



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Gender-Based Violence And Democratic Deficits: A Study Of Women's Political Participation In India

Author: Ms. Shivani Kumari
Research Scholar
Department of Political Science
Banasthali Vidyapith, Rajasthan

Abstract

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a significant barrier to women's political participation, undermining democratic processes and reinforcing systemic inequalities. This study explores the intricate relationship between GBV and democratic deficits, investigating the allegations as how threats, harassment, and violence deter women from engaging in political activities. Despite constitutional guarantees and legislative measures promoting gender equality, the political arena continues to be dominated by men, with women facing social stigmatization, character assassination, and even physical harm when they challenge traditional power structures. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data analysis with qualitative approaches, case study, policy analysis, etc. Findings reveal that how does GBV hinders women's political participation and where does India Stands in the scenario. This study argues that addressing GBV in the political sphere is crucial for strengthening democratic governance and ensuring women's agency in public life. It recommends comprehensive policy reforms, gender-sensitive electoral practices, and societal change through education and advocacy to create a safe and enabling environment for women in politics. By highlighting the interconnections between GBV and democratic deficits, this research contributes to the broader discourse on gender justice and democratic empowerment and role of Indian democracy and governance in countering such issues. At last, the paper would exaggerate the root essence of gender democratic politics in India with some strong eminent examples of empowerment and its impact on other countries.

Keywords: Democracy, Gender-based Violence, Empowerment, Democratic deficits, etc.

1. Introduction

Democracy, a beautiful aura in combination of power and responsibility. Power is exhibited after being elected and responsibility is exhibited by the citizens performing their duties in casting vote and selecting the responsible candidate to nurture that power.

India stands-as the largest democratic country in the world to successfully sustain democratic values inspite of being a secular and colonized for a long period. Democracy is always superior to any other form of government because it enhances the dignity of individual by giving them equal treatment.¹

Though democracy sometimes face constraints such as Gender based violence (GBV)

Which greatly deters its creditability and transparency. Gender based Violence is a harmful act directed at individuals based on their gender which encompasses physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse, mostly affecting women, girls and marginalized gender group. If we see minutely then, GBV acts as a significant barrier to women's political participation, discouraging their involvement as voters, candidates and political leaders. Fear of violence, including online harassment and intimidation, often deters women from engaging in political and public life. This acts further weaken gender representation in governance due to fear of threat and electoral violence.

Democracies thrive on inclusive representation that too of women's political participation in democratic governance. When women and marginalized groups are excluded from the decision-making processes, policy outcomes often fail to reflect the interests of all citizens². The absence of diverse voice limits the legitimacy and effectiveness of democratic institution.

Democracies today in the south are lacking gender- inclusive leadership tend to overlook or minimize policies addressing GBV and gender inequality. The absence of gender- sensitive governance is resulting in inadequate resource allocation and ineffective support system for survivors and thus is major cause of democracy deficits.³

1.1. Research Problem

This study examines the intricate relationship between gender-based violence (GBV) and democratic deficits, focusing on its impact on women's political participation in a democracy. Despite constitutional guarantees and legal frameworks supporting gender equality, women continue to face significant barriers to political engagement due to pervasive gender-based violence. From physical and psychological intimidation to online

¹ Musi, Florida. (July 26, 2022). "Impact of Gender Based Violence on Democracy". <https://follap.egerton.ac.ke/news/impact-of-gender-based-violence-on-democracy>

² Meissner, Richard & Kapingura, Forget. (October 30, 2019). "Factors influencing women political participation: The case of the SADC region". <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311886.2019.1681048>. Taylor & Francis Publication Article no. 1681048.

³ Lindberg, I, Staffan & Papada, Evie. (December 2022). "Does Democracy Promote Gender Equality?". https://www.v-dem.net/media/publications/pb_37_aAwHJrz.pdf. V-Dem Institute No.#37.

harassment and structural discrimination, GBV undermines women's agency and restricts their ability to participate fully in democratic processes.

The research aims to explore how GBV contributes to the democratic deficit by limiting the representation of women in political decision-making, deterring them from electoral participation, and weakening democratic institutions. Through a mixed-methods approach, the study will assess the experiences of women politicians, candidates, and activists to understand the prevalence and consequences of violence in political and public spheres. Additionally, it will analyze the effectiveness of legal mechanisms, institutional responses, and policy interventions aimed at addressing GBV and promoting gender-inclusive governance.

