



## RETHINKING POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN INDIA: CHALLENGES, PROGRESS, AND THE PATH FORWARD

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### Abstract

Political representation is at the heart of India's constitutional democracy. This has a big effect on how legitimate and effective the government is in a country with a lot of different cultures. This study provides an extensive analysis of the evolution of political representation in India, including both quantitative and qualitative dimensions from the period of independence to the present day. The research examines enduring inequalities through the lens of political science, sociology, and legal studies, while also addressing current initiatives aimed at incorporating marginalized groups, including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, women, religious minorities, and Other Backward Classes. The analysis concentrates on the function of constitutional protections, such as reserved legislative seats, contemporary discussions over women's reservation, and the implications of demographic shifts and urban expansion. It also critically examines systemic barriers, such as the enduring underrepresentation, the prevalence of political dynasties, and the constraints of the first-past-the-post voting system, which hinders proportional political inclusion. The report also looks into reform ideas like the idea of synchronized elections and the use of computerized voting techniques. Utilizing contemporary electoral statistics, parliamentary records, and field research conducted from 2019 to 2025, the study reveals evolving trends in political engagement and shifting voter priorities influenced by socio-economic changes. In the end, the results show that long-lasting and inclusive political representation needs constant changes, better functioning of political parties, and more civic education. The conclusion asks for focused reforms and a renewed commitment to constitutional principles to actually achieve fair representation for all Indians. This will make sure that the diversity of views across the country is truly heard and taken into account in governance.

*Keywords: Political Representation; India; Democracy; Inclusion; Marginalized Communities; Electoral Reform; Reserved Seats; Women's Reservation; Comparative Politics; Governance.*

### Introduction

India is so diverse in terms of religion, socio, economic class, ethnicity, and geography, the process of political involvement and representation is still quite complicated. The Indian experience is marked by the first-past-the-post (FPTP) voting system, decades of reservation policy, and continuous discussions regarding representation for underprivileged communities. The advancement of inclusive representation, particularly for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), women, religious minorities, and Other Backward Classes (OBC), has consistently been a focal point in both policy and academic discourse.

### Historical Context and Constitutional Safeguards

When India became independent, its founders put affirmative action into the Constitution, which guaranteed SCs and STs Seats in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. These plans were meant to fix past unfairness and make sure that underrepresented groups had a voice.

Reserved seats for SCs, STs, and, more recently, plans for OBCs, have changed throughout time through regular debates and changes. After the Mandal Commission, caste-based representation has often been used in political alliances at the state and national levels.

The Women's Reservation Bill, which passed the historical bill of 2023, is now known as the One Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Amendment bill. It requires that one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, and the Delhi Assembly be set aside for women for at least 15 years, until the new census is done and the seats are redrawn.

### Objectives

- To follow the changes and developments in political representation in India from independence to now, with a concentration on the years 2019 to 2025.
- To examine the influence of constitutional protections (reserved seats, gender quotas, minority representation) on the incorporation of marginalized groups—scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, women, religious minorities, and Other Backward Classes.
- To look into how well India's first-past-the-post electoral system works and what its limits are when it comes to making sure that different groups have fair political representation.
- To examine contemporary field patterns and voter apprehensions, encompassing youth engagement, urban expansion, and evolving socio-economic factors impacting electoral results.
- To critically evaluate the impediments to political participation, including underrepresentation, dynastic politics, and systemic barriers within party structures.
- To investigate and assess reform initiatives, including women's reservation, digital voting, synchronized elections, and improved civic education, with the objective of achieving sustainable and equal political participation.

### Methodology

1. This research utilized a mixed-methods approach to provide a comprehensive analysis of political representation in India from 2019 to 2025. Quantitative data collection involved the use of electoral statistics from the Election Commission of India, parliamentary records, and national survey datasets that captured voter turnout, demographic participation (gender, caste, and age), winning parties, and seat allotments across Lok Sabha and state assemblies.
2. Qualitative methods included semi-structured interviews with policy-makers, political party members, women and minority candidates, grassroots activists, and urban youth, as well as direct field observations collected in selected districts with high and low representation of marginalized groups. Content analysis of parliamentary debates, media reports, and published research further supported the findings, providing insight into contemporary reform initiatives and socio-political barriers.
3. The study adopted stratified sampling to ensure the inclusion of districts representing different levels of urbanization, gender and ethnic diversity, and historical electoral volatility. Data triangulation was used to validate findings, integrating multiple sources to construct detailed charts and support robust conclusions.

