

Women & Politics: Changing Trends and Emerging Patterns

Executive Summary

This collaborative report between, Lokniti a programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung has attempted to look at women and politics from a multi-track perspective. While the assessment relied quite extensively on existing aggregate data on the theme and an exhaustive review of literature, the key focus of the analysis was the findings of a survey conducted among women across the country. The report is divided into eight chapters including the conclusion and the introduction and relies heavily on Lokniti's survey data.

Having chosen a sample of respondents that helped best mirror the larger `universe` it was meant to represent (Indian women), a range of questions on the patterns of political participation and representation were asked. The survey attempted to assess the perception of women to different dimensions of political participation and representation and the challenges in this regard. The survey findings have helped present the socio-economic and cultural context that define and decide the attitudes and perception of women to issues of political participation and representation. The varied factors that contribute to greater women's participation in politics and the pathways to greater political representation were also assessed as part of the study. The study examines the perceptions of women to their role as voters. Their views on different dimensions of political participation and the barriers to the same are also studied. The impact of political socialization and the family are also analysed as part of the survey. Factors that influence voting decisions as well as womens' perception of women as leaders, has also been attempted in this study.

Table 1| Level of electoral participation and socio-economic position

	Active Electoral Participation		
	Not at all active	Somewhat active	Highly active
Locality			
Rural	76	16	8
Urban	80	15	5
Level of Education			
Non Literate	84	12	4
Up to Primary	75	19	6
Up to Matric	75	17	8
12th Pass/intermediate	75	17	8
College and above'	78	15	7
Age Groups			
18 to 25 yrs	83	13	4
26 to 35 yrs	78	17	6
36 to 45 yrs	75	18	7
46 to 55yrs	75	17	9
55 yrs and above	75	16	9
Caste/communities			
Upper Caste	78	15	7
OBC	75	18	7
SC	81	14	5

ST	81	15	5
Muslims	70	22	8
Others	81	12	6
<i>Economic Class</i>			
Poor	83	13	4
Lower	78	16	6
Middle	74	19	7
Upper class	78	14	9

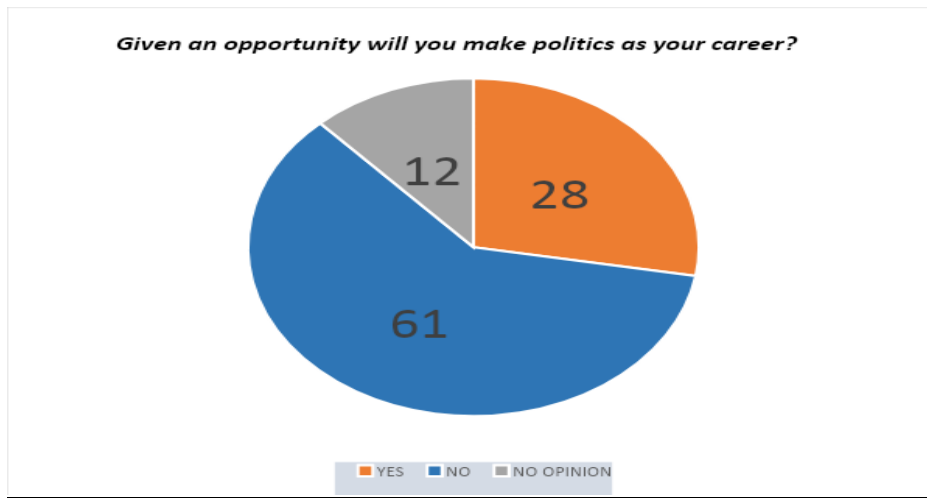
Socio-economic class also determines women's participation in electoral activities. Women belonging to the upper social (castes) and upper economic classes were found to be more active in electoral politics as compared to women placed at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy (Table 1).

The study found that the women's participation in elections as voters has seen a sharp increase over the years. In the recent past, there is hardly any gender gap in terms of voting. In many states of India, the percentage of turnout among women is higher than that of men. This welcome trend is a categorical reflection of women asserting their fundamental right to vote and elect their representatives. Autonomy in deciding who to vote for is also increasingly visible. Urban women, those with access to higher education and those who were married reported lesser impact of family influence in deciding who to vote for.

