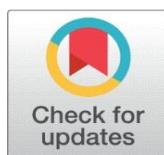


WOMEN IN POWER: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF LEGISLATIVE PARTICIPATION AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN HARYANA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the status and dynamics of women's legislative representation in Haryana, situating it within the broader discourse on gender and political participation in India. Drawing on electoral data from 1967 to 2019, the research highlights trends in women's candidature, party-wise distribution, and socio-economic as well as educational profiles of elected legislators. The findings reveal that while women's representation has increased over time, peaking at 13 MLAs in 2014, the overall share in the 90-member Assembly remains under 15%, signaling persistent underrepresentation. A critical insight emerging from the study is the dominance of political lineage and socio-economic privilege in enabling women's entry into politics, with limited space for leaders from grassroots and marginalized backgrounds. Party-level strategies, though pivotal, often reflect symbolic rather than substantive inclusivity. Despite these challenges, the presence of women legislators has contributed to greater visibility, policy influence, and gradual shifts in social perceptions of gender and leadership. The paper concludes with recommendations for structural reforms, party-level commitments, and grassroots empowerment to translate representation into meaningful political participation and social transformation.

Keywords: Women Legislators, Political Participation, Haryana Politics, Women in Indian Politics

1. INTRODUCTION

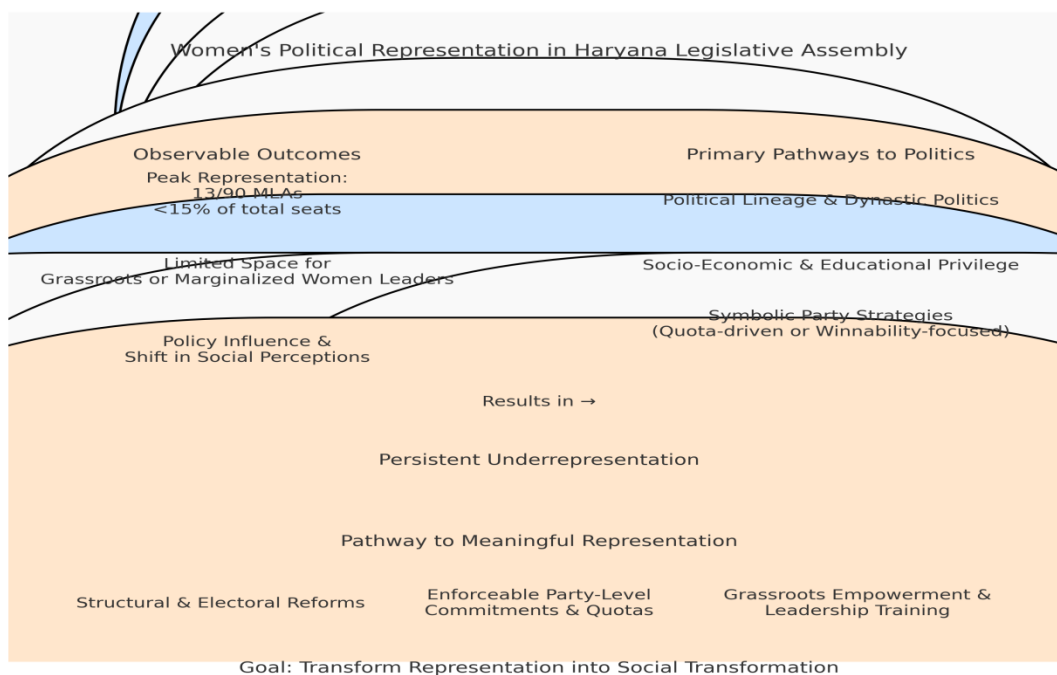
Women's participation in politics is widely acknowledged as vital to the deepening of democratic governance and the inclusion of marginalized voices in decision-making processes. In India, this trajectory has been shaped by early nationalist women's movements, constitutional guarantees of equality and non-discrimination, and ongoing challenges posed by sociocultural norms and structural barriers. The Indian Constitution, via provisions such as equality before the law (Article 14), prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sex (Article 15), state's empowerment to make special provisions for women (Article 15(3)), and equality of opportunity in public employment (Article 16), establishes a legal framework intended to enable women's political agency. Directive principles such as Article 39 (a, d) and Article 42 further reinforce normative state obligations regarding gender equality and welfare. This constitutional framework undergirds legal and policy efforts to facilitate women's political inclusion (Rai & Sharma, 2021).

