

# Political participation and Women Empowerment in India

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## Abstract

*Political participation is a mechanism which enables any individual, group or the society to control the path of own present and future. Political participation in the democratic institutions implies greater participation by any group in the process of decision making in the society. The political participation is very essential for the purpose of the empowerment of women in our country because it promotes the feelings of self-empowered to take control of one's own destiny. The political participation of women in the decision making process at the various level is very crucial for the purpose of women empowerment.*

**Key words:** Empowerment, participation, welfare, Bargaining power and .

## Objective, Methods and Sources

The basic objective of this paper is to analysis of different terms and concepts in which empowerment has been conceptualized and defined in terms of the political participation of the women in the various institutions. A comparative index is constructed in this paper to study the women participation in the various democratic institutions. This index will measure the empowerment of the women at the political level. Secondary data collected from internet, newspapers, published papers, books government report and publication like NFHS -3 and various economic survey and paper published by various intellectuals academicians in various conferences and seminars at the national and international level. This paper used various statistical techniques to empirically analyze the relationship between the predictor and response variables. The statistical methods have been analysed by the statistical computer programme as Microsoft Excel and the Statistical Programme for the Social Science (SPSS-18).

## Introduction:

Political participation of women is essential to ensure that woman's concerns and issues are integrated into main- stream decision-making processes. This would be a major step in facilitating women to exercise and enjoy their rights guaranteed in the Constitution, towards achieving substantive equality for women .The number of women in political decision-making bodies is abysmally low in both the Parliament and the State Legislatures. Lack of space for women in these political institutions and decision-making bodies has resulted in the perpetuation of inequalities and discrimination against women.

Actually empowerment is a movement for equality, equity, liberty and dignity of women in every sphere of life like socio-economic, political and cultural. Political participation of women is essential to ensure that woman's concerns and issues are integrated into main- stream decision-making processes. As women's empowerment is a vast field with a myriad of indicators, we focus on its prominent dimensions. Specifically, we analyze five dimensions of women's empowerment: economic contribution, social, political, health, and education.

## Indicators for the political empowerment:

UNICEF uses the Women's Empowerment Framework constructed by Sara Longwe, which encompasses welfare, access to resources, awareness-raising, participation, and control. UNICEF (1994) defines Women empowerment as a process framework in which Women's empowerment take place as a progression through following ways:

- **Welfare:** The level of material welfare of women, relative to men in such matters as food supply, income and medical care.
- **Access:** Women's access to the factors of production as land, labour, credit, training, marketing facilities and all publicly available services and benefits on an equal basis with men.
- **Conscientisation:** The understanding of the difference between sex roles and gender roles, and that the latter are cultural and can be changed.

- **Participation:** Women's equal participation in the decision-making process, policymaking, planning and administration.
- **Equality of control:** over the factors of production, and the distribution of benefits so that neither men nor women are in a position of dominance.

Rowlands, Nelson and Wright (1996) power relation framework for the empowerment in the following ways:

- **Power from within:** Individual changes in confidence and consciousness.
- **Power to:** Increase in skills, abilities including earning an income, access to markets and networks.
- **Power over:** Changes in power relations within households, communities and a macro level.
- **Power with:** Organisation of the powerless to enhance individual abilities and/or ability to challenge and change power relations.

#### **Political empowerment index:**

Political empowerment refers to the equitable representation of women in decision-making structures, both formal and informal, and their voice in the formulation of policies affecting their societies. The inadequate representation of women in decision-making bodies is one of the major factors that have contributed to their low status.