The study has also found that though the number of women as candidates at elections across different levels has registered an increase, there still exists a wide gap between the percentage of men and women as candidates in elections. While the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment gave a boost to women's representation in local government by providing for mandatory reservation of one-thirds of the seats for women, the level of representation of women in the elected legislatures at the state and national level leaves much to be desired. The Women's Reservation Bill providing for reservation for women in state assemblies and the parliament has not as yet been passed in spite of the major political parties making a commitment to the same. The fear among the male elected representatives that reservation of seats for women at the state and national level could well adversely impact their chances of getting elected appears to be working on their mind. Political parties too have only made vague commitments to enhance women's representation in elected bodies but have done precious little to nominate a larger number of women candidates when finalizing their nominees when distributing the party ticket. The `elusive` factor of `winnability` is used as a `mask` to explain away why a high proportion of women candidates are not nominated by parties. The fact that political parties still have `male dominated` decision making structures, appears to be the key factor.

The report has clearly shown that the representation of women in politics is limited and politics remains mostly a male-dominated bastion. Surprisingly, only a little over one-fourth of the women respondents were keen to make a career in politics if given an opportunity (Figure 1). The numbers of women not willing and having no opinion constitute around three-fourths of all respondents.

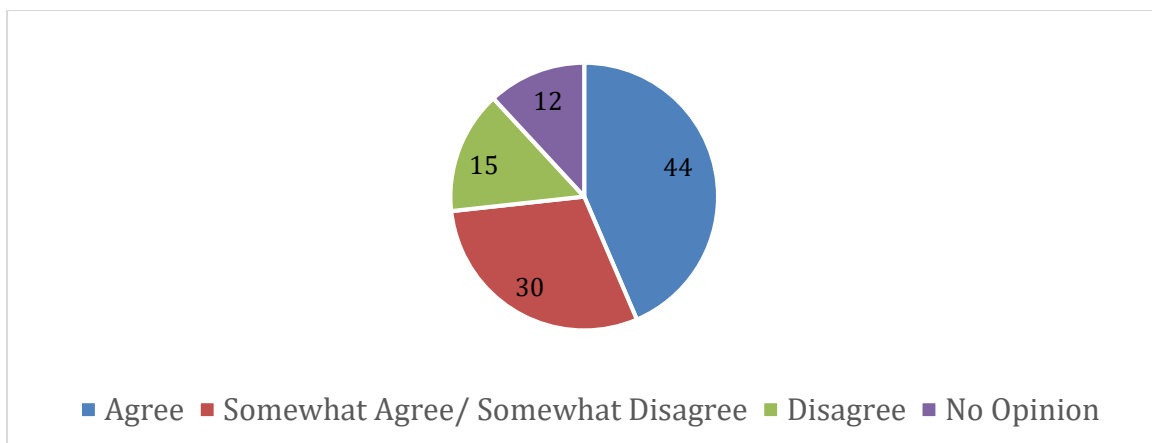
Figure 1: 3/4th of the women respondents were not willing to make politics as their career if given the opportunity



The study also found an increased participation of women in election related activities in recent times. The Index of Political Participation developed as part of the study indicated that while there is evidence of increase in participation in election related activities it still is severely limited. The barriers that inhibit participation in election related political activity seem to be very similar to the factors that limited male participation.

When asked to respond to a question that presented a situation where a man and a woman were equally good candidates, political party always prefer a male candidate while giving tickets, it is noticed that close to half the women respondents agreed with the statement (Figure 1.2). Only one-seventh women respondents disagreed and one in every ten women had no opinion whatsoever on the issue.

Figure 1.2: Even when a man and a woman are equally good candidates, political parties always prefer a man over women while giving tickets?

