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INDIAN WOMEN IN POLITICS – POLITY

NEWS: In the 2024 Maharashtra Assembly elections, **65.21% of registered women voters** cast their votes, a significant increase from **59.62% in 2019**.

Near Gender Parity: Of the 6.4 crore voters who participated, 3.06 crore were women, closely trailing the 3.34 crore men, demonstrating women's growing electoral engagement.

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

Electoral Impact of the Scheme

- The **Mukhyamantri Ladki Bahin Scheme** emerged as a pivotal factor in mobilizing women voters, significantly influencing the election narrative.
- Despite increased voter participation, women's actual representation in the **Maharashtra Assembly** remains low.

Women's Representation in the Maharashtra Assembly

Limited Representation

- Women in Power: Out of **288 seats**, only **21 women** were elected, constituting **less than 10%** of the Assembly.
- Low Candidate Pool: Merely 363 women contested, representing 8.8% of the total candidates, highlighting systemic barriers to entry in political candidature.

Structural Barriers

- **Challenges for Non-Dynastic Leaders**: Women not belonging to political dynasties face deliberate hurdles, limiting their opportunities for leadership roles.
- **Token Representation**: Despite increased voter turnout, political parties tend to view women primarily as voters rather than serious contenders for legislative positions.

Comparative Analysis: Local Governance vs. State Assemblies

Progress at Local Levels

- Impact of Reservations: Following the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, 33% reservation for women in rural and urban local bodies has led to over 1 million women entering local governance.
- States with 50% Reservation: In 22 States, including Maharashtra, 50% of Panchayati Raj seats are reserved for women. For example:

Manipur: Despite no legal mandate, 50.7% of local representatives are women.

Persistent Gap in Higher Governance

While women have gained traction in local governance, their transition to State or national politics remains limited. In Maharashtra, known for its progressive stance, the proportion of women in the Assembly remains strikingly low.

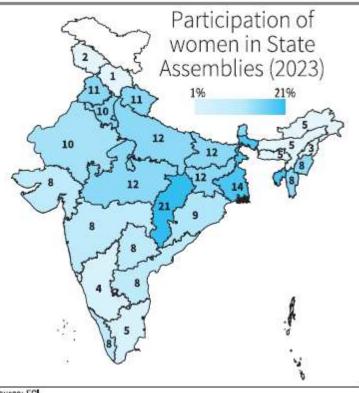
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Source: EC

Global Perspective on Women's Political Participation

UN General Assembly Resolution (2011)

The resolution emphasized that women globally remain marginalized in politics due to:

Discriminatory practices and gender stereotypes.

Low access to education and healthcare.

Poverty's disproportionate impact on women.

The resolution underscores the global nature of barriers, resonating with India's challenges in achieving gender parity in higher governance.

Key Takeaways and Implications

Paradox of Progress:

Increased electoral participation by women has not translated into meaningful representation in legislative bodies.

Systemic Hurdles:

Political systems continue to pose significant barriers for women, especially those outside dynastic politics.

Need for Reforms:

Beyond reservations, comprehensive strategies are essential to enhance women's participation in higher governance.



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Lessons from Local Bodies:

The success of reservations at the local level could serve as a model for broader reforms at State and national levels.

Broader Societal Change:

Addressing deeply rooted gender biases in political structures is crucial for ensuring equitable representation.

The analysis reveals a critical gap between women's participation as voters and their empowerment as policymakers, emphasizing the need for sustained policy and societal interventions.