The affirmative action adopted by the government of India providing for reservation of not less than one-third seats in local self governing bodies has facilitated more number of women to participate in the decision-making arena equally with men in these institutions. This paper has been defined to mean and include participation of women in terms of their numbers (i.e. the presence or absence of a critical mass), the quality of their participation and their involvement in effective decision-making in political institutions and the electoral processes as candidates, elected representatives and constituencies. This political empowerment sub index is constructed by using the women's participation in various bodies and institution as below:

- **Representation in panchayati raj Institutions:** Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are the grass root level institutions of our democracy. So the researcher has taken percentage of women representation in the PRIs in every state for the purpose of women empowerment analysis. PRI includes Village Panchayats, Intermediate Panchayats, District Panchayats and municipal boards.
- **Representation in state legislature:** Percentage of women representation in state legislature is taken as another variable for the purpose of empowerment analysis.
- **Representation in the parliament:** State wise percentage of women representation in the parliament (lok sabha) is taken as a last variable for the analysis of political empowerment of women.

#### **Construction of the aggregate index:**

The Index is constructed using a four-step process, outlined below:

- Conversion of Negative Variable in to Positive variable;
- Conversion into standard scale;
- Calculating the weighted average of the variables within each index ;
- Average of the all index.

Index Number at the Aggregate level means that the Women Empowerment Index Should be Constructed at the National and State level. In construction of the women empowerment index it must noted that this should properly addressed to the each and every dimension of the empowerment. A proper care must be taken for each dimension by assessing identified indicators on four main criteria: measurement, data accuracy, data reliability, and effectiveness at measuring women's empowerment. Moreover, in recommending indicators, consideration is given to standardization and comparability across states as well as the usefulness of such indicators.

#### **Conversion into standard scale:**

The variable chosen for working out composite Indices are measured in different units and in general, not directly additive and comparable. So it is necessary to convert them to some standard 'units' so that the initial scale chosen for measuring the variables do not bias the results. It is; however, true that any method of scale conversion involves implicit weighting and the selection of a standard scale is never a value free judgement. Standardization methods can improve the indicator and increase comparability of results across the

state. Standardization makes variables scale free and remove the biasness. Standard scale conversion can be done by Ranking method, Standardization, Division by mean, standard deviation or by any ideal number. For the construction of the Women Empowerment Index 'National Average' is chosen for the purpose of making variables scale free. This method not only convert the variable into the standard scale but also very useful in doing comparable analysis of each state's Index in terms of National Average.

#### Calculation of weight and index Scores:

Once the bias of unit of measurement is removed from the observation, the next step in the process involves calculating the weighted average of the variables within each index to create the index scores. There are various methods used in social research for calculation of weight. Selection of These methods depends upon the nature of the variables and the objectives of the study.

This paper has used the method for the calculation of weight similar to the method used by World Economic Forum in the construction of the Global Gender Gap Index in its Global Gender Gap Report in 2011. Averaging the different variables would implicitly give more weight to the measure that exhibits the smallest variability or standard deviation. In this study we have first convert the variables in to the standard scale by division of series by the National Average. For example, within the political empowerment sub index, standard deviations for each of the variables are calculated. Then we determine what a 1% point change would translate to in terms of standard deviations by dividing 0.01 by the standard deviation for each variable.

**Table Number 1**  
**Calculation of weight for political Index**

Political Index	Standard deviation	Standard deviation per 1% point change	Weight
Percentage of women in PRI	0.172	0.006	0.632
Percentage of women in State Legislature	0.414	0.002	0.262
Percentage of women as MP from each State	1.026	0.001	0.106
Total	1.612	0.009	1.000

This way of assigning weight to the variables essentially allows us to make sure that each variable has the same relative impact on the index. In the calculation of this particular index maximum weight has been assigned to the representation of women in the local bodies (63 percent). Delhi, Punjab and Kerala are the highest ranking states as far as this Index is concern. The values for this index for these states are respectively 1.32, 1.31 and 1.27. While the Orissa, Maharashtra and Jammu and Kashmir are the lowest performing states in terms of this political empowerment index. The values for these states are respectively 0.77, 0.75 and 0.59. Performance of the different states can be analyzed by the help of the graph and table as below:

Graph Number 1

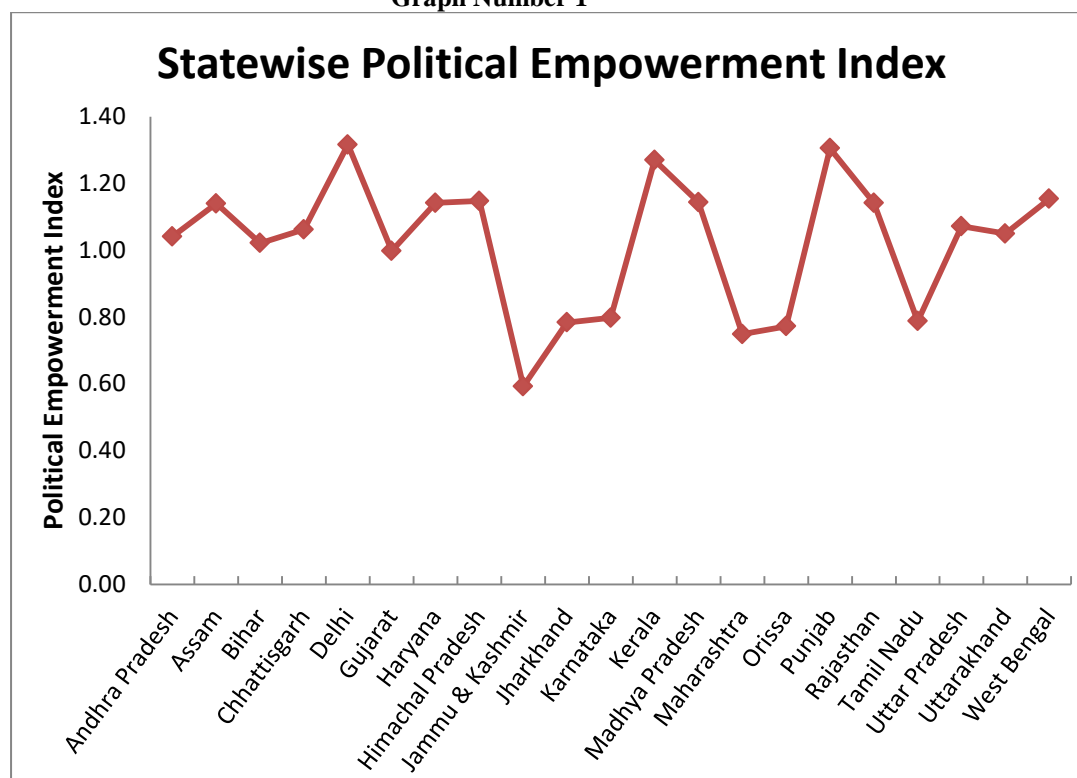


Table Number 2

Political Empowerment Index			
Sr. no.	High index score	Medium index score	Low index score
1	Delhi	Assam	Gujarat(national average i.e. one)
2	Punjab	Rajasthan	Karnataka
3	Kerala	Uttar Pradesh	Tamil Nadu
4	West Bengal	Chhattisgarh	Jharkhand
5	Himachal Pradesh	Uttarakhand	Orissa
6	Madhya Pradesh	Andhra Pradesh	Maharashtra
7	Haryana	Bihar	Jammu & Kashmir

**Conclusion and suggestion:**

The following are conclusions and suggestion of this paper;

- Participation in the panchayati raj institutions(PRIs) is contributing more than 63 percent in the construction of the political empowerment index.
- There exist huge disparities among the states as far as the women political empowerment index is concerns.
- Political variables have a strong relationship with those factors which affects the process of empowerment.
- There exists huge disparities among the states as far as the educational development and awareness index is concerns.
- Findings of this paper suggested that although the participation of women increased in the political field but it is still not able to enhance their decision making role in their family and in their community in that proportion and she is not able to exercise her right fully.
- Women are still dependent upon the male member of the family especially in the case of financial and political matters. They are simply rubber stamp of their male counterparts.



Women in India still are suffering from the various kinds of exploitation and inequalities. The effective participation of women in various policies and programmes can enhance the level of empowerment of women in India. There is a high need for enhancing women participation in the political fields so that it will provide better bargaining power and decision making to the women so that they will make and implement women specific policies effectively.

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