

2.0 Women in Leadership Positions: A Study of Political Participation in the Context of Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract

Women's participation in socio-political development is a key priority area at the global level. In India, women's participation in leadership positions is not new. Indian women have contributed significantly to leadership positions since the ancient period. The present paper is an attempt to analyse the priority focus areas for women in the global scenario and women's participation in governance and leadership. The study examines the current status of women in leadership positions in India with special reference to Uttar Pradesh. It examines the trends and outcomes of women's participation in the elections of the Lok Sabha during the period from 1999 to 2024. It analyses the extent and pattern of women's political engagement at the national level over time. In addition, the study incorporates details of women representing Uttar Pradesh in the Rajya Sabha. Thus, the research focuses on understanding the representation of Uttar Pradesh in the central political framework of India, with special emphasis on women's participation and leadership. The present study forms a part of the project undertaken by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), and the researcher gratefully acknowledges and attributes due credit to them.

Key Words: Women in Leadership, Political Participation of Women in Uttar Pradesh.

Introduction

Women excel in every sphere, but understanding the trajectory of their transformation has many facets. First of all, it is not possible to generalise all segments of women into a single stratum. They have multiple levels of social identities, such as social, economic, religious, and region-based. At the global level, focus is moving from facing oppression and marginalisation to empowerment and transformation.

The feminist movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries focused primarily on legal rights such as suffrage, education, and property ownership. During the 1970s and 1980s, global orientation shifted from welfare-oriented approaches to more participatory frameworks. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5, emphasise “gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls,” thereby integrating empowerment within a broader framework of systemic change (United Nations, 2015). The report Women and Men in India 2024 (Government of India, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation) states that the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) developed “Minimum Set of Gender Indicators”, which is a collection of quantitative and qualitative indicators measuring and collecting information on issues relevant to gender equality and women's empowerment. Table 1 shows the UN's Minimum Set of Gender Indicators. They are organised into five themes: economic empowerment,

education, health and related services, public life and decision making and human rights of women and girls.

Table: 1 United Nations Minimum Set of Gender Indicators.

Theme	Description	Key Indicators
Economic Empowerment	Focuses on women's participation and equality in economic activities	Labour force participation, income gaps, unemployment rates, and ownership of assets
Education	Examines access to and attainment in education by gender	Literacy rates, school enrollment ratios, and educational attainment levels by sex
Health and Related Services	Addresses women's health status and access to healthcare services	Maternal mortality ratio, adolescent fertility rate, and life expectancy
Public Life and Decision-Making	Assesses women's involvement in governance and leadership roles	Representation in national parliaments, management positions, and local government
Human Rights of Women and Girls	Focuses on the protection and promotion of fundamental rights	Violence against women, child marriage, and access to justice

Objectives:

- To analyse international reports and documents based on gender related indices
- To examine the trends of women's participation in elections to the Lok Sabha from 1999 to 2024.
- To study the representation of women from Uttar Pradesh in the Rajya Sabha

Methodology:

The focus of the present paper is to document the political participation of women in India, with a specific context of Uttar Pradesh. The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design, focusing on the representation of women from Uttar Pradesh. The study is mainly based on secondary sources, such as government reports, research articles, policy documents, and reports from national and international organisations. The present study examines the elected women in the elections of the Lok Sabha during the period from 1999 to 2024.

Gender related Indices

Different organisations developed various indices with certain focus areas for understanding and indicating the Gender Inequality Index and Gender Development Index. UNDP (1995) focused on GDI (Gender Development Index) on life expectancy, education and income. GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure) assesses women's participation in political and economic decision-making.