By highlighting the intersection of GBV and democratic backsliding, this study seeks to provide evidence-based facts that are strengthening gender-sensitive democratic practices in India. The findings will contribute to the broader discourse on gender justice, political participation, and inclusive democracy, offering insights for policymakers, civil society organizations, and academic scholars revisiting their views and perceptions upon GBV in global south.

1.2. Research Question and Objective

- How does gender-based violence impact women's political participation, and what are its implications for democratic deficits?

1.3. Research Objectives

1. To examine the prevalence and forms of gender-based violence faced by women in political and public life.
2. To analyze the impact of gender-based violence on women's political participation, including their candidacy, voter turnout, and leadership roles.
3. To investigate the role of institutional frameworks and legal mechanisms in addressing gender-based violence in the political sphere.
4. To assess how gender-based violence contributes to democratic deficits by limiting inclusive representation and participation.
5. To provide policy recommendations for strengthening gender-inclusive democratic processes and protecting women's political rights in democracies of global south.

1.4. Research Hypotheses

H1: Gender-based violence significantly reduces women's political participation in India, contributing to democratic deficits.

H2: Increased representation of women in political leadership positions leads to stronger institutional responses to gender-based violence and reduced democratic deficits.

H0: Gender-based violence has no significant impact on women's political participation or democratic processes in India.

1.5. Methodology

The study will adopt a **mixed-method research approach**, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure a comprehensive analysis. The methodology will consist of the following components:

1.5.1. Research Design

- **Exploratory and Descriptive Design:** The study will explore the relationship between gender-based violence (GBV) and democratic deficits by assessing its impact on women's political participation.
- **Cross-Sectional Study:** Data will be collected at a single point in time to analyze patterns and relationships.

1.5.2. Data Collection Methods

A. Secondary Data Collection

- **Government Reports and Legal Documents:** Data from National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), National Family Health Survey (NFHS), and Election Commission reports will be analyzed.
- **Academic Literature and Policy Papers:** Relevant studies on GBV, women's political participation, and democratic deficits will be reviewed.
- **Media Reports and Case Studies:** High-profile cases of violence against women in politics will be examined to illustrate systemic patterns.

1.6. Scope & Limitation of Study

This study, Gender-Based Violence and Democratic Deficits: A Study of Women's Political Participation in India, examines the intersection of gender-based violence (GBV) and democratic participation, focusing on the barriers women face in political engagement. The study encompasses: Political participations, Forms of gender-based violence in politics, Democratic deficits, Geographical and conceptual scope.

The study has certain limitations pertaining to data availability and understanding legal and institutional gaps, Cultural and social barrier, Scope of case studies and interviews and limited. While this study provides critical insights into the relationship between GBV and democratic participation in India, its findings are constrained by underreporting, legal ambiguities, and socio-political complexities. Future research should explore longitudinal data, intersectional perspectives, and comparative analyses with other democracies to deepen the understanding of these challenges.

2. Gender- Based Violence and Democratic Deficits

2.1. Understanding Gender- Based Violence (GBV)

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) refers to harmful actions directed at individuals based on their gender. It is rooted in unequal power dynamics and social norms that reinforce gender inequality. GBV predominantly affects women and girls, but it can also target men, boys, and non-binary individuals, particularly those who challenge traditional gender roles.

*The UN defines violence against women as, 'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.'*⁴

2.1.1. Forms of Gender-Based Violence

GBV can manifest in various forms, including⁵:

1. **Physical Violence:**

- Beating, hitting, burning, or other forms of physical harm.
- Common in domestic violence, intimate partner violence, and honor-based violence.

2. **Sexual Violence:**

- Rape, sexual assault, harassment, or exploitation.
- Can occur in both private and public spaces, including workplaces and educational institutions.

⁴ Rescue, committee, International. (Aug 22, 2023). What is gender-based violence- and how to prevent it? <https://www.rescue.org/article/what-gender-based-violence-and-how-do-we-prevent-it>.

⁵ EIGE. (2025) "Forms of violence". https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/what-is-gender-based-violence/forms-of-violence?language_content_entity=en.

3. **Psychological Violence:**

- Emotional abuse, intimidation, coercion, or threats.
- Includes verbal harassment, gaslighting, and isolation.

4. **Economic Violence:**

- Withholding financial resources, restricting access to employment or education.
- Often used as a form of control in intimate relationships.