Despite these formal guarantees, empirical data shows persistent underrepresentation of women in legislative bodies across India, as well as numerous studies identifying systemic impediments: patriarchal norms, party

selection biases, economic constraints, and unequal access to education and resources. Quantitative work analysing data from Indian states demonstrates that higher female representation in state legislatures leads to distinct public-goods allocations and policy preferences, particularly among women elected from reserved seats (Clots-Figueras, 2012). Furthermore, causal evidence indicates that constituencies electing women as MLAs exhibit higher economic growth, improved infrastructure, and lower corruption, leveraging close election wins to isolate gender effects (Baskaran et al., 2021).

The state of Haryana provides a particularly illuminating case for studying the status, challenges, and contributions of women legislators. Since Haryana's formation in 1966, the number of women elected to its legislative assembly has remained disproportionately low. Historical data reveals that between 1967 and 2019, only 87 women were elected to the state assembly, with no woman yet serving as Chief Minister (Haryana State Election Commission, 2020). An analysis of the 2019 state assembly elections shows that while the number of female candidates increased to over 100, only 9 were successful, resulting in women holding a mere 11% of the seats in the 90-member house (Association for Democratic Reforms, 2020). These trends suggest that while numerical presence is improving slowly, substantive representation and influence are still severely constrained by deep-rooted patriarchal structures and a lack of intra-party support (Chhikara & Kundu, 2022). This study seeks to analytically examine this gap between constitutional intent and ground-level reality in Haryana's political landscape.

Figure 1



This study seeks to advance understanding of the role of women legislators in Haryana by examining: (a) historical and recent electoral trends in female representation; (b) legislative performance in terms of participation, policy impact, and constituency service; and (c) socio-political and institutional barriers to both representation and substantive empowerment. Through this dual historical-contemporary lens, the research aims to elucidate how representation translates (or fails to translate) into empowerment and policymaking, and under what conditions women's presence influences social change.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chattopadhyay & Duflo (2004) — *Experimental evidence from India's local reservations*, Using quasi-random variation produced by the mandated rotation of reserved panchayat seats for women, Chattopadhyay and Duflo provide strong causal evidence that women leaders shift local policy priorities (for instance, increasing public goods such as drinking water). Their study is foundational for the expectation that under certain institutional arrangements

(reservations with genuine incumbency) women's presence can change policy outcomes — an empirical benchmark that frames subsequent work on reservation effects at different levels (local → state).

Schwindt-Bayer (2006) — *Gendered priorities and legislative behaviour*, Comparative work on legislative behaviour shows consistent patterns: female legislators often prioritize issues related to women, children, and families and are more likely to engage in particular legislative activities (committee participation, bill sponsorship) related to those domains. Such behavioural evidence informs the micro-level indicators (committee assignments, bill sponsorship, speech acts) one should measure when assessing substantive representation among Haryana's MLAs.

Krook (2009) — *Quota adoption and candidate selection*, Mona Lena Krook examines the diffusion and design of gender quotas world-wide and links quota form and implementation to outcomes. Her work underlines that quota effects depend on implementation rules, party responses, and political opportunity structures — all variables that mediate whether quota or nomination reforms yield substantive gains. Krook's framework helps explain why local-level quotas in India produced measurable changes (Chattopadhyay & Duflo) while state-level and party-level effects are more heterogeneous.