Table: 2 Presentation of efforts on the international level on various indices

Year	Organisation	Index / Initiative	Focus Area / Key Features
1995	United Nations Development Programme	Gender Development Index (GDI)	Measures gender gaps in life expectancy, education, and income based on HDI dimensions (UNDP, 1995)
1995	United Nations Development Programme	Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)	Assesses women's participation in political and economic decision-making (UNDP, 1995)
2004	Social Watch	Gender Equity Index (GEI)	Focuses on education, economic participation, and empowerment (Social Watch, 2004)
2006	World Economic Forum	Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI)	Examines gender gaps in economic participation, education, health, and political empowerment (WEF, 2006)
2007	OECD Development Centre	Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)	Measures discriminatory social institutions, norms, and legal frameworks (OECD, 2007)
2010	United Nations Development Programme	Gender Inequality Index (GII)	Captures gender-based loss in human development across reproductive health, empowerment, and labour participation (UNDP, 2010)
2010	UN Women	Establishment of UN Women	Strengthens global advocacy, monitoring, and policy action for gender equality (UN Women, 2010)
2014–2019	OECD Development Centre	SIGI Updates	Expands indicators to include legal reforms and social norms affecting gender equality (OECD, 2019)
2015	United Nations	Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5)	Establishes global targets for gender equality, including rights, participation, and empowerment (UN, 2015)
2016 onward	World Economic Forum	Annual GGGI Reports	Tracks progress in closing gender gaps globally; includes emerging areas like STEM and workforce participation (WEF, various years)
2018 onward	Social Watch	GEI Strengthening	Enhances focus on grassroots inequalities and civil society accountability (Social Watch, 2018)
2020 onward	United Nations Development Programme	Gender Data & Dashboard Approach	Promotes disaggregated, intersectional data beyond composite indices (UNDP, 2020)
2020 onward	United Nations	Expanded Gender Metrics	Includes unpaid care work, gender-based violence, and local governance participation (UN, 2020)

Analysing Table 2 shows that these indices do not present the full picture as situations and circumstances vary in different contexts. The Global Gender Gap Report 2025, published by the World Economic Forum, indicates that global gender parity stands at 68.8%. It projects that full equality will take another 123 years. The report tracks four key dimensions, viz., economic, educational, health, and political leadership. India ranked 131st out of 148 countries in 2025, with an overall gender parity score of 64.1%. (Gender Gap Report, 2025) Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2025 report says that Women hold top State positions in just 25 countries. Europe remains the region with the highest number of women-led countries. 106 countries have still never had a woman leader. The Americas have the highest proportion of women MPs (34.5%) and women Speakers of parliament (33.3%). Europe comes second with 31.8% women MPs and 30.4% women Speakers. (Women in Politics: 2025)The focus area after 2020 is mainly on the participation of women in governance.

Global Efforts:

UN General Assembly resolutions on women and political participation stated that “Women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalised from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women”. (UN, 2012) It affirms that the State shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country. UN Women was created in July 2010 by the UN General Assembly and became operational in 2011. It is the entity of the United Nations dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, established to accelerate progress on their needs worldwide. It acts as a global champion, working with governments and civil society to set standards, create policies, and promote women's economic, political, and social rights. One of UN Women's key priority areas is the inclusive participation and representation of women in political and electoral processes. (UN Women, 2024)

Political Participation of Women in India:

The total number of women contesting general elections in the country has increased from 3% in 1957 to 10% in 2024. The total number of elected women members, which was 22 in the First Lok Sabha and 27 in the Second Lok Sabha, has increased to 78 in the 17th Lok Sabha and to 75 in the 18th Lok Sabha (which is approximately 14% of the total members). In the Rajya Sabha also, the total number of women members in 1952 was 15, which is 42 at present. It is approximately 17% of the total members. Further, the country has about 14.5 lakh Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), which is about 46% of the total elected representatives, unparalleled in the world. (PIB, 2025). Table 3 presents women's representation in the Central Council of Ministers (1998–2024).

Table 3: Women's Representation in the Central Council of Ministers (1998–2024)

Year	Cabinet Ministers	Ministers of State	Total Ministers	Women Cabinet Ministers	Women Ministers of State	Total Women Ministers	Women (%)
1998	21	21	42	1	3	4	9.52
2002	32	41	73	2	6	8	10.96
2004	29	39	68	1	6	7	10.29
2009	40	38	78	3	4	7	8.97
2011	32	44	76	2	6	8	10.53
2012	31	43	74	2	6	8	10.81
2013	31	47	78	3	9	12	15.38
2014	23	22	45	6	1	7	15.56
2015	23	22	45	6	2	8	17.78
2016	26	49	75	5	4	9	12.00
2017	27	48	75	6	3	9	12.00
2018	25	49	74	6	3	9	12.16
2019	24	33	57	3	3	6	10.53
2020	22	32	54	2	3	5	9.26
2021	31	47	78	2	9	11	14.10

(Source: Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi)

The table 3 presents the composition of the Central Council of Ministers in India over the period 1998 to 2024, with a focus on gender representation. In 1998, women constituted only 9.52% of the total ministers, indicating a very low level of representation at the national level. The data highlights that although there has been progress in enhancing women's political participation, it is insufficient.

