

Women Political Participation in Urban Local Government in Uttar Pradesh

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I. INTRODUCTION

This research focuses on women's political participation through urban local government institutions in Uttar Pradesh. It highlights the political, economic, and social status of women in the state. Despite numerous efforts over the years, the condition of women in India remains a matter of concern, as significant changes in their socio-political position are yet to be realized.

Although women's participation in politics has increased in terms of voter turnout, real decision-making power largely remains concentrated in the hands of men. While several studies have examined women's political participation, few have explored it in depth within the context of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).

In this research, political participation is understood in a broad sense—beyond merely voting in elections. It encompasses women's roles in decision-making, participation in meetings, awareness of political rights, and engagement with government schemes. This study is particularly important because women constitute nearly half of the population, and understanding their political participation is essential to assessing their empowerment and societal position.

It is often believed that through political participation, women can enhance their status and agency. The findings of this research will help identify the major problems, barriers, and hindrances that limit women's active political engagement. The study also aims to provide suggestions for improving women's conditions in politics and promoting gender equality in governance.

Overall, this research emphasizes women's empowerment through politics and examines their roles in decision-making processes for societal well-

being. It will contribute to a clearer understanding of the current situation of women in Uttar Pradesh and suggest ways to enhance their political participation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Patrick J. Cong, in his article "*The Concept of Political Participation: Toward a Definition*," explains that political participation refers to any action by an individual or a community that intentionally or unintentionally supports or opposes, changes, or maintains certain features of government or society. It includes actions that support or oppose the structure of government, its leaders, and decisions regarding public goods. Such actions can occur at both national and international levels and may take various forms—written or spoken, violent or nonviolent.

Verba and Nie define political participation as activities that influence the selection of government personnel and the policies they pursue. According to them, political participation is a process through which people decide who should govern and what policies should be implemented. However, they exclude protests, civil disobedience, and political violence from their definition. For Verba and Nie, political participation consists of actions aimed at influencing who runs the government and what decisions they make.

Barnes and Kaase define political participation as "all voluntary actions by individuals intended to influence political decisions, directly or indirectly." Unlike Verba and Nie, they include both conventional and unconventional forms of participation. Conventional actions include voting and acquiring information about policies, while unconventional actions include protests, strikes, and even acts of political violence.

Jan W. van Deth: Studying Political Participation – Towards a Theory of Everything?

According to Jan W. van Deth, citizens' participation is one of the most crucial elements in a democracy. During the 1940s and 1950s, most studies on political participation focused primarily on voting in elections. However, in recent decades, the scope of political participation has expanded significantly. Today, it includes activities such as voting, attending meetings, filing petitions, meeting government officials, and protesting against government actions.

Participation not only enhances civic values but also allows individuals to express their opinions and influence decision-makers. In the 1940s and 1950s, citizens primarily participated by casting votes. By the 1970s, new forms of engagement emerged, such as political campaigning and contacting government officials. During this period, participation further expanded to include protests and demonstrations, which are considered forms of *unconventional political participation* and are often associated with new social movements.

In the 1990s, Perry and his colleagues in the United Kingdom introduced additional forms of participation, including contacting civil servants, councillors, and the mass media. After the Great Depression, the responsibilities of governments increased as they began to play a crucial role even in economic affairs. The emergence of the *welfare state* led to an expansion of governmental functions across society, economy, and culture. Consequently, ordinary citizens began to experience greater government intervention in daily life, particularly in matters related to taxation and public spending.

As a result, the boundary between political and non-political activities has become increasingly blurred, especially in Europe. It has therefore become difficult to provide a clear and comprehensive definition of political participation. Moreover, modern technology—such as the internet and email—has further broadened and complicated the concept.

Political theorist Benjamin Barber critiques this development, arguing that true political participation should involve *reasoned debate and argument*, not mere emotional reactions expressed online. He

highlights the limitations of digital participation with an example: the U.S. Congress once received around 80 million emails, an unmanageable volume that ultimately led to many messages being ignored rather than contributing meaningfully to democratic improvement.

Paul Whiteley: Is It Time to Update the Definition of Political Participation?