5. **Structural or Institutional Violence:**

- Discrimination and exclusion from political participation, education, or healthcare.
- Gender-biased laws and ineffective justice systems reinforce such violence.

2.1.2. **Causes of Gender-Based Violence**

GBV is not caused by individual behavior alone but is reinforced by societal and institutional factors such as **Patriarchal Norms and gender inequality**, which deeply entrenches the beliefs about male dominance and women subordination. Cultural and harmful traditional practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation results to cultural and religious justification. There is weak legal frameworks and poor enforcement which often allow perpetrators to act with impunity.

2.1.3. **Impact of Gender-Based Violence**

Gender-based violence has far-reaching consequences at the individual, societal, and institutional levels⁶:

1. **Physical and Mental Health Impact**

- Survivors often suffer from physical injuries, psychological trauma, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

2. **Impact on Families and Communities**

- GBV disrupts family structures, increases economic burden, and perpetuates cycles of violence.

3. **Economic Consequences**

- Reduced productivity, increased healthcare costs, and loss of income for survivors.

4. **Political and Social Exclusion**

- Fear of violence limits women's participation in politics, governance, and public life.

5. **Erosion of Democratic Values**

- Societies with high levels of GBV experience weakened institutions, lower political representation, and a lack of inclusive policymaking.

⁶ BRIEF. (September 25, 2019). "Gender-Based Violence (Violence Against Women and Girls)".

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialsustainability/brief/violence-against-women-and-girls>. World Bank Group Report. Last Retrieved on 2025-03-25.

2.2. Democratic Deficits and Gender Inequality

Democratic deficit refers to the gap between the principles of democratic governance and the actual practice of democracy⁷. It occurs when democratic institutions fail to represent and include all segments of society, undermining accountability, participation, and inclusivity. One significant factor contributing to democratic deficits is gender inequality, which systematically excludes women and marginalized genders from political processes and decision-making.

2.2.1. Understanding Democratic Deficits

A democratic deficit is characterized by:

- **Lack of Representation:** Underrepresentation of women and marginalized groups in political institutions.
- **Weak Accountability:** Failure of institutions to address gender-based violence, discrimination, and inequality.
- **Exclusion from Participation:** Limited opportunities for women to engage in political leadership, voting, or advocacy.
- **Policy Deficiencies:** Lack of gender-responsive policies due to the absence of diverse voices in decision-making.

2.2.2. Gender Inequality as a Driver of Democratic Deficits

Gender inequality manifests across political, economic, and social spheres, reinforcing democratic deficits in the following ways⁸:

A. **Limited Political Participation**

Women face systemic barriers to entering politics, including cultural norms, financial constraints, and gender-based violence (GBV). Electoral violence, online harassment, and intimidation further deter women from participating as candidates or voters. Mostly the weaker and marginalized section had to face problems in political participation.

⁷ Norris, Pippa. (2011). "Democratic Deficit- critical citizens revisited". Cambridge University Press Online Publication. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511973383>. Published on June 2012.

⁸ Hleng, Hom, Kham, Nang. (October 23, 2023). "Gender inequality decline the Democracy in India". <https://democratic-erosion.org/2023/10/23/gender-inequality-decline-the-democracy-in-india/>. Democratic Erosion Con Publication

B. Underrepresentation in Decision-Making

Women remain underrepresented in parliaments, local governments, and leadership positions. In India, women hold only around **15% of seats** in the national parliament, well below the global average. The absence of women in policymaking results in gender-blind policies that fail to address gender-specific issues.

C. Gender-Based Violence and Political Exclusion

GBV, including threats, harassment, and violence against women in politics (VAWIP), silences women's voices and undermines democratic participation. Fear of retaliation discourages many women from pursuing political careers or engaging in civic activism.

D. Inequitable Legal Frameworks

Despite legal frameworks promoting gender equality, weak enforcement and patriarchal norms hinder the protection of women's rights. Gender biases in judicial and law enforcement systems perpetuate impunity for gender-based crimes.

E. Economic Disparities and Political Marginalization

Economic inequality disproportionately affects women, reducing their access to resources necessary for political campaigns and civic participation. Financial dependence further limits women's ability to challenge gender norms and participate in democratic processes.