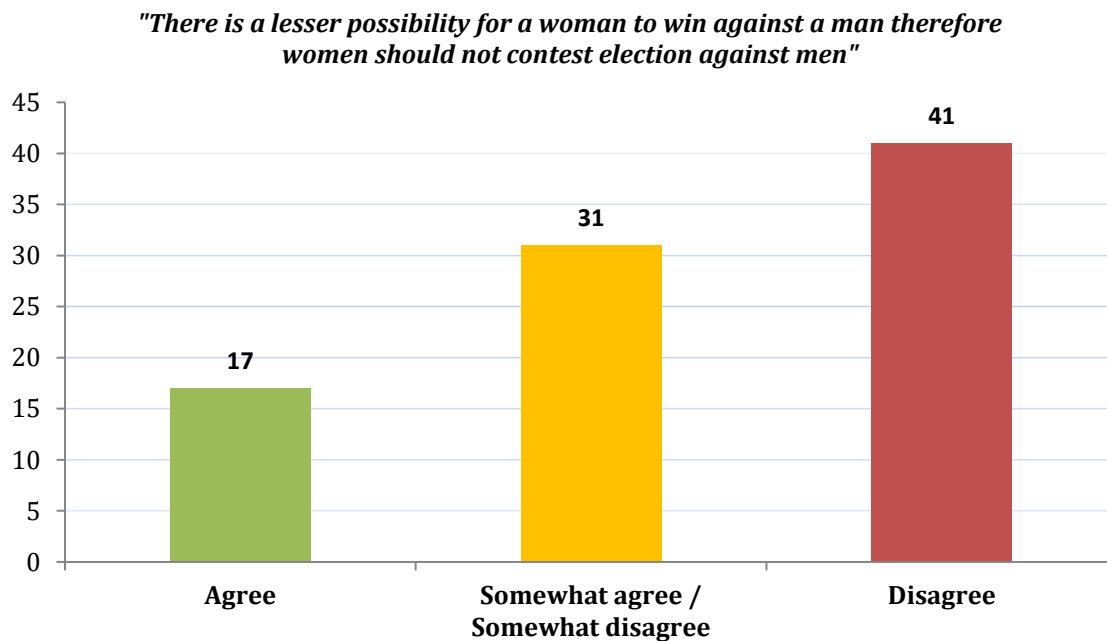


As part of the survey, a statement was read to the respondents and they were asked whether they agree or disagree with the same. The statement was: *“There is a lesser possibility for a woman to win against a man therefore women should not contest election against men”*.

Overall, two in every five women disagreed with the statement but when we segregated the data on the basis of their age, the disagreement was found to be much higher amongst younger women compared to those older. While about half of the women between 18-20 years disagreed, only a little more than one-third of women who are above 60 years disagreed. However, from both the above mentioned age-groups, almost an equal proportion of women agreed with the statement (14% and 15% respectively) (**Figure 1.3**).

Further, married and unmarried women also responded quite similarly with an equal proportion in agreement (17% and 18% respectively). However, there is a significant gap of 8 percentage points amongst the women who reported disagreement. While two-fifth married women disagreed, about half of the unmarried women reported disagreement.

Figure 1.3 | Winning probability against men



Note: Rest of the respondents did not answer

Question asked: Also tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement -there is a lesser possibility for a woman to win against a man therefore women should not contest election against men?

More than half the women respondents felt that it was easier for women from upper castes to join politics. (Table 1.2) Only two of every ten felt that upper caste women had no special advantage. Close to six of every ten women agreed that women with political backgrounds have less difficulties than women without any political background to join politics. Over four of every ten women respondents felt that Indian voters are more likely to vote for men than women and six of every ten respondents felt that it is easier for women from wealthier

economic backgrounds to join politics in comparison to women from a lower economic status.

