



Women's participation in assembly elections (2012 to Present) with a special reference to Uttar Pradesh

Dr. Monika Srivastava¹, KM Shweta Chaudhary²

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social, Dr. Ram Manohar, Lohiya National Law University Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India

² Department of humanities and social sciences, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohiya National, Law University Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract

This study explores women's participation in Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh from 2012 to the present, examining their roles as voters and political representatives. Despite constitutional provisions for gender equality and reservations in local bodies, women's political representation in Uttar Pradesh remains low. The research investigates the historical context, voting patterns, and active political involvement of women in the state. Data reveals an increasing trend in female voter turnout, surpassing male voters in some elections. However, their representation as elected representatives remains disproportionately low, with only 47 women winning seats out of 403 in the 2022 Assembly elections.

The study identifies societal attitudes, gender biases, and political party dynamics as key obstacles. It highlights the need for a supportive environment to enhance women's political participation. Greater representation of women is crucial for balanced decision-making and promoting social equity. The research employs both primary and secondary data collection methods and adopts a historical and political perspective. It concludes that increasing women's political participation is essential for a more inclusive and democratic political system, urging reforms and societal change to achieve gender parity in politics.

Keywords: Women's Political Participation, Uttar Pradesh Assembly Elections, Gender Representation in Politics, Women Voters in India, Women's Reservation in Politics, Electoral Trends and Women, Challenges in Women's Political Participation, Historical Framework of Women in Politics, Women's Empowerment in Uttar Pradesh, Impact of Women Leaders in Politics.

Introduction

To increase the percentage of women's participation in politics and to provide them with a better life, provisions related to women have been included in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution, Fundamental Rights (Article 14, 15, 15(3), 19(d), 19(1)(g), 23), and Directive Principles of State Policy (Article 39(a), 39(d), 42, 46). Additionally, under the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, 33% reservation has been provided in Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies (Article 243(d)(3)), and Article 325 ensures that both men and women are equally included in the electoral rolls.

The Constitution has not only granted equality to women but has also empowered the state to take affirmative actions in favor of women, which is the need of the hour. Women face various challenges in establishing their dominance in politics. Political laws are being formulated to encourage women's participation equally, even at the panchayat level. Women candidates have won panchayat elections, opening new doors of progress. From household boundaries to banking, industries, education, and other sectors, women have proven their competence alongside men and have secured a respectable position for themselves.

There should be a system ensuring maximum participation of women in elections. However, this requires a change in social mindset, social development, and most importantly, an educated and healthy environment. Grassroots-level initiatives must be taken to allow both educated and uneducated women, including those from rural areas, an opportunity to step forward. Efforts should be made to ensure maximum participation of women in all possible ways.

The government has implemented several schemes to achieve this goal, such as the National Policy for Women's Empowerment (2001) and the 73rd and 74th Amendments, which provide 33% reservation for women in panchayat seats and local urban bodies. These measures aim to provide a strong foundation for women's participation in politics.

Research Objectives

1. To study the status of women in Uttar Pradesh politics, both as voters and as representatives.
2. To analyze the impact of women in Uttar Pradesh politics.
3. To study the key reasons behind the low participation/representation of women.
4. To understand the historical framework of women's political participation in Uttar Pradesh and evaluate the factors that have played a positive and negative role in influencing women's political participation.

Research Methodology

The historical research method will be used for the present study, along with a political perspective. Both primary and secondary data will be utilized in this study.

- Primary data will be collected through direct surveys, interviews, observations, questionnaires, and schedules.
- Secondary data will be gathered from diaries, journals, newspapers, various websites, and books.

The nature of this study is descriptive, and its dimensions will include both theoretical and empirical aspects.

A Glance at the Role of Women in Indian Politics

In modern Indian history, women's participation in politics has been highly significant. Rani Lakshmi Bai, Kasturba Gandhi, Aruna Asaf Ali, Sarojini Naidu, Sucheta Kripalani, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Indira Gandhi, and many others made notable contributions to our freedom struggle. In independent India's political landscape, Mohsina Kidwai, Sushma Swaraj, Mayawati, Vasundhara Raje, Sheila Dikshit, Mamata Banerjee, Renuka Chowdhury, Sonia Gandhi, and others have played active roles. Indira Gandhi led the country as Prime Minister for 16 years.

Immediately after independence, the Indian Constitution granted women not only equal voting rights with men but also the right to contest elections from the panchayat to the parliament.

As a result, under the Panchayati Raj system, women's political participation has increased with at least one-third representation in all elected bodies. Due to the one-third reservation for women through the Public Representation Law, the perception of gender equality in society is changing rapidly. Women have gained new self-confidence, and their self-image has improved. Special attention is being given to women-related issues, awareness against atrocities and violence has increased, and girls' education is being promoted. The respect for female voters has also grown.

However, the irony is that the Women's Reservation Bill, which seeks to increase one-third representation of women in Parliament and State Assemblies, has been pending since 1998. This remains a bitter example of an unjust decision in a male-dominated society.

Status of Women Voters in Uttar Pradesh Assembly Elections

Women are considered half of the state's population, yet they have not been given much importance as voters in politics. However, in the past few years, women have started gaining recognition in electoral politics, and this half of the population has shown its power to change the government, as witnessed in the 2022 Assembly elections.

Since 2012, the number of female voters in Assembly elections has been increasing compared to male voters (before 2012, the number of female voters was significantly lower than male voters). Now, political parties are paying more attention to women, both as voters and candidates.