2.2.3. Consequences of Democratic Deficits Due to Gender Inequality

- **Weakened Democratic Institutions:** When half the population is excluded from decision-making, institutions lose legitimacy and fail to represent diverse interests.
- **Policy Gaps:** Gender-insensitive policies lead to inadequate responses to issues like GBV, maternal health, and economic inequality.
- **Reduced Trust in Democracy:** Persistent exclusion and injustice erode public trust in democratic institutions, fueling disillusionment and disengagement⁹.
- **Stunted Social and Economic Development:** Gender inequality hinders overall societal progress, as women's empowerment is closely linked to economic growth and social well-being.

⁹ Saikia, S., & Baruah, A. (2012). DEEPENING DEMOCRACY IN INDIA BY BUILDING GENDER EQUALITY IN POLITICS. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 73(2), 273–282. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41856590>

2.2.4. Addressing Democratic Deficits Through Gender Equality

Promoting gender equality is essential for reducing democratic deficits. Key strategies include:

1. **Political Representation and Leadership**

- Implementing gender quotas and affirmative action policies to increase women's representation in political bodies.
- Supporting women candidates through financial resources, training, and mentorship programs.

2. **Legal and Institutional Reforms**

- Strengthening laws to combat GBV and ensure accountability for crimes against women in politics.
- Establishing gender-sensitive judicial and law enforcement systems.

3. **Gender-Responsive Governance**

- Integrating gender perspectives into policymaking and budgeting.
- Promoting women's participation in local governance and community decision-making processes.

4. **Public Awareness and Cultural Change**

- Conducting gender sensitization programs to challenge harmful norms and promote gender equality.
- Encouraging media representation of women leaders as role models.

5. **International Cooperation and Advocacy**

- Engaging in global platforms like **UN Women** and the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)** to push for gender-equitable democratic practices.

3. **Women Political Participation in India: An Overview**

Women's political participation in India has seen significant growth over the years, yet it continues to face substantial challenges. From constitutional provisions ensuring gender equality to increasing representation in governance, Indian democracy has made strides toward empowering women in politics. However, deep-rooted social norms, political marginalization, and structural barriers continue to hinder full participation.¹⁰

¹⁰ Wikipedia. (March 31, 2025). "Women's political participation in India".

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_political_participation_in_India#:~:text=During%20India's%20parliamentary%20general,representation%20of%20women%20in%20Parliament.

3.1. Current Status of Women's Representation

As of April 2025, women's representation in India's political landscape has seen incremental improvements.

A. **Parliamentary Representation:**

- **Lok Sabha (House of the People):** In the 2024 General Elections, women secured approximately 15% of the seats, marking a modest increase from previous years.
- **Rajya Sabha (Council of States):** Women's representation remains around 13%, indicating a need for further progress.¹¹

B. **State Legislative Assemblies:**

The proportion of women in State Legislative Assemblies varies significantly across India, with an average representation of about 9%. Notable examples include:¹²

- **Chhattisgarh:** 14.4% women MLAs.
- **West Bengal:** 13.7% women MLAs.¹³
- **Bihar:** 14.5% women MLAs, supported by initiatives like the 50% reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

In September 2023, the Indian Parliament passed the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, commonly known as the Women's Reservation Bill. This landmark legislation aims to reserve 33% of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. The reservation is set to be implemented after the next delimitation exercise, which will follow the upcoming census.¹⁴

i. **Women in Parliament and State Assemblies**

- In the **first Lok Sabha (1952)**, only **4.4% of MPs** were women.
- In the **2019 General Elections**, women held **14.4% of seats** in the Lok Sabha.
- Rajya Sabha (Upper House) has **13.8% women MPs** as of 2023.
- State legislative assemblies show even lower representation, averaging around **9%**.

¹¹ IAS, Drishti. (July 19, 2024). "Political Representation of Women". https://www.drishtias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/political-representation-of-women?utm_source=chatgpt.com

¹² Yasmeen, Smt. (December 12, 2024). "Women's Representation in Indian Parliament and State Legislatures (Current statistics and challenges)". https://www.ijnrd.org/papers/IJNRD2412297.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com. Volume 9, Issue, ISSN 2456-8184.

¹³ Rathore, Manya. (October 19, 2023). "Women elected to the state legislative assemblies India 2023".

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1416408/india-women-in-state-legislative-assemblies-by-state/>.

¹⁴ Wikipedia. (March 27, 2025). "One Hundred and Sixth Amendment of the Constitution of India".