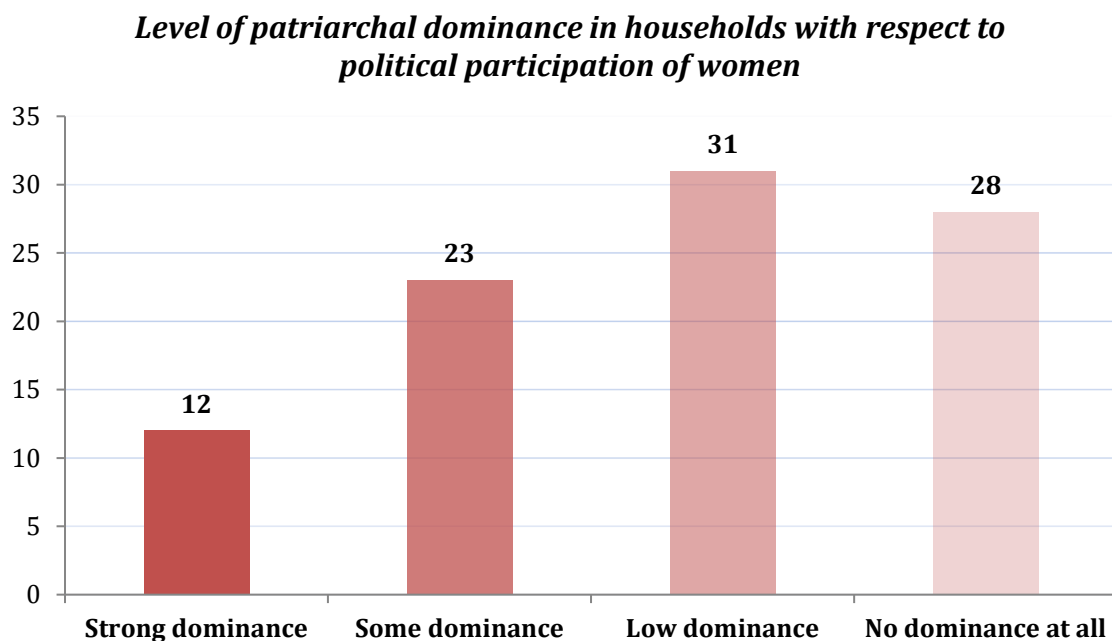
Table 1.2: The traditional social and economic barriers still stands high

	Agree
<i>“Easier for a woman from upper caste to join politics compared to women from lower caste.”</i>	56
<i>“Easier for a woman with a political background to join politics compared to a woman without any political background”</i>	58
<i>“Indian voters are more likely to vote for men than women.”</i>	44
<i>“Easier for a woman from upper economic status to join politics compared to a woman from lower economic status.”</i>	57

Note: Rest of respondents somewhat Agreed/ somewhat disagreed, disagreed or didn't had any opinion.

When one looked at the overall data, it was found that about two in every three women (66%) reporting to be having at least some degree of patriarchy in their respective households. Only a little more than one in every ten women reported strong dominance of patriarchy, while about one in every four reported some dominance, and nearly one in every three reported low dominance of patriarchy in their families. Only about a quarter of respondents reported to be having no dominance at all (Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4 | Composite index of internalized patriarchal prejudices

