



Research Article

The Impact of Women's Empowerment on Political Involvement in Urban Local Bodies

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Abstract

Women's empowerment has always been linked to increased participation in the decision-making process of society. The women still do not represent the city in the urban local bodies and municipal councils, even though the number of female employees and literate women in Indian cities is on the rise. This descriptive research examines the relationship between women's politics in municipal political policy, as well as empowerment policies such as economic, mobility, education, and family choices. Based on the primary survey data collected in selected wards over the urban areas, and secondary data. Even though the cultural norms and the absence of institutional support still limit the leadership roles of women, initial trends show that empowerment brings on board more political confidence and willingness to participate. The report underlines the need to have extensive empowerment programs and local reforms that eliminate the barriers beyond the official reservation policies.

Objectives of the Study

1. to assess urban women's level of political participation in local government.
2. to determine the elements of empowerment that affect women's involvement in local politics.
3. to evaluate the role that social, educational, and economic empowerment have in influencing political participation.
4. To investigate perceived obstacles preventing women from being represented in urban municipal bodies.

Research Questions

1. In the local government scenario, how do urban women participate?
2. Which aspects of empowerment have the most impact on women's involvement in local decision-making?
What effect do social and financial help have on women's inclination to run for office?
What obstacles make it difficult for women with political clout to pursue leadership roles in urban local organisations?

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KEYWORDS: Women's Empowerment, Urban Local Bodies, Political Participation, Municipal Governance, Gender and Politics

1. INTRODUCTION

In spite of gradually growing women's political participation in India, the development rate remains unequal at various levels of government. The current urbanisation and the increased availability of economic opportunities caused women to acquire new social identities, such as more access to digital technology and education. The changes have transformed debates on empowerment and the impact it has on civic participation to a more detailed level.

There is the chance of women taking part in the decision-making in the municipal government, which is provided by the decentralisation amendments in the constitution. However, the representation in the urban local governments has not been satisfactory, particularly in leadership and decision-making processes. Empowerment in this case can be in a variety of forms. Besides finances and education, it involves augmented mobility, education of political rights and bargaining power to make decisions both at the home and the community level. People often assume that empowerment is correlated with political participation, but this association should be questioned comprehensively.

Due to patriarchal principles, financial independence and formal and informal politics of male domination, the local politics might remain closed off. The principal objective of the study is to understand the association between political participation and empowerment in the metropolitan environments where women are supposed to be in a better position to exercise power (agency). In examining some of the signs of empowerment and how it has affected political participation, the paper studies the question of whether institutional reforms and changes in society have greatly enhanced women's participation in local governance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The decriminalised governmental possibility is highlighted by the research on female political participation in India. The proximate nature of local government institutions and their attention to the salience of local government issues have been discussed by scholars as giving women an easy entry point. The comparative studies have shown that the variables of empowerment, including the financial resources, levels of education, and family support, have a significant impact on political ambition. Moreover, empirical researches prove that although reservation policies increase descriptive representation, it does not automatically lead to subjective representation participation in the decision-making processes. Urban women often face various types of marginalisation, such as a lack of awareness of the city procedures, access to party systems and the social constructs that have pushed them out of the spotlight. The assumption about the necessity of institutional reforms, mentorship programmes, and capacity-building measures finds support in international experience, in the sense that there could be no efforts at ensuring the active involvement and leadership without the aspects of empowerment. Collectively, the literature indicates that in order to get the women to a new phase of active participation,

towards more than what symbolic representation comprises, extensive approaches that entail the inclusion of empowerment initiatives and structural adjustments to municipal governance are needed.

Conceptual framework

According to the conceptual framework, political participation in urban municipal bodies is influenced by women's empowerment. Four domains are used to operationalise empowerment:

- Economic empowerment includes work, personal income, and financial management.
- Literacy, skill development, and rights knowledge are examples of educational empowerment.
- Social empowerment: freedom from constrictive norms, mobility, and support systems.
- Household Decision-Making Power: the freedom to make decisions at the family level.

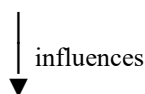
Voting behaviour, attendance at municipal meetings, interaction with elected officials, involvement in civic activities, and the desire or inclination to run for office are all considered aspects of political involvement.

Although institutional and cultural limitations might buffer or modify this connection, the framework posits that more empowerment boosts confidence, lowers perceived obstacles, and encourages active participation in municipal-level operations.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

(Independent Variables)

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| | 1. Economic Empowerment (income, employment) | |
| | 2. Educational Empowerment (literacy, civic education) | |
| | 3. Political Awareness (media exposure, campaigns) | |
| | 4. Social-Autonomy (family support, mobility) | |



Political Involvement in Urban Local Bodies (Dependent Variables)

- | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|--|
| | - Contesting local elections | |
| | - Voting turnout | |
| | - Participation in ward meetings | |
| | - Leadership roles in committees | |

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Field Survey Questionnaire (Urban Women Respondents)

Section A: Personal Profile

1. Age group (18–25 / 26–35 / 36–50 / Above 50)
2. Educational level (Primary / Secondary / Higher Secondary / Graduate / Postgraduate)

3. Employment status (Unemployed / Informal work / Self-employed / Salaried)
4. Marital status

Section B: Empowerment Indicators

Do you have independent control over personal income? (Yes/No/Partly)

6. Are you able to travel outside your neighbourhood alone for work or civic tasks? (Always/Sometimes/Never)
7. Who typically makes decisions about household expenses?
8. Are you familiar with your voting rights and municipal functions?