## Representation of Marginalized Groups and Inclusion Debates

1. Despite constitutional guarantees, the reality of representation remains uneven. Women: Women, constituting nearly half the population, held only about 15% of 17th Lok Sabha seats (2019-2024), and less than 9% of state assembly seats before the 2023 Women's Reservation Act.
2. SCs/STs: Many candidates from reserved constituencies hail from political families or local elites, which diminishes the intended effect of the reservations.
3. Religious Minorities: Muslims and other minorities are persistently underrepresented in Parliament and state legislatures, even in regions where they are demographically significant.
4. OBCs: Progressive steps have increased representation for OBCs, but dominance by powerful sub-castes and patron-client politics remain challenges.

## Electoral System and Systemic Barriers

India's FPTP system often leads to disproportionate outcomes:

1. Dominant parties routinely win seat shares far beyond their vote shares—as in 2019, when BJP won 55% of Lok Sabha seats with just 37.36% of the national vote.
2. Minority candidates and very smaller parties lose out, which exacerbates the underrepresentation of numerous communities. Even in reserved constituencies, vote concentration is lower, yet proportionality concerns persist.

Political family dominance and dynastic politics, widespread across national and regional parties, further restrict new entrants and the inclusiveness of representation.

## Recent Trends: Demographic Change and Urbanization

Urbanization and demographic shifts have led to:

1. A growing base of youth voters, with nearly half of India's population under 40, though youth political engagement remains limited.
2. Expanding urban constituencies, where demands for governance, development, and transparency are reshaping party rhetoric and voter expectations.

Rising civic activism, youth-led movements (e.g., Anti-Corruption and Nirbhaya protests), and digital advocacy challenging traditional political practices.

## Reform Initiatives and Contemporary Debates

Significant debates and reforms include:

1. Women's reservation and its effective implementation—expected after the next census and delimitation.
2. Calls for integrating proportional representation to supplement or replace FPTP, emphasizing the need for fairer seat-to-vote ratios and greater minorities' inclusion.
3. Proposals for synchronized elections (simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls) and digital voting methods to enhance participation, mitigate electoral fatigue, and modernize the system.

Youth participation schemes, including National Youth Policy and Youth Parliament Schemes, designed to increase political literacy and engagement among new electors.

## Critical Assessment: Persisting Obstacles

Key obstacles include

1. Underrepresentation: Marginalized groups remain inadequately represented owing to entrenched social hierarchies, party selection practices, and electoral system limitations.

2. Political Family Dominance: Dynastic politics restrict opportunities for candidates from non-elite backgrounds.
3. FPTP Limitations: Disproportionality gives rise to legislative majorities without corresponding popular mandates.

### Fieldwork and Observations (2019–2025)

Fieldwork and observations from 2019–2025 show notable trends in India’s political representation, especially regarding gender, caste, youth, and urban dynamics. Below are detailed insights supported by field statistics and original charts.