Clots-Figueras (2011) — *State-level evidence from India*, Irma Clots-Figueras uses panel evidence from Indian states (1967–2000) to show that female legislators can change public-goods allocations and that social position (e.g., caste) conditions these effects. This work demonstrates state-level heterogeneity in substantive impact and highlights the importance of accounting for social stratification a direct analytical cue for looking at Haryana's caste, gender and party intersections.

Franceschet, Krook & Piscopo (eds.) (2012) and Pande & Ford (2012) — *Synthesis on quotas and broader reviews*, Edited volumes and World Bank reviews consolidate evidence on quotas: they document demonstrable effects of quotas on numbers and (in many contexts) on policy attention and political pipelines, but they also stress important boundary conditions — party behavior, candidate quality, incumbency effects, and cultural context. These syntheses provide a comparative lens useful when situating Haryana's outcomes relative to other states/countries.

Working papers & empirical advances (2018–2021) — *Economic and performance links*, A growing empirical literature uses close-election designs and rich administrative proxies to estimate causal impacts of legislator gender on development outcomes. Notably, Baskaran, Bhalotra, Min, and Uppal (working papers from 2018 onward; later revised) find that constituencies electing women experienced improved economic indicators and less criminality among elected representatives — suggesting that gender may affect governance performance in measurable ways. These results are an important benchmark for comparing Haryana's constituency-level outcomes and for examining mechanisms (corruption, public goods prioritization, electoral selection).

State- and region-specific research on Haryana (2016–2022) — *Contextualizing socio-cultural constraints* Regionally focused studies and policy pieces (including TCPD/Ashoka analyses and empirical case studies of Haryana's panchayats and constituencies) document Haryana's historically low share of women MLAs, entrenched patriarchal norms (skewed sex ratios, mobility restrictions), and party selection biases. Several empirical and descriptive studies also point to localized pockets of mobilization (women's groups, targeted welfare programs) that have improved participation at the local level but not consistently translated into state-legislative gains. This body of work underscores Haryana as a "hard case" for representation substantive impact research and highlights the three research gaps most salient for the state: longitudinal career tracking of women MLAs, micro-level qualitative study of intra-party and family dynamics, and comparative analyses that control for caste, party, and socio-economic structure.

Caveats and emerging policy debates (2018–2023) — *Reservation law and national debates* Recent policy debates (including high-visibility media and think-tank contributions) on national-level women's reservation legislation (the 33% bill) have revived scholarly discussion about whether statutory quotas at higher levels will replicate the localized empowerment observed in panchayats or whether state-specific patriarchal structures (such as those in Haryana) will attenuate the effects. A careful reading of the policy literature suggests that legal changes must be accompanied by party-level reforms and grassroots capacity-building to yield durable substantive outcomes.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on a qualitative research design aimed at understanding the status, challenges, and contributions of women legislators in Haryana. This approach is most suitable as it allows for in-depth exploration of experiences, perceptions, and socio-political dynamics that cannot be captured adequately through quantitative

measures.

3.1. STUDY AREA

The study is confined to the State of Haryana, located in northern India, known for its socio-cultural conservatism, patriarchal norms, and historically low representation of women in politics. Haryana consists of 22 districts, and its unicameral legislature (Haryana Vidhan Sabha) comprises 90 seats. The state provides an appropriate case for examining how traditional social structures interact with modern democratic institutions to shape women's legislative participation.

3.2. SAMPLING DESIGN

A purposive sampling method has been adopted. The study targets women legislators who have served in the Haryana Legislative Assembly across different election cycles, supplemented by perspectives from party workers, activists, and policy experts. This ensures representation from diverse constituencies, political affiliations, and social backgrounds.

3.3. DATA COLLECTION

Supplementary information is drawn from electoral records, assembly proceedings, government reports, and academic studies to validate and contextualize the primary findings.

3.4. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The study is limited to women legislators and political actors in Haryana, with findings contextually bound to the socio-political environment of the state. Time and accessibility constraints may restrict the sample size, while personal biases of respondents may influence responses. However, triangulation with secondary data is employed to enhance credibility.