According to the 2022 Electoral Roll data released by the Election Commission, Uttar Pradesh had a total of 14.51 crore voters, out of which 7.85 crore were male voters and 6.66 crore were female voters, meaning women accounted for approximately 45% of the total electorate. If we look at the voting percentage trend in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections from 2012 to 2022, the figures are as follows:

- Before 2012, the female voter turnout was significantly lower compared to male voters.
- 2012: 58.68% male voters, 60.28% female voters
- 2017: 59.15% male voters, 63.31% female voters
- 2022: 59.56% male voters, 62.24% female voters

Thus, we can observe that the voting percentage of women is now increasing compared to men.

Status of Women in Active Politics in Uttar Pradesh

If we talk about the status of women in active politics in Uttar Pradesh, it is significantly lower compared to men. At

present, some of the prominent women active in the state's politics include:

- Priyanka Gandhi (National General Secretary of the All India Congress Committee and in charge of Eastern Uttar Pradesh)
- Mayawati (Former Chief Minister)
- Rita Bahuguna Joshi (Former MLA in the 16th Assembly and elected to the 17th Lok Sabha)
- Anupriya Patel (Former member of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly in 2012 and Union Minister of State in 2014 Lok Sabha elections)
- Aradhana Mishra (Member of the 16th, 17th, and 18th Legislative Assemblies)
- Pallavi Patel
- Gulab Devi (Minister of State, Secondary Education Minister)
- Swati Singh (Former Minister of State for Flood Control, Agricultural Export, Agricultural Foreign Trade, and Women's Welfare Department)
- Neelima Katiyar (First-time elected member of the 17th Assembly)

In the 2022 Assembly elections, some female candidates entered the electoral battle for the first time and won, which is a matter of pride and appreciation for all of us. Some of these candidates are:

- Dr. Pallavi Patel (Samajwadi Party)
- Baby Rani Maurya (BJP)
- Maharaji Prajapati (Samajwadi Party)

However, this is still not enough, as women's active participation in politics remains significantly lower than men. The situation is still not favorable, and the responsibility for this lies not only with political parties but also with society itself, which is not yet fully ready to accept women in politics.

When women enter politics, they are often criticized for their appearance and attire. For example, many comments were made about Priyanka Gandhi, questioning whether a beautiful woman could succeed in politics. Similarly, many other female politicians continue to face constant remarks and criticism. Any failure they face is often attributed to their gender, whereas male politicians also experience failures but are not judged in the same manner. Women candidates are believed to have lower chances of winning elections because they spend more time on household responsibilities and less time in politics. Women are perceived to have less political understanding, which is why even when they win elections, they are often restricted to ministries related to women and children rather than significant portfolios.

If we look at the number of women elected to the Uttar Pradesh Assembly:

- 2012 (16th Assembly) – 35 women out of 583 candidates
- 2017 (17th Assembly) – 42 women out of 482 candidates
- 2022 (18th Assembly) – 47 women out of 560 candidates (majority from BJP)

Although the number has slightly increased over time, it still cannot be considered a satisfactory result. In a 403-seat Assembly, at least half the seats (around 200) should be won by women to achieve true representation.

To increase their participation, women need to work harder than men in their constituencies. Due to their low representation in politics, women often remain unaware of cabinet divisions, which is why they are not usually assigned key ministries such as Finance, Home, Defense, and Health. Instead, they are given portfolios related to women, children, and social welfare.

Now if we will talk about research problem then we will see, After independence, various laws and provisions were introduced in the Indian Constitution's Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties, and Directive Principles of State Policy to increase women's political participation and provide them with a better life. The Constitution not only granted women equality but also empowered the state to take measures for positive discrimination in their favor.

From my study of books, I have found that in the 2022 Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections, 47 women won the elections. It was also observed that women's participation in elections has increased both as voters and as candidates. However, the problem here is that while women turned out in large numbers to vote, only 47 women managed to win in a 403-seat Assembly. This cannot be considered a major achievement. Since women constitute half the population of the state, their representation should also be equal.

The real question is:

- Why has women's representation/participation remained so low?
- What challenges are they facing?

These issues have not yet been adequately highlighted. To fill this gap in the subject, I have chosen this as my research problem.

Now, The important question is what is the relevance of women's participation in politics, and what changes can be expected in the nature of politics due to their involvement? Politics makes decisions that impact all aspects of our lives—political, economic, educational, healthcare, internal and external security, etc. Therefore, if half of society—the women—are not included in these decisions, it is not in the best interest of democracy.

Women possess compassion and creativity, which are inherently non-violent and free from the ego of physical power. These qualities will make politics more peaceful, balanced, and constructive. Increased women's participation will strengthen democracy and develop their decision-making abilities. It will lead to:

- A reduction in criminalization and corruption in politics
- A decline in violence
- An increase in citizenship awareness and social prestige
- A decrease in social evils and crimes against women

Furthermore, greater focus will be given to the development of infants, girls, and young women. Their education, healthcare, and employment opportunities will improve. Women's property rights will become more practical and stronger. There will be greater equality and balance in relationships between men and women.

The rise in women's participation in politics has initiated a new phase of development for both men and women. The outcomes will improve further—but this is only possible if men take women's political participation seriously in the broader socio-political interest. On the other hand, women must also fight hard for the equality of their political rights.

When women become economically empowered, they will be able to influence society and make decisions more effectively.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that both the government and society have taken substantial steps toward ensuring equal political participation for women. They have also proven that women's dignity and empowerment have elevated politics to new heights.

Efforts are being made to raise political awareness, where women are being equally encouraged, even at the Panchayati level. In Panchayat elections, many female candidates have won, opening new doors for progress.

This time, in the 2022 Assembly elections, women's participation appears to have increased compared to previous years, which is a commendable achievement. If a provision for women's reservation is introduced in Assembly elections as well, the results in the future could be even better.

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