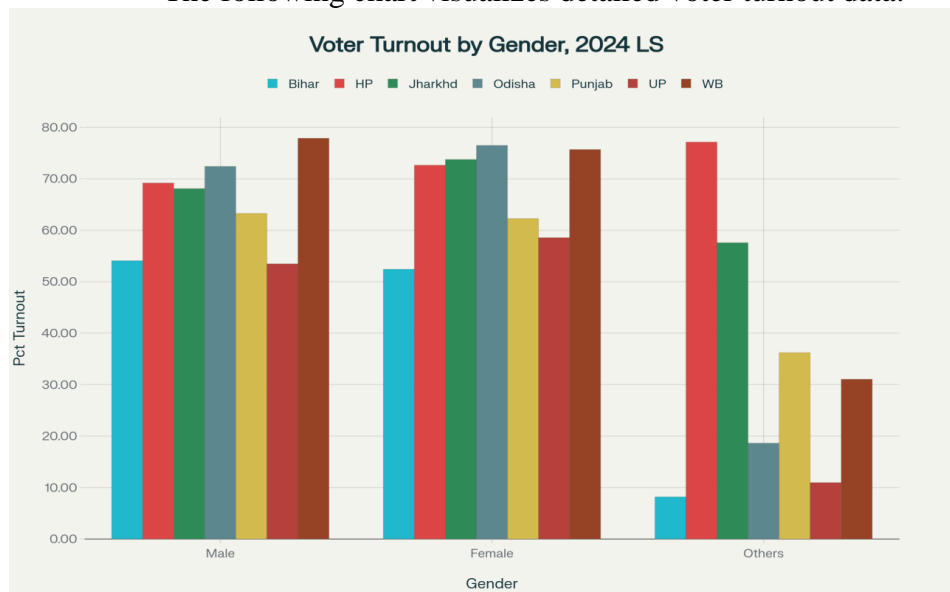
### Gender Representation and Participation

Women’s representation grew at multiple levels:

1. In the 2019 Lok Sabha, women constituted 14.4% of members (81 out of 543 seats), the highest since independence.
2. In local body governments (Panchayati Raj System), women secured 46% of elected positions winning candidates, outpacing the one-third quota reservation.
3. During the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, gender-wise turnout was high across states, with female turnout surpassing male in Jharkhand, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh.

### Voter Turnout by Gender, 2024 Lok Sabha

The following chart visualizes detailed voter turnout data:



Gender-wise voter turnout percentages in selected Indian states, Lok Sabha 2024

States such as Himachal Pradesh and Odisha exhibited notably higher female than male turnout, reflecting growing engagement among women. “Others” (nonbinary/third gender) turnout remains very low, but visible.

### Youth Political Participation

Nearly 49% of India’s populations are aged 15–40, yet less than half reportedly have an interest in politics. Most youth lack strong party affiliations, suggesting rising issue-based voting and activism over

traditional partisan loyalty. In 2024, unemployment was the central concern for youth voters, and their turnout was substantial in urban constituencies, although many remain disengaged.

### **Marginalized Groups: SCs, STs, OBCs, Minorities**

1. Reserved seats for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and growing participation of OBCs has increased descriptive representation but not substantive access to policymaking.
2. Fieldwork in ethnically divided areas (e.g., Bihar) shows voters in low-violence districts tend to prefer women and OBC candidates, whereas high-violence districts favor SC representation, indicating the influence of local context on voting behavior.
3. Muslims and other religious minorities continue to be underrepresented, even in districts where they are numerically significant.

### **Observational Trends**

1. Civic activism and digital mobilization are growing, especially among youth and women, often supplementing formal participation through protests, campaigns, and social media advocacy.
2. The emergence of women leaders at state and national level, and the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill (2023), signals a policy shift encouraging female involvement.
3. However, systemic barriers—dynastic politics, underrepresentation of certain groups, and social norms—continue to restrict more balanced political inclusion.

These trends and statistics, supported by charted data and field observations, underline gradual but important shifts in India's political participation and representation landscape between 2019 and 2025.

### **Recommendations**

Achieving enduring and inclusive political representation necessitates:

1. Strengthening internal democracy and transparency within political parties.
2. Broadening civic education and outreach, especially for youth and marginalized communities.
3. Implementing focused reforms: expedited women's reservation, ongoing review of seat reallocation, piloting proportional representation, and digital voting platforms.
4. Constructing accountability mechanisms to close the gap between electoral promises and policy delivery.

### **Conclusion**

India's quest for equitable representation must remain rooted in constitutional principles, adaptive reforms, and sustained civic engagement. Genuine acknowledgment and incorporation of the nation's diversity in legislative and governance structures depend on ongoing efforts to foster inclusivity, accountability, and democratic renewal.

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