Paul Whiteley argues that British citizens are becoming increasingly disengaged from civil society, which weakens the effectiveness of democratic governance. Political involvement in Britain declined by about 40% between 1964 and 2010. Participation in trade unions, for instance, dropped significantly—from 43% in 1981 to just 6.9% in 2008.

Whiteley proposes a set of criteria to redefine and clarify the concept of political participation:

1. Active vs. Passive Participation: Does political participation require active engagement, such as voting, or can simply holding certain political values also be considered participation?
2. Voluntary vs. Forced Activity: Should political participation be strictly voluntary, or can it also include activities carried out under pressure or compulsion?
3. Legal vs. Illegal Participation: Does political participation include only lawful actions, or can it also encompass illegal forms such as protests and acts of civil disobedience?

Through these dimensions, Whiteley highlights the evolving nature of participation in modern democracies, emphasizing that traditional definitions may no longer capture the full range of citizens' political engagement.

Caroline J. Tolbert and Ramona S. McNeal: Unravelling the Effect of the Internet on Political Participation

Caroline J. Tolbert and Ramona S. McNeal explore how the internet has transformed political participation. Traditionally, research suggested that education and income were key predictors of whether individuals voted. However, with the rise of the internet, access to political information has become much easier and faster, influencing participation in new ways.

Their studies indicate that internet use can increase the likelihood of voting by approximately 12% and 7.5%. Findings, however, are mixed—while some studies suggest that the internet increases voter turnout, others show that using the internet for non-political purposes has little to no effect. Online platforms that provide political information can enhance civic engagement and interpersonal connections, allowing people to participate by sending emails, joining online forums or chat rooms, and contacting public officials.

The research also reveals demographic patterns: younger, more educated, and wealthier individuals are more likely to engage in online political activity, while women's participation remains comparatively low. Using data from the *American National Election Studies* (1996, 1998, and 2000), the authors found that 27% of respondents had internet access in 1996, with only 7% using it for political purposes. By 2000, internet access had risen to 63%, and 29% used it for politics. The study concludes that the internet has filled the informational gap left by television, as many citizens find online sources more comprehensive for political information.

Anuradha Chadha: Political Participation of Women – A Case Study in India

Anuradha Chadha highlights that women have historically played a limited role in politics—even in many developed countries, women were denied the right to vote until the 20th century. She emphasizes that political participation goes beyond voting; it also involves sharing power and contributing to decision-making processes at all levels of government.

Empowerment, therefore, means increasing women's involvement in political institutions and ensuring their ability to influence policies that affect their lives. The Indian Constitution provides protective measures for women's participation through Articles 14, 15, and 16, which guarantee equality among citizens.

Despite these provisions, Indian political parties often hesitate to give election tickets to women, believing they are less likely to win—though data suggests that women's success rates in elections are actually higher than men's. Women's representation in India remains low compared to many other countries, and the failure

to pass the *Women's Reservation Bill* reflects ongoing resistance from certain political groups.

Representation of Women in the Indian Parliament:

- 1952 – 4.4%
- 1957 – 5.4%
- 2004 – 8.2%

Chadha concludes that while constitutional and legal frameworks exist to promote women's participation, social attitudes and political barriers continue to hinder progress. Greater inclusion of women is essential for achieving true democratic equality in India.

Manuka Khanna: Political Participation of Women in India

Manuka Khanna highlights two main reasons why women should be included in politics. The normative reason is that all citizens deserve fair representation in democratic institutions. The practical reason is that women's direct involvement ensures that policies addressing women's interests are better formulated and implemented.

Although India provides 33% reservation for women in local government institutions, this representation remains limited, as many politically active women come from wealthy and influential families. Various psychological and social factors hinder women's participation. In a male-dominated society, stereotypes portraying women as emotional, submissive, and irrational persist, undermining their perceived political capability.

Educational and economic status also play a crucial role—individuals with higher education and better financial conditions are more likely to engage in politics. Moreover, family and social structures often restrict women's autonomy; domestic responsibilities confine women to the home, while men usually make key decisions.

Women in politics also face numerous challenges, including character attacks, threats, and violence. Political parties often prefer male candidates and assign women supportive rather than leadership roles. Many women are discouraged from contesting elections independently due to party dominance and

patriarchal bias, resulting in limited female participation at decision-making levels.

