

Women in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha: A Critical Evaluation of Political Participation in India

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Abstract

Women's political participation in India has been a subject of sustained academic and policy discourse. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and India's status as the world's largest democracy, women continue to remain underrepresented in parliamentary politics. This paper critically examines women's participation in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, focusing not only on numerical representation but also on the qualitative dimensions of legislative influence and policy engagement. Drawing upon secondary data from parliamentary records, Election Commission reports, PRS Legislative Research, government publications, and international studies, the study explores historical trends, socio-cultural barriers, institutional constraints, and recent policy developments.

The paper incorporates recent developments up to 2025, including the enactment of the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023 (Women's Reservation Act), and data from the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The findings reveal that while incremental progress has been achieved, women's representation in Parliament continues to hover around 13–14 percent, far below global averages. Persistent patriarchal party structures, economic barriers, delayed implementation of affirmative policies, and limited access to political networks continue to restrict women's substantive participation. The study argues that meaningful political participation requires not merely numerical inclusion but sustained institutional reforms, leadership development, and timely implementation of gender-responsive policies. Strengthening women's role in Parliament is essential for deepening democratic legitimacy and ensuring inclusive governance in India.

Keywords

Women's Political Participation, Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, Gender Representation, Women's Reservation Act, Indian Democracy.

Introduction

India's democratic framework is founded on the principles of equality, universal adult franchise, and representative governance. However, women's political representation has consistently lagged behind that of men. From the first general elections in 1951–52 to the most recent 2024 Lok Sabha elections, women have played significant roles in India's political life, yet their presence in the highest legislative institutions remains disproportionately low. Although women constitute nearly half of India's population, their representation in Parliament remains limited, reflecting deep-rooted socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers (Chaudhuri, 2020).

Political participation is not merely about occupying seats; it also involves influencing legislative agendas, shaping policy outcomes, and representing diverse social interests. Studies indicate that women legislators are more likely to raise issues related to education, health, nutrition, social welfare, and gender justice, thereby enriching parliamentary deliberations (Kumar, 2021). The presence of women in legislatures also enhances public trust in democratic institutions and contributes to more inclusive governance.

This paper offers a critical evaluation of women's participation in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha by examining both quantitative representation and qualitative influence. By integrating historical analysis with recent developments—particularly the passage of the Women's Reservation Act, 2023—the study seeks to assess the current state of women's parliamentary participation and identify pathways toward gender-equitable representation in India.

Objective of study

The primary objective of this study is to critically examine the scope, quality, and impact of women's participation in India's parliamentary politics, with specific reference to the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. The specific objectives are:

1. To trace historical trends in women's representation in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha since Independence.
2. To examine socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers limiting women's political participation.
3. To assess the substantive contributions of women legislators in parliamentary debates, committees, and policy formulation.