Contribution of women leaders from Uttar Pradesh

Uttar Pradesh has played a major role in shaping the social, political, and economic direction of India. After independence, many influential leaders have emerged from the country's largest state, who has guided both the state and the nation on the path of development. Among them, several women leaders are also included. It is noteworthy that the honour of being the first Governor of Uttar Pradesh after independence also goes to a woman. The "Nightingale of India," Sarojini Naidu, served as the Governor of the state from 1947 to 1949. Similarly, Uttar Pradesh also holds the distinction of giving the country its first woman Chief Minister. Sucheta Kriplani (1963–1967) became not only Uttar Pradesh's but also the first woman Chief Minister of any state in India. When we talk about the symbol of women's struggle and strength in a social context, Uttar Pradesh also has the honour of giving the country its first Dalit woman Chief Minister. Kumari Mayawati did remarkable work as the first Dalit woman Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. She took oath as Chief Minister on June 3, 1995, and served a total of four terms. Her rise to the peak of politics is seen as an upliftment of the most marginalised sections of society. Countless women in the state and the country have drawn inspiration from her.

The following table presents a glimpse of Rajya Sabha members from Uttar Pradesh:

Table: 4 Rajya Sabha members from Uttar Pradesh:

Former Rajya Sabha Members from Uttar Pradesh		Current Rajya Sabha Members
Aizaz Rasul, Begum Alia, Kumari Sarla Bhadauria, Bindumati Devi, Indira Gandhi. Hamida Habibullah, Kailashpati Kanta Kardam Shyam Kumari Khan Anis Kidwai,	Chandravati Lakhanpal, Km.Mayawati, Savitry Devi Nigam, Uma Nehru, Kusum Rai, Bahin Satya Sushila Rohatgi, Kanak Lata Singh Dr Tazeen Fatma,	Jaya Amitabh Bachchan, Darshana Singh Geeta alias Chandraprabha, Dr Sangeeta Balwant, Seema Dwivedi, Sangeeta Yadav Sadhna Singh.

Source: prsindia.org

Table 5: Women's Representation from the 13th to 18th Lok Sabha from Uttar Pradesh

15 th Loksabha	16 th Lok Sabha	17 th Loksabha	18 th Lok Sabha
Annu Tondon, Dimple Yadav, Kaisar Jahan, Maneka Gandhi, Jaya Prada, Raj Kumari Chauhan, Ratna Singh, Sarika Singh Baghel, Seema Upadhyaya	Anju Bala, Anupriya Patel Begam Tabbasum Kaisar, Dimpal Yadav, Hema Malini, Krishna Raj, Maneka Gandhi, Neelam Sarkar, Nranjn Jyoti.	Anupriya Patel, Dimaple Yadav, Hema Malini, Keshari Devi Patel, Maneka Gandhi, Niranjan Jyoti, Rekha Verma, Rita Bahuguna Joshi, Sangeeta Azad, Sanghmitra Maurya Smriti Zubin Irani Sonia Gandhi.	Anupriya Patel, Dimaple Yadav, Hema Malini, Iqra Chaudhay, Krishna Devi, Priya Saroj, Ruchi Vira
In the 13 th Lok Sabha, 09 women candidates, and in the 14 th Loksabha 07women candidates represented Uttar Pradesh.			

Source: prsindia.org

Among the women leaders from Uttar Pradesh, former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi holds a prominent place. Her journey in the freedom movement began at Anand Bhavan in Prayagraj and later reflected in her powerful political role after independence. Being elected three times from the Rae Bareilly parliamentary constituency, she had a special connection with the region. After Indira Gandhi, her daughter-in-law, Sonia Gandhi, also represented Rae Bareilly as a Member of Parliament.

The former Human Resource Development Minister Smriti Irani is also included among the influential leaders elected from Uttar Pradesh. It is especially relevant to mention the current Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Honourable Anandiben Patel, who has worked

excellently in this role and has guided the state toward development. She has particularly given a new direction to the field of education. She also holds the record for being the longest-serving Governor of Uttar Pradesh. Along with this, other notable women leaders include former minister of Uttar Pradesh and former MP from Prayagraj Rita Bahuguna Joshi, current Union Minister Anupriya Patel, Chairperson of the National Commission for Backward Classes and former Union Minister Sadhvi Niranjana Jyoti, MP from Kannauj Dimple Yadav, Overall, it can be said that the country's largest state has played a significant role in women's empowerment, and the empowered women from here have not only guided the state but also the nation.

Therefore, it is evident that women's political contribution in Uttar Pradesh has been significant. This study reflects the gradual progress in their participation and representation within the political sphere. However, this advancement remains insufficient when viewed against the broader goals of gender equality and inclusive governance. There is an increasing need to further strengthen women's participation through supportive policies and socio-political encouragement. Moreover, future research should extend beyond the political domain to explore women's leadership in other critical areas such as education, economy, technology, and community development.

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