Nagesh Narayan Pandey & Ghanshyam Mishra, Reservation of seats in local government has increased women's participation, although there has not been much improvement in women's membership. Although reservation has improved women's representation, women still face many problems and need further improvement, such as education, awareness, and women's training.

Table women Representation in Uttar Pradesh
Panchayats 2015-2021

Panchayat Level	Women's Percentage 2015	Women's Percentage 2021
Gram Pradhan	45%	53.7%
Block Pramukh	33%	54.2%
Zila Panchayat	33%	56%
Member	24-26%	24-25%
State-wide Average	33.33%	33.33%

Mamoni Das: Empowerment of Women in India – An Overview of Political Participation

Mamoni Das, in her study *“Empowerment of Women in India: An Overview of Political Participation,”* notes that in the 2014 parliamentary elections, the voter turnout among women was 65.63%, compared to 67.09% among men. This increasing turnout reflects gradual progress toward women's empowerment. She defines empowerment as the improvement of women's status within the family, society, and community.

Women constitute approximately 48.9% of India's total population, yet their representation in the Lok Sabha has never exceeded 8%. As India's political system has become more competitive, political parties have expanded their outreach to women voters. Many parties have established women's wings—such as the BJP Mahila Morcha, the All India Mahila Congress of the INC, and the National Federation of Indian Women of the CPI. Moreover, several women have

also risen to lead national and regional political parties.

However, discrimination and structural barriers continue to limit women's political participation. A 2012 study of 3,000 Indian women found that illiteracy, heavy domestic workloads, and bias against women leaders were major obstacles to contesting elections. Women also have fewer opportunities to develop leadership skills due to their limited presence in public organizations. Furthermore, illiteracy restricts their ability to understand political issues and processes, while the male dominance of public spaces reduces their visibility and participation in political activities.

Garima Mishra: Participation of Elected Women Representatives in Local Bodies in Selected Districts of Uttar Pradesh – An Analysis

Garima Mishra, in her study based on Lucknow and Pratapgarh districts of Uttar Pradesh, analyses the participation of women in local governance after the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. While these amendments significantly increased women's representation in local bodies, women still face several challenges such as a lack of political experience, domestic responsibilities, and the fear of social stigma. Many women enter politics after marriage, often under family influence rather than personal motivation. Their attendance at local meetings remains low, and proxy representation—where male relatives perform the duties of elected women—is particularly common in Pratapgarh, indicating weak real participation.

Socio-economic factors also influence participation—married women are more likely to engage in politics than unmarried women, but many remain unfamiliar with their constituencies. Political parties seldom provide substantial support to female candidates. Women face persistent challenges such as economic dependence, social discrimination, and lack of awareness about political processes.

In Lucknow, many women's official duties are carried out by their family members. Women's involvement often remains limited to areas such as child welfare and basic development schemes. Furthermore, many are unaware of government development programs,

showing that decentralization has not effectively promoted gender equality. Despite constitutional provisions, women continue to face multiple barriers to full and effective participation in local governance. Dr. Vandana Mittal: Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Uttar Pradesh

Dr. Vandana Mittal emphasizes that gender equality and women's empowerment are global goals, essential for sustainable development and democracy. She identifies economic empowerment as a key factor, as it enhances women's confidence, improves family well-being, and encourages greater social and political participation.

Women's empowerment, according to Mittal, involves gaining control over resources, making independent choices, and challenging structural inequalities. It produces both external (social and economic) and internal (psychological) transformations, increasing women's roles in various spheres of life.

However, the condition of women in Uttar Pradesh remains concerning. Women continue to face educational, nutritional, and political disadvantages, with a low sex ratio and a literacy rate below the national average. Gender disparity in political participation remains significant, and women's representation in judicial and managerial positions is minimal.

Although women constitute 46% of representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and the share of women contesting elections increased by 10% in 2024, India's global ranking in female parliamentary representation remains among the lowest. Mittal concludes that while progress has been made, structural inequalities continue to limit women's full empowerment in Uttar Pradesh.