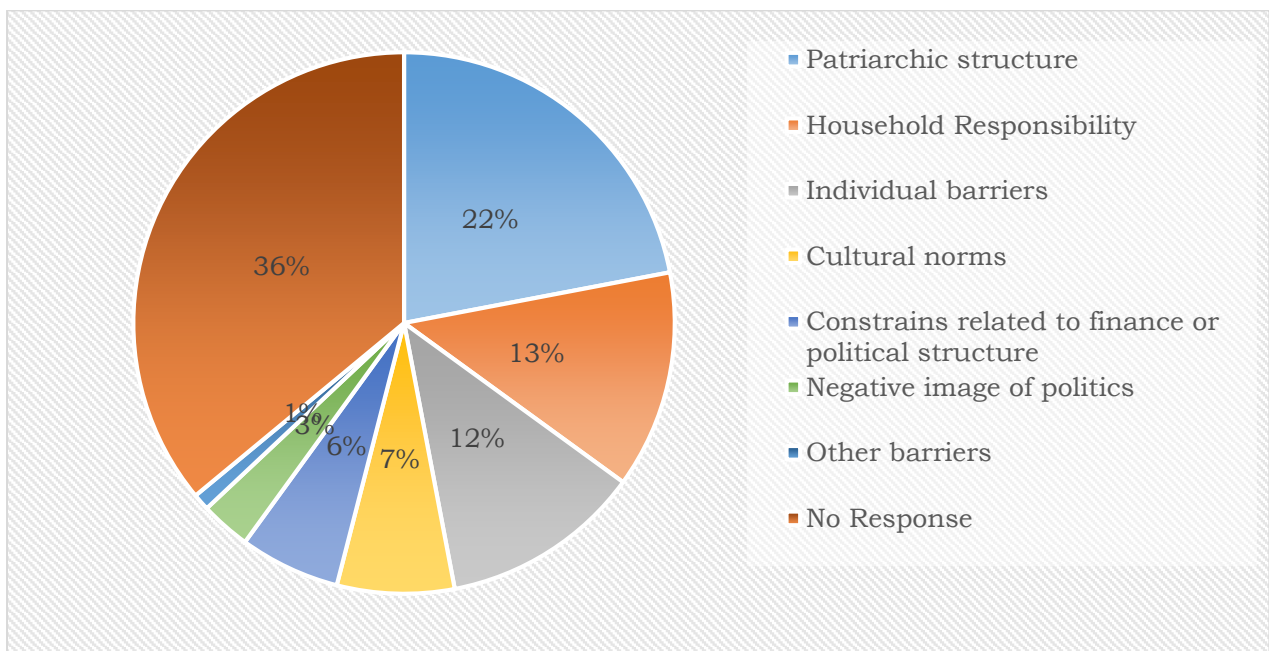


Note: Rest of the respondents did not answer

The women were asked about the barriers which they themselves think prevented them from taking part in politics. A little more than one-third of the women did not respond to this question. Those who responded, for them the patriarchic norms/structure of the society were the biggest obstacles which prevented them from taking part in politics. More than one-fifths of the women stated this reason. The second reported reason (13% of the women in survey) was the household responsibilities which women had to take care of like taking care of children, preparing meals for the family members and the like. The third reason was the individual barriers which hinder women to take active part in politics such as lack of interest in politics, lack of awareness and educational backwardness. One in every ten of the women respondents reported reasons related to their individual incapability (Figure 1.5).

The cultural norms also prevent them from taking part in politics. The cultural barriers here mean that women are not supposed to talk to other men, purdah system, and no freedom in mobility and the like. Seven percent of the women stated the inherent cultural barriers in the society which prevented them take part in politics. The financial and other structural constraints were also reported by women as barriers which stopped them from taking part in politics.

Figure 1.5| Biggest barrier /obstacle that prevents women from participating in politics



When women were asked what party they preferred BJP got the highest share overall. A community-wise analysis of party preferences reveals that party identification is much higher amongst the Sikhs and lowest among the Muslims (**Table 1.3**). Support/liking for the BJP was particularly strong amongst its core constituency of Upper Caste Hindus (39 %) and Other Backward classes (35 %). The same is also reflected in representation in Parliament where the upper castes are over-represented in the Lok Sabha in general and within the BJP cohort. The support for the Congress, on the other hand, was essentially from Muslims and Sikhs. Close to a quarter of Muslim women (26%) said that they supported the Congress party but the maximum support came from Sikh women where four in ten women liked the party.

Table 1.3 | Party liked most by social demographics

	Like Cong	Like BJP	Like Left	Like Other Parties	Don't like any
Overall	18	27	2	25	28
Poor	13	20	3	28	36
Lower	19	23	2	26	30
Middle	18	31	2	24	25
Rich	23	35	2	21	20
Rural	18	26	2	28	27
Town	19	21	2	27	31
City	16	37	2	14	31
Non Literate	17	26	1	28	28
Up to Primary	18	21	3	29	29
Up to Matric	20	26	3	24	28
12th Pass/intermediate	16	32	2	21	29
College and above	16	34	2	20	28
Upper caste	15	39	1	15	29
OBC	13	35	2	26	23
SC	15	27	4	24	30
ST	15	24	1	27	34
Muslims	26	12	4	25	33
Christian	17	2	1	40	41
Sikh	39	16	<1	29	16

Over the last half century one notices a steady rise in the level of interest in politics among women. The younger generation appears to be more plugged into politics as are those who have access to education. Women in rural areas have demonstrated a greater interest, especially in local politics. The study found a direct relationship among women between a negative image about politics and the level of interest in politics.