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_Hundred_and_Sixth_Amendment_of_the_Constitution_of_India?utm_source=chatgpt.com. Retrieved on 2025-03-29.

ii. Women in Local Governance

- The **Panchayati Raj system** has significantly boosted women's leadership at the grassroots level.
- Today, over **1.45 million women** hold positions in local governance, comprising **nearly 46%** of elected representatives in PRIs.
- Some states, like **Bihar, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh**, have increased the reservation from 33% to **50%** for women in local bodies.

3.2. Legal and Policy Framework

India has established a robust legal and policy framework to promote women's political participation. The Constitution, legislative acts, and policy initiatives collectively aim to ensure gender equality and greater representation of women in governance.

The Indian Constitution provides a strong foundation for women's political participation through various articles¹⁵:

- **Article 14** – Guarantees equality before the law.
- **Article 15(3)** – Allows the state to make special provisions for women.
- **Article 39(a)** – Directs the state to ensure equal rights for men and women in livelihood and opportunities.
- **Article 325 & 326** – Ensure no person is denied the right to vote based on gender.

3.2.1. Legislative and Policy Initiatives

i. The Women's Reservation Bill (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023)

- Reserves 33% of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.
- Applies to seats reserved for SC/STs as well.
- Implementation depends on delimitation and the next census.

ii. 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992)

- Mandate 33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and urban local bodies.
- Many states (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, etc.) increased reservation to 50%.

¹⁵ Department, Legislative. (May 1, 2024). "The Constitution of India".

<https://cdnbbsr.s3waas.gov.in/s380537a945c7aaa788ccfcdf1b99b5d8f/uploads/2024/07/20240716890312078.pdf>. Retrieved on 2025-03-29.

iii. Representation of People Act, 1951

- Governs elections in India but does not mandate gender-based reservations for political parties¹⁶.
- Criticism: Lacks provisions to ensure political parties nominate more women candidates.

iv. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001)

- Aims to increase participation of women in decision-making bodies.
- Encourages political parties to promote women leaders.

3.2.2. Institutional Mechanisms Supporting Women in Politics

i. National Commission for Women (NCW)

- Monitors women's rights violations and advocates for gender-sensitive policies.
- Works to enhance women's political representation and leadership skills.

ii. Election Commission of India (ECI)

- Conducts awareness campaigns on women's voting rights and political participation.
- Encourages political parties to nominate more women candidates.

iii. Women's Leadership Development Programs

- UN Women & Government of India programs focus on capacity building.
- NGOs and civil society groups provide training and mentorship for women candidates.

3.3. Barriers to Women's Political Participation

Despite legal and policy measures to enhance women's representation in politics, several barriers continue to hinder their active participation. These challenges stem from societal norms, political structures, economic constraints, and systemic biases.

3.3.1. Societal and Cultural Barriers

a. Patriarchal Mindset

Indian society remains deeply patriarchal, where men dominate political and decision-making spaces. Women are often expected to prioritize family responsibilities over political careers.

b. Lack of Political Awareness and Education

Many women, especially in rural areas, lack awareness about their political rights. Low literacy and inadequate civic education hinder their ability to participate effectively.

¹⁶ Kanoon, India. (2025). "Section 3 in The Representation of the People Act, 1951". <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/681462/>

c. **Gender Stereotyping**

Women in politics are often subjected to character attacks and media scrutiny. Society tends to associate politics with aggression and power, discouraging women from entering the field.

3.3.2. **Political Barriers**

a. **Limited Party Support**

Political parties hesitate to give tickets to women candidates, citing electability concerns. No legal requirement for parties to nominate a certain percentage of women, leading to underrepresentation.

b. **Male-Dominated Political Networks**

Politics in India is heavily influenced by dynastic politics and male-dominated networks, making it difficult for new women leaders to emerge. Women often need male political mentorship to secure leadership positions.

c. **Electoral Violence and Harassment**

Women candidates often face intimidation, online abuse, and threats. Lack of security discourages many women from actively participating in elections.

3.3.3. **Economic Barriers**

a. **Financial Constraints**

Running an election campaign requires significant financial resources, which many women lack. Women have less access to financial backing from political parties, businesses, and donors.

b. **Unequal Economic Opportunities**

Economic disparities and low workforce participation limit women's financial independence. Women's lack of economic empowerment affects their ability to invest in political campaigns.