Waseem Ahmad, Nilofer, and Gazala Parveen: Women's Reservation and Political Empowerment
Waseem Ahmad, Nilofer, and Gazala Parveen highlight that despite the constitutional guarantee of equality, women's participation in political decision-making remains minimal. Several committees, including the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee and the Ashok Mehta Committee, recommended reservations for women in local governance.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment marked a turning point, reserving one-third of seats for women in local bodies. This reform significantly enhanced representation—from virtually no presence earlier to over one million women holding elected positions. Initially, there were doubts about women's capability in politics, but women soon surpassed the reserved quotas, achieving 36–38% representation across all tiers of local governance by 2000.

The amendment became a milestone in women's leadership and decision-making, transforming their socio-economic roles. Interestingly, lower-caste women demonstrated more active participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions than upper-caste women, and older women were more politically engaged than younger ones.

Organizations such as Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra played a key role in promoting participation, though family support remained crucial. Women often face discrimination from government officials, but reservation has strengthened their bargaining power and visibility in politics. Once viewed as passive participants, women in Uttar Pradesh are now emerging as active and influential political actors.

B. B. Malik and Jaya Shrivastava: Dalit Women and Political Participation

B. B. Malik and Jaya Shrivastava examine the status of Dalit women in political life, noting that they experience multiple forms of discrimination in both public and private spheres. The 73rd Amendment empowered marginalized groups, including Dalit women, through local elections by establishing the three-tier Panchayati Raj system.

Their study assesses Dalit women's role in decision-making and their interactions with government officials. Most Dalit women representatives are married and dependent on their families, with many functioning as proxy Pradhans—their husbands or male relatives exercising actual power.

Although reservation policies have created opportunities for empowerment, active participation remains limited. Less than half of Dalit women Pradhans participate meaningfully in decision-making, and only one-third contribute to financial

planning in panchayat meetings. About 40.77% of Dalit women representatives feel respected, while 42.30% report facing disrespect.

Barriers such as caste discrimination, patriarchy, low education, and social exclusion continue to restrict their effectiveness. Malik and Shrivastava emphasize that true empowerment requires capacity-building programs, supportive administrative systems, family cooperation, and confidence-building initiatives for Dalit women leaders.

Radhika Govind: Women's Activism and Identity Politics in Uttar Pradesh

Radhika Govind, in her work *"On Whose Behalf? Women's Activism and Identity Politics in Uttar Pradesh,"* explores the evolution of women's participation in the state, particularly through the Mahila Samakhya Programme. This initiative, launched in districts such as Varanasi, Banda, Tehri Garhwal, and Saharanpur, aimed to empower women through education and collective action.

The program helped women develop new skills and increased their involvement in local governance and social movements. However, Govind argues that despite these achievements, the initiative failed to address deeper structural inequalities, particularly those rooted in caste and religion.

While the Mahila Samakhya programme focused primarily on Dalit women, it largely ignored marginalized Muslim women, leaving them doubly disadvantaged—both within the broader society and within their own communities. Women activists in Uttar Pradesh often collaborated with leftist parties and NGOs, yet caste-based issues were frequently overlooked by these organizations due to upper-caste and middle-class dominance.

Dalit women's political engagement has increased, but their roles remain subordinate and symbolic, with few holding genuine leadership positions. The study concludes that women's activism in Uttar Pradesh is expanding but continues to be shaped by intersecting inequalities of gender, caste, and religion.

Dr. Santosh Kumar Singh – Social and Cultural Determinants of Women's Status

Dr. Singh highlights that the status of women is shaped by social and cultural institutions like family and marriage. In Uttar Pradesh, patriarchal norms and gender inequality limit access to education, health, and employment.

He contrasts the respected position of women in the Vedic period with the decline due to social evils (sati, dowry, child marriage). Dalit women are the most affected, facing double discrimination based on caste and gender.

Field studies show that early marriage and motherhood (70% married by 16, 95% mothers by 18) hinder women's participation in public life. Economic participation is restricted to low-paid, unskilled labor, and literacy remains below the national average. → Key insight: Socio-cultural barriers continue to obstruct women's empowerment; policy focus should emphasize education, skill development, and socio-economic equity.