News through various media is a major source of political information, resulting in a higher level of interest. This exposure to news media is positively associated with one's interest in

politics. Women having higher exposure compared to those with no or low exposure to news media showed more interest in politics (**Table 1.4**). Similarly even those who accessed political news through phone, email, Whatsapp or similar platforms had a much greater interest in politics compared to those who did not access these mediums (71 percent vis- a vis 39 percent)

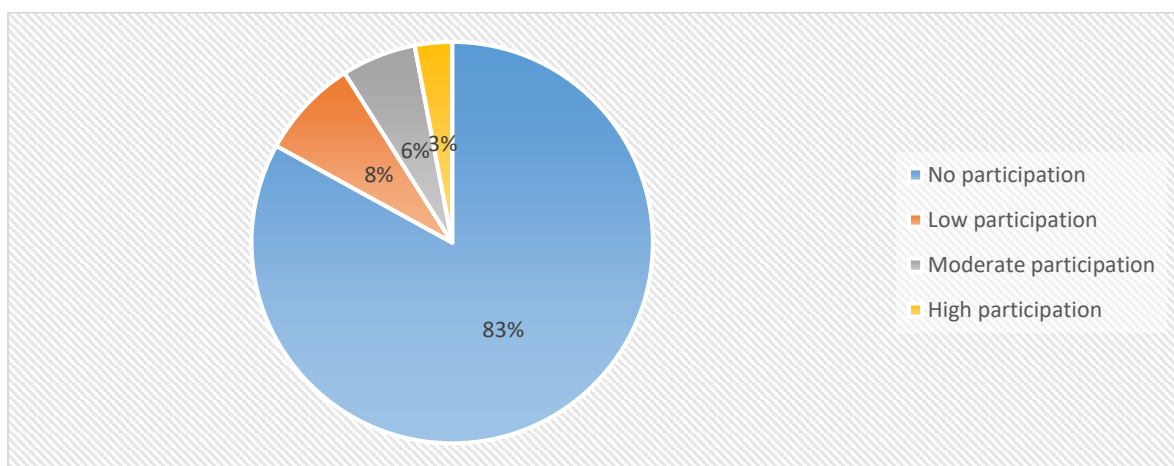
Table 1.4 | Exposure to news and interest in politics

<i>News Media Exposure</i>	No interest at all	Low interest	Interest in politics
No news media exposure	36	33	31
Low	29	34	37
Moderate	17	27	56
High news media exposure	16	22	62
<i>Recipient of political news through different means</i>			
Non Recipient	28	34	39
Occasional Recipient	21	30	49
Recipient at times	10	31	59
Recipient of it many times	15	14	71

Note: The categories of ‘moderate interest’ and ‘a lot of interest’ has been merged to form ‘interest on politics’.

The degree to which women gather news on media is linked to their socio-economic status. The higher their socio-economic status, the greater is their exposure to news media. The younger women compared to the older accessed news more, as did women who had access to college education as compared to those with less exposure to formal education. Further, women in urban localities were more likely to access news as compared to those in rural areas.

Figure 1.6| Political participation through online platforms



Overall, a little more than four-fifths of the women in the present study had not done any activity on social media platforms. This may be due to the non-availability of the social media platforms to women. Eight percent of the women had low participation on social

media platforms and six percent moderately participated on social media platforms for political activities. Overall, only three percent of the women were highly active on social media platforms for the political activities (Figure 1.6).

Unlike active political participation, political participation through online platforms, saw women from privileged groups to be more participative. Women living in urban areas, women with higher levels of education and younger women were more participative or active on online platforms for political activities as compared to rural women, women having no access to education and elderly women respectively. But like active participation, women from higher socio-economic groups were also found to be active on online platforms. The possible reason for this could be the availability and ease to understand and use technology for the privileged sections of the society (Table 1.5).

Table 1.5 |Political participation through online platforms by social economic status

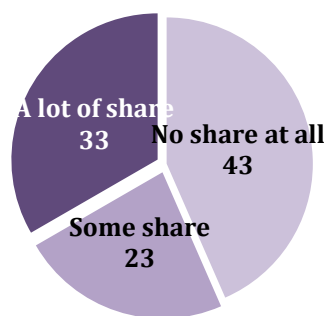
	Political participation through online platforms			
	No participation	Low participation	Moderate participation	High participation
<i>Locality</i>				
Rural	85	7	6	2
Urban	80	10	7	3
<i>Level of Education</i>				
Non Literate	98	2	1	0
Up to Primary	91	5	3	1
Up to Matric	84	9	5	2
12th	71	12	13	5
Pass/intermediate				
College and above'	63	14	16	8
<i>Age Groups</i>				
18 to 25yrs	74	11	11	5
26 to 35 yrs	80	9	8	4
36 to 45yrs	86	8	5	2
46 to 55yrs	89	6	3	1
55yrs and above	93	4	2	1
<i>Caste/communities</i>				
Upper Caste	82	8	7	4
OBC	85	6	7	2
SC	91	5	3	1
ST	83	12	4	2
Muslims	84	7	6	3
Others	78	12	7	3
<i>Economic Class</i>				
Poor	91	5	3	1
Lower	84	10	5	2
Middle	80	9	8	4
Rich	77	6	11	6

Patriarchal mindsets appear to be a critical limitation inhibiting women’s active participation in politics and autonomy about politics. The study found that the culture and environment at the home had the potential to create visible barriers to women’s participation in politics. Absence of a fair share in decision making at home was an important variable that impacted on the activeness of women’s interest and participation in politics.

Women in urban areas reported enjoying a greater say in decision making in the family and also demonstrated greater interest in politics. When one looked at the overall data, more than two in every five women were found to be reporting no share in family decisions at all, while about one in every four reported to be having only some share in these important family decisions. Conversely, only one in every three reported to be having a lot of share in family decisions (**Figure 1.7**).

Figure 1.7| Composite index of women’s share in family decision making

Women's share in family decision making



Question asked: Now I am going to read out a few decisions that are taken in families. Please tell me who takes these decisions in your house. b. Expenditure on big things like buying a car/scooty c. buying a house or land d. buying other important household items like fridge, TV, washing machine?

Indian women seem to be much more hopeful for the times ahead, with more than two thirds of the respondents expressing the view that women will have a greater say in decision making in the future. Conversely, more than one in every five (22%) think the situation is going to get worse or it is going to remain the same (**Table 1.6**).

Table 1.6 | Women’s say in decision making: Past, present and the future

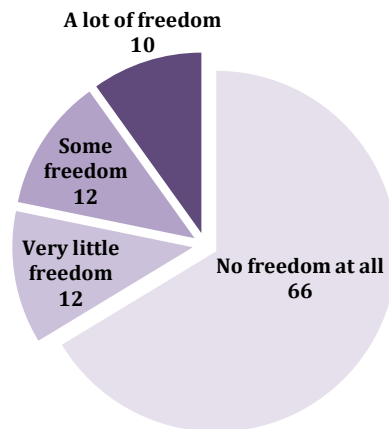
	Greater say	Lesser say	No difference	NR*
<i>Comparing the present situation with the situation of the past, would you say women had greater say or lesser say in decision making?</i>	60	14	16	10
<i>In context of the next generation, do you think that women will have a greater say or lesser say in decision making than before?</i>	68	10	12	11

*NR: No response

When one looked at the overall data, as high as two in every three women were found to be reporting no freedom at all. Only one in every ten women reported a lot of freedom with respect to their participation in political activities (**Figure 1.8**).