3.3.4. **Institutional and Structural Barriers**

a. **Delayed Implementation of Women's Reservation Bill**

- The **33% [reservation for women in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies](#)** (passed in 2023) is yet to be implemented.
- The delay in delimitation and census processes **postpones actual representation gains**.

b. **Lack of Political Training and Leadership Development**

- Women receive **less exposure to leadership training programs** compared to men.
- Many **first-time women politicians struggle with governance and decision-making** due to inadequate mentorship.

c. **Bias in Media Representation**

- The media often **focuses on a woman's personal life** rather than her policies or leadership skills.
- **Underreporting of women's achievements** in politics reinforces gender biases.

3.3.5. **Legal and Policy Gaps**

- There is no mandatory quota for women candidates in political parties.
- Lack of accountability mechanisms for increasing women's participation in politics.
- Weak enforcement of laws protecting women from electoral violence and harassment.

4. **The Intersection of Gender-Based Violence and Women's Political Participation**

Gender-based violence continues to restrict women from participating in politics across the globe. Female political leaders experience obstacles at all levels which block their ability to lead while making decisions. The obstacles women face through direct violence together with systemic discrimination affect individual women and simultaneously damage democratic governance systems. The solution to these obstacles demands thorough approaches enabling women to conduct political work securely and efficiently¹⁷.

4.1. **Physical and Psychological Violence against Women in Politics**

Political women experience physical attacks alongside psychological assaults which include intimidation and threatening behaviors and assassination attempts¹⁸. Violence targeting female politicians exists to stop women from participating in political affairs and preserve men's stronghold in leadership positions.

- **Case Study: Jayalalitha and Other Women Leaders**

The political career of J. Jayalalitha as Tamil Nadu's former Chief Minister in India provides an evident case of gender-based attacks. Gender-based hostility targeted her during the entire period of her political leadership. A violent physical attack against her occurred in the Tamil Nadu State Assembly in 1989 while demonstrating the direct violence which women encounter when operating in political spheres. The gender-based violence did not stop Jayalalitha from building her political journey to become a powerful leader of India while showing strength in adversity. Female political figures including Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan and Julia Gillard of Australia endured powerful emotional harassment as well as verbal assaults during their political careers. Benazir Bhutto became the pioneer of Muslim-majority countries to hold leadership when she was murdered in 2007 despite enduring long-term threats. The sexist verbal assaults directed at Australian Prime Minister

¹⁷ Women, UN. (2025). "Political Participation of Women". <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/governance/political-participation-of-women>. Retrieved on 2025-03-15.

¹⁸ Women, UN. (2025). "Women's Political Empowerment and Leadership". <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/11/womens-political-empowerment-and-leadership>. Retrieved on 2025-03-15.

Julia Gillard about her personal life eventually led to her political downfall while she remained Australia's first female prime minister. Women in political leadership suffer deliberate attacks based on their gender in addition to their policy decisions thus impeding their ability to participate equally.

4.2. Institutional and Structural Barriers

4.2.1. Inadequate Legal Protections for Women in Politics

Several national governments have not established distinct laws which protect female politicians from violence. Electoral violence receives some coverage in current legal frameworks, yet these frameworks never acknowledge gender-specific obstacles that women face during elections. The lack of proper enforcement of anti-discrimination laws drops women's participation in politics while leaving them unprotected from threats due to minimal legal mechanisms to defend themselves.

4.2.2. Lack of Gender-Sensitive Policies in Political Parties

Political parties are among the primary barriers that restrict women from taking part in the political process. Multiple party organizations persist in neglecting gender-sensitive policy implementation which involves candidate quotas and barrier solutions for harassment while providing equal campaign resources. Women need gender-sensitive policies but without them they face challenges in obtaining party endorsements and sufficient fundraising support for their campaigns.

4.2.3. Structural Discrimination and Patriarchal Norms

The societal pressure for male political leadership perpetuates hostile conditions within female political representation. Society perceives ambitious women through negative stereotypes that describe them as "aggressive" or consider them incapable of leading but looks at men as possessing strength and leadership abilities. Societal biases against ambitious women lead many to avoid election contests and prevent their opportunity to participate in leadership positions.

4.3. Impact on Democracy and Governance

4.3.1. Democratic Erosion Due to Gender Exclusion

The exclusion of women from political decision-making reduces democracy's strength while creating underrepresentation in the government. Political gender-based violence creates barriers which prevent women from entering politics and reduces the number of diverse representatives in office. Such exclusion results in governmental systems that neglect essential needs and challenges of fifty percent of the population.