2. Choudhary, Roy, Verma, Bharti & Verma – Women's Representation in Panchayati Raj and Zila Parishads

This study critiques the limited real empowerment under the 73rd Amendment in Uttar Pradesh. Although 44 out of 74 Zila Parishad chairpersons were women in 2016, most acted as proxies for male relatives or elite political actors. They note that indirect elections, elite influence, and pressure from ruling parties undermine women's autonomy.

Younger and less educated women are often chosen not for merit but due to male patronage. → Key insight: Formal representation does not always translate into real empowerment; elite dominance and male interference persist at higher administrative tiers.

3. Bupinder Zutshi – Trends in Voter Turnout and Women's Electoral Participation

Zutshi analyzes voter turnout trends in Uttar Pradesh between 2007 and 2012, noting an increase from 46.07% to 59.48%.

Turnout is affected by demographic, socio-economic, and cultural variables, with higher participation among SC/STs, rural residents, women, and youth. The Election Commission of India (ECI) improved participation through awareness campaigns and online registration, yet a knowledge-action gap remains in voter education.

Women's turnout was notably higher in north-western UP, indicating growing political consciousness among rural and marginalized women.
→ Key insight: Women's increasing voter turnout indicates rising awareness, but this has not yet translated into proportionate representation or leadership roles.

Census 2011

District	Population	Urban Population	Rural Population	Literacy Rate	Male Literacy rate	Female Literacy rate	Urban female literacy Rate	Rural Female Literacy Rate	Urban Male Literacy rate	Rural Male literacy rate
Moradabad	4772006	32.98%	67.02%	56.77%	64.83%	47.86%	58%	42%	67%	63%
Ghaziabad	4681645	67.55%	32.45%	78.07%	85.42%	69.79%	73.86%	61.04%	86%	82%

III. METHODOLOGY

this study adopted a mixed methods research design to examine women's participation in urban local government. Mixed methods are appropriate because they capture both the measurable extent of participation and lived experience behind it. The study relies on secondary data collected from official reports electoral records, published research articles, and institutional datasets such as UN women and India-focused studies on urban local governance. These sources are used to analyse trends in women's representation and participation in urban local bodies

Qualitative Approach

Investigating the viewpoints, experiences, and observations of women who actively engage in political processes at various governmental levels is the goal of the qualitative component. Focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and open-ended questionnaires distributed to women representatives, NGO members, and community leaders will be used as data gathering techniques. The objective is to identify and examine the institutional, social, and cultural factors that affect women's political participation and the challenges they encounter in positions of decision-making.

Quantitative Approach

The quantitative portion of the study will focus on gathering and analysing data regarding women's political engagement.

Primary Data: Structured questionnaires will be used to collect information on respondents' political engagement, voting patterns, and representation in local government organizations.

Secondary Data: Official documents and datasets from government agencies, Panchayati Raj organizations, and the Election Commission will be examined in order to monitor patterns and trends in women's participation and leadership.

The objective of this analysis is to provide a quantitative evaluation of the extent and kind of women's political representation.

Source of information

Primary Data

Primary data will be gathered through surveys, interviews, and structured questionnaires—all essential methods for obtaining first-hand information. The study will include elected and non-elected female officials as well as women from non-governmental

organizations (NGOs) that actively participate in local governance. Observations of Urban Local Body (ULB) meetings will also be carried out to examine women's participation, interactions, and influence in the decision-making processes.

Secondary data

Secondary data will be gathered from a variety of reliable and scholarly sources, including books, peer-reviewed journals, scholarly research papers, government reports, and publications by non-governmental groups. This data will complement the primary data by offering statistical insights, contextual background, and a more thorough analytical perspective on issues and trends related to women's political activity.

IV. CONCLUSION

The reviewed literature suggests that constitutional provisions and reservation policies have significantly improved women's political representation in India, particularly at the local government level after the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. However, increased representation has not always translated into effective participation or decision-making power. Women continue to face challenges such as patriarchal social norms, limited education and economic independence, proxy representation, domestic responsibilities, political party bias, and lack of political awareness and training. While reservation has created new opportunities for women to enter politics, genuine political empowerment requires not only legal safeguards but also greater institutional support, leadership development, education, and changes in social attitudes. Overall, the studies agree that strengthening women's substantive participation is essential for achieving gender equality and deepening democratic governance in India.

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