Section C: Political Involvement

Did you vote in the last municipal elections? (Yes/No)

10. Have you attended any ward or municipal body meetings?
11. Do you interact with local representatives (corporators/councillors)?
12. Would you consider contesting a local election? (Definitely/Maybe/No)
13. What prevents you from participating more actively? (Multiple choice: financial constraints, lack of time, lack of support, norms, lack of awareness, other)

Section D: Suggestions

14. What changes would make it easier for women to engage in municipal governance?
15. Do you support reservations/quotas for women in urban local bodies? Why or why not?

CITY SELECTION RATIONALE + SAMPLING DESIGN

Target Population

women who live in urban municipal areas under elected local government.

Frame of Sampling: Women may cast ballots in municipal elections held in specific cities' wards.

Method of Sampling Using a mixed sampling strategy that combines:

- Stratified sampling to guarantee participation from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds.
- A deliberate selection of wards and cities with recent municipal elections.
- To lessen prejudice, respondents are chosen at random within each ward.

The size of the sample. A sample of 150–300 respondents from various cities may offer adequate representation for exploratory research.

Justification for City Selection

Cities selected using three selection criteria:

differences in the degree of urbanization (tier-1, tier-2, and tier-3 cities).

Distinct socioeconomic factors that affect women's empowerment and mobility.

Respondents can recollect and record their participation in recent municipal elections.

A sample of illustrative cities may be:

- Mumbai (tier-1, diverse metropolis with a large female workforce)
- Ahmedabad or Pune (developing semi-urban empowerment patterns, tier-2)
- Nashik, Surat, and Mysuru (growing municipal structures, mixed migration, tier-2/3)

This variety enhances comparative understanding of political participation and empowerment in various urban situations.

Plan For Qualitative and Quantitative Data Analysis Quantitative Evaluation

Variables

Indicators of empowerment (income control, mobility, education, decision-making capacity) are independent factors. Indicators of political engagement (voting, meeting attendance, interaction with officials, readiness to challenge) are dependent variables.

Methods of statistics

Distribution of frequency and proportion

Using cross-tabulation to evaluate connections

Chi-square tests to determine the significance of relationships, if necessary. Descriptive summaries can be calculated using software such as SPSS, Excel, or comparable platforms.

Qualitative Evaluation

Sources: • short interviews or notes on obstacles; • open-ended survey questions

Approach:

• Content analysis
Thematic coding (e.g., party gatekeeping, finances, patriarchal standards, mobility restrictions) and grouping responses into themes to analyse trends

Validity is enhanced by triangulating qualitative ideas with quantitative data.

Tables For Coding Responses

Table 1: Empowerment Coding Categories

Empowerment Indicator	Response Option	Code
Control over income	Yes	1
	Partly	2
	No	3
Mobility freedom	Always	1
	Sometimes	2
	Never	3
Household decision-making	Self	1
	Shared	2
	Husband/Family	3
Education level	Graduate and above	1
	Secondary/HSC	2
	Below secondary	3

Table 2: Political Participation Coding Categories

Political Participation Indicator	Response Option	Code
Voted last municipal election	Yes	1
	No	0
Ward meeting attendance	Yes	1
	No	0
Interaction with corporators	Yes	1
	No	0
Willing to contest	Definitely	1
	Maybe	2
	No	3
Perceived barriers	Financial constraint	A
	Lack of support	B
	Social norms	C
	Awareness gap	D
	Time constraints	E

Codes facilitate analysis and frequency calculation.

4. CONCLUSION

It is assumed that women who have more empowerment will show more participation in the political activities with high rates, including those that showcase economic independence and superior levels of education, being part of the survey and coding information. Though more intensive municipal participation, like the situation of showing up at council meetings or being a person who simply has a desire to seek elective office, may not necessarily follow on the outcome of vote turnout, it is still a relevant marker of enhanced political agency. The problem of social expectations and lack of mobility has remained a major barrier to politics. In terms of the communication with officials of the community, those who report about the household decision-making process being either shared or autonomous are always more likely to demonstrate self-confidence. A distinct pattern is formed between economic empowerment and the propensity of seeking leadership positions, as is evidenced by an increased tendency of those women with their personal income to consider candidates seeking office. It is based on qualitative responses and sheds light on the barriers that are in place in the form of structures: - Lack of institutional backing or capacity-building process; - Partisanism in the nomination of parties; - Low level of awareness of the city politics; - An impressive but informal patriarchal control over the open activities of women. The evidence acquired to date denotes that empowerment is a prerequisite and not a decisive factor to political participation. The fact that women shifted from passive voters to active candidates and decision-makers is limited by the structural and cultural milieus, which reduce the motivating impacts of empowerment. To sum it up, the research confirms the presence of a positive empirical effect of the metrics of empowerment on the political participation of women in urban governance, and specifically on the electoral turnout and citizen engagement. However, the existence of firmly established cultural norms, unequal access to resources and the lack of an appropriate institutional support system still limit substantive participation of women in competitive political arenas and positions of power.

These conclusions lead to the following suggestions:

- 1- Provide women with organised training in municipal leadership.
- 2- Provide financial aid programs for female candidates who are running for office for the first time.
- 3-Boost public awareness initiatives about the rights and functions of municipalities.
- 4- To facilitate safe participation, ward-level gender-sensitive support mechanisms should be institutionalised.
- 5- Encourage NGOs and civic organisations to close the gaps between political institutions and empowered women.

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Shazia Unwan Musarrat is a researcher affiliated with the University of Mumbai, India. Her academic interests focus on gender studies, urban governance, and social development, with particular emphasis on women's participation in local institutions and inclusive policy processes. She engages in interdisciplinary research addressing equity and governance challenges in contemporary India.