Figure 1.8 | Two-third women have no freedom at all with respect to their political participation

Women's autonomy of political participation



Question asked: Please tell me whether you have/will have to ask permission of your husband or a senior family member to:-

b. To go to a political rally; c. To attend a meeting of a candidate in your locality; d. To take part in some morcha/protest/demonstration; e. To campaign for a candidate/party; g. (If Village) Attend Gram Sabha meetings?

The limited autonomy in taking decisions about politics was directly linked to the restrictive practices that women encountered at their homes. Women who had access to education were less likely to believe that men make better political leaders than men. Once again, access to education, those of the younger generation and living in a city were more likely to independently articulate their views on politics as compared to other women.

Self-perception of the capacities and capabilities of women in politics was linked to age, education and exposure to urban India. The study also found that greater the access to education, the more positive was the response of women to their capacities (as compared to men) in politics. Being previously involved in public/civic engagement made women more confident to participate in politics, if given the opportunity.

When asked in an open-ended question (*post coded later into crisper categories for the purpose of better analysis*) what women thought to be the most important problem facing India, two of every ten (20 %) stated unemployment to be the single biggest problem in the country today (**Table 1.8**). This was followed by poverty where one in every ten women stated this to be the biggest problem (13 %). Corruption and price rise, each were reported by eight percent of the women. Physical and social infrastructures together were reported by one

in every ten women. Women issues stood at seventh in order of problems. One in every four women respondents had no response to this question (22%).

Table 1.7| Unemployment was reported to be the most important problem

Biggest Problem India today	(%)
Unemployment	20
Poverty	13
Price Rise	8
Corruption	8
Physical infrastructure	5
Social infrastructure	4
Women specific Issues	4
Farmer/ Agricultural Issue	2
Terrorism	2
Law & Order	2
Other Issues	10
Did not respond	22

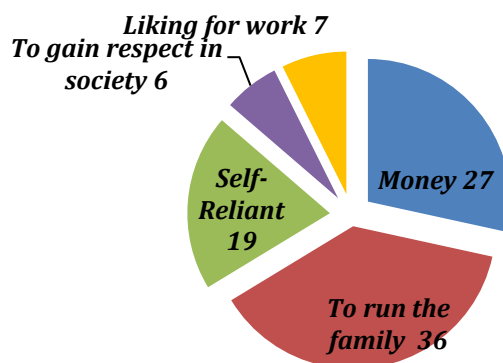
Note: Physical infrastructure includes categories of water facilities, electricity, housing, roads, public transport and sanitation. Social infrastructure includes food, health, educational and other basic amenities.

Question asked: *In your opinion, what is the most important problem facing this country that government should address?*

After looking at the biggest problem that women feel India has i.e. unemployment, we asked the working women in the formal or informal sector what motivates them to work- whether they work to earn money; or to gain respect of society; or just because they enjoy their work; or in order to be self-reliant; or is it out of the need to maintain the family or is it because of something else?

Figure 1.9 | More than one-third of working-women are working because it is important for them to work to run their families

Objective behind working



Note: Rest of the respondents either did not answer or gave an answer not mentioned above.

28% women in our sample are working-women.

Question asked: There are different reasons for which women work - some work in order to earn money, some in order to have respect in society, some work because they like their work, and some work because they want to be self-reliant and then there are others who work because it is important for them to work to run the family. Which one of these applies most to you?

As the data indicates, more than one in every three women worked because it was important for them to work in order to run the family, while close to one in every four reported the main reason to be money itself. For about one in every five, the main objective is the desire to be self-reliant. The women working primarily in order to earn respect in the society or for liking for the work are in the least proportion (6% and 7% respectively) **(Figure 1.9)**.

How women perceive their role and participation in politics is intrinsically linked to the socio-economic and cultural context in which they were socialized. How women articulate their views on politics and their realistic expectations from women politicians is directly linked to their life experience and larger public exposure. It is clear that access to education, economic independence, exposure to the media and being part of a younger generation growing up in the 21st century does have a positive impact on the attitude and approach of women to their participation and representation in politics.