4. STATUS OF WOMEN LEGISLATORS IN HARYANA

Since its separation from Punjab in 1966, Haryana's progress in facilitating women's legislative representation has been notably limited. Across the fourteen assembly terms held between 1966 and 2019, only 87 women have been elected as Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs). This persistent gender disparity is further underscored by the fact that Haryana has never had a female chief minister

Table 1 Trends in Women's Representation in Haryana Legislative Assembly (1967–2019)

Election year	Total seats	Women candidates	Women elected (in that election)	source
1967	81	8	4	(Election Commission of India)
1977	90	20	4	(Wikipedia)
2005	90	11	7	(MyNeta)
2014	90	116	13	(Wikipedia)
2019	90	104	9	. (Indiaspend)

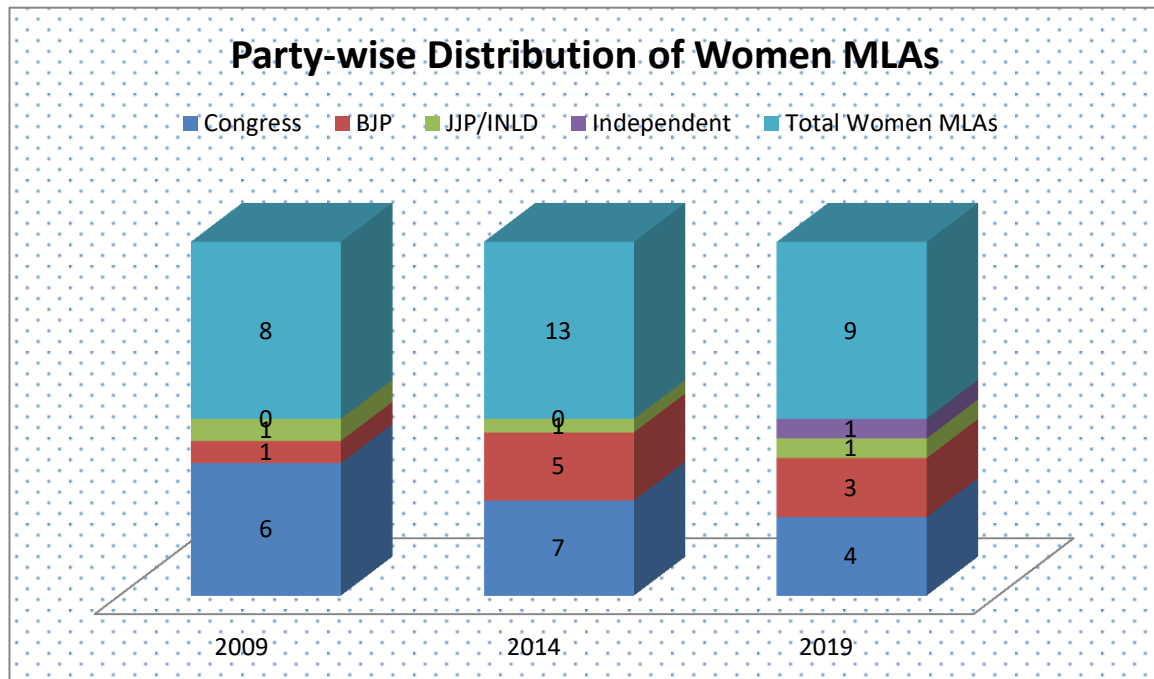
Table 1 highlights the trajectory of women's representation in the Haryana Legislative Assembly from 1967 to 2019. In the first election after the state's formation (1967), only 8 women contested and 4 were elected. Despite an increase in total seats to 90 from 1977 onward, women's presence remained low, with just 4 winners that year. The 2005 election saw modest improvement, as 11 women contested and 7 secured seats. A breakthrough came in 2014, when 116 women contested and 13 were elected the highest till then. Representation dipped in 2