4.3.2. Long-Term Effects on Policymaking and Representation

Through their positions in politics women advocate for programs that support disadvantaged populations and welfare needs of both healthcare and education systems. Critical issues failed to receive proper attention when women are excluded from decision-making structures. When governance lacks equal representations, the implemented policies keep previous social disparities while failing to establish a framework that fosters social equality and inclusivity. Women's intellectual and decision-making involvement in politics, including policy formulation, governance, and leadership roles leads to better democratic systems while creating policies that include all communities.

5. Policy and Institutional Responses to Address GBV in Politics

Gender-based violence (GBV) in politics is a critical issue in India, where women in political spaces often face harassment, threats, and discrimination. Addressing this requires a combination of legal measures, institutional mechanisms, and cultural shifts. Below are some key responses:

5.1. Legal and Policy Frameworks

5.1.1. Laws Addressing GBV in Politics

- **The Representation of the People Act, 1951:** While not explicitly addressing GBV, this law regulates electoral conduct, including provisions against intimidation and undue influence, which can be used to address political violence against women.
- **The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013 (POSH Act):** This law applies to workplaces, including political offices, and provides mechanisms for complaints against sexual harassment.
- **Indian Penal Code (IPC) Provisions:** Sections 354 (assault on women), 509 (outraging a woman's modesty), and 506 (criminal intimidation) are often used to address harassment and threats faced by women in politics.
- **The Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000:** Used to combat online harassment, trolling, and cyber threats against women politicians.
- **National Policy for Women, 2016 (Draft):** While yet to be enacted, this policy aims to enhance women's participation in governance and strengthen protections against political violence.

5.2. Institutional Mechanisms

- **Election Commission of India (ECI):**
 - Monitors electoral violence, including gendered intimidation during elections.
 - Issues model codes of conduct to ensure fair treatment of women candidates.
- **National Commission for Women (NCW):**
 - Investigates cases of violence and harassment against women politicians.
 - Provides recommendations to the government on strengthening protections.
- **Parliamentary Committees on Women's Empowerment:**
 - Reviews laws and policies affecting women in politics and governance.
- **Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs):**
 - Political parties and legislative bodies are mandated to have ICCs under the POSH Act to address workplace harassment.

5.3. Political Party Reforms

- **Gender-Sensitive Codes of Conduct:**
 - Some political parties have adopted internal policies against harassment and discrimination.
- **Reservation and Women's Representation:**
 - The **Women's Reservation Bill (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023)** reserves 33% of seats in Parliament and state assemblies for women, aiming to enhance their political participation.
 - **Panchayati Raj System:** 33-50% of seats in local governance are reserved for women, encouraging grassroots political engagement.

5.4. Protection and Support Mechanisms

- **Legal Aid and Counseling Services:**
 - NCW and NGOs provide legal and psychological support to women facing political violence.
- **Cyber Crime Cells:**
 - The Ministry of Home Affairs has launched cybercrime reporting portals to address online abuse against women politicians.
- **Women's Helpline (181) and Police Initiatives:**
 - Special police cells for women handle complaints of GBV, including threats to women in politics.

5.5. Media and Public Awareness

- **Ethical Media Guidelines:**

- Some media houses have adopted gender-sensitive reporting standards to avoid victim-blaming.

- **Online Safety Measures:**

- Initiatives like Twitter's "#SheLeadsIndia" and Facebook's "We Think Digital" aim to create safer digital spaces for women politicians.

- **Male Allyship Programs:**

- Various NGOs and political organizations conduct awareness programs encouraging men in politics to support gender equality.

5.6. Civil Society and International Collaborations

- **NGOs and Advocacy Groups:** Organizations like the Centre for Social Research (CSR), the All-India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), and UN Women India work on policy advocacy and support systems for women in politics.

- **International Cooperation:** India collaborates with UN Women, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), and other global bodies to strengthen institutional responses to GBV in politics.

6. Strategies to Enhance Women's Political Participation and Safety

6.1. Legal and Institutional Reforms

The successful participation of women in political activities requires immediate legal and institutional changes to ensure their safety. New legislation with strong enforcement standards requires protection for women against political violence which includes harassment through the internet along with abusive words and physical intimidation. Electoral laws throughout many countries fail to identify gender-based violence as a distinct electoral offence which exposes female candidates to assaults and intimidation. The implementation of gender-based electoral regulations within party systems produces safer political boundaries for female participation. Political parties must follow gender-sensitive regulations that require woman candidate quotas in addition to equal campaign finances and internal systems for harassment prevention and discrimination response. Political institutions and electoral commissions require increased authority to monitor and deal with violence faced by female politicians while receiving the ability to swiftly penalize aggressors.

6.2. Awareness and Capacity-Building Programs

Women need essential awareness programs and capacity-building programs to develop their ability for political engagement. Women candidates can better handle political discrimination through training and mentoring which builds their leadership abilities alongside personal strength. Multiple societies discriminate against female politicians by prioritizing their private matters over their political competence in media coverage. Media awareness projects need to be conducted for the purpose of combating bias in female leader reporting and achieving balanced publicity. Civil society organizations should use their role to advocate and supervise political institutions so they can meet their responsibility to end gender-based discrimination and violence. The public needs to receive awareness campaigns that combat social beliefs which prevent women from taking political roles.

6.3. Strengthening Digital and Physical Security for Women Politicians

Women need access to awareness and capacity-building educational programs that will empower them to become active participants in political life. Women candidates benefit from leadership development training combined with mentorship programs because these programs build their political abilities and defensive capabilities against hostile political conditions. Many societies direct their media coverage towards female political candidates by prioritizing their personal details rather than their professional qualifications. Sensitization programs through media channels need to be implemented because they combat negative prejudices about women leaders while supporting fair media coverage. The duty to monitor and advocate for gender equality falls upon civil society organizations which must keep political institutions responsible for addressing gender discrimination and violence in politics. Society should experience public education drives to combat prejudices that deter women from standing in political elections.

6.4. Advocacy for Cultural and Social Change

Social transformation stands as the cornerstone to fight patriarchal standards since it supports gender equality in political institutions. Modern social attitudes about gender norms work against women who want to become leaders. Educational strategies aimed at the public will promote positive changes by showing how women bring value to leadership and demonstrating that political engagement is natural to both sexes. The involvement of male politicians together with community leaders serves to support the inclusion of women in political institutions and denounce all violence against women. A united political movement against discrimination and violence through combined action by women politicians as well as feminist groups and human rights organizations will maintain gender equality as a vital point in political dialogue.

7. Findings

1. **High Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) as a Barrier:**

- Women in India face significant gender-based violence, both in private and public spheres, which hinders their political participation.
- Violence, including harassment, threats, and physical assault, discourages women from contesting elections and engaging in political activities.

2. **Democratic Deficits and Institutional Challenges:**

- Despite India's democratic framework, structural inequalities persist, limiting women's effective political representation.
- Political parties often fail to provide adequate support or representation for women, and patriarchal norms dominate decision-making processes.

3. **Impact of Quotas and Affirmative Action:**

- The implementation of women's reservations in local governance (Panchayati Raj) has improved participation at the grassroots level.
- However, tokenism remains an issue, with many women serving as proxies for male relatives (the concept of 'Sarpanch Pati').

4. **Intersectionality and Marginalization:**

- Women from marginalized communities (Dalits, Adivasis, and other minorities) face compounded discrimination, making political participation even more challenging.
- Socioeconomic status influences women's ability to engage in politics, with poorer women facing higher risks of violence and exclusion.

5. **Media and Public Perception:**

- Women politicians often face negative media portrayals, gendered scrutiny, and character assassinations, further discouraging active participation.
- Social media has become both a tool for empowerment and a platform for gendered abuse and cyber harassment.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

Gender-based violence and democratic deficits continue to act as significant barriers to women's political participation in India. While legislative measures such as reservations have facilitated greater representation, deep-rooted patriarchal structures, institutional biases, and security concerns still limit women's active engagement in governance. A holistic approach—including legal reforms, political will, social awareness, and stronger protection mechanisms—is necessary to ensure women's meaningful and independent political participation. Strengthening democratic institutions to be more inclusive and gender-responsive is key to bridging the gap between legal equality and actual political empowerment.

Democratic deficits and gender inequality are interconnected challenges that undermine inclusive governance and sustainable development. By ensuring equitable participation of women in political and public life, democracies can become more representative, responsive, and resilient. Promoting gender equality is not only a moral imperative but also a fundamental requirement for the realization of true democratic ideals.

8.1. **Way Forward: Authors Key Points to Overcome Barriers**

- A. Fast-track implementation of the Women's Reservation Bill.
- B. Mandate internal quotas for women candidates in political parties.
- C. Increase financial and leadership support for women in politics.
- D. Stronger laws against gender-based electoral violence and harassment.
- E. Enhance political education and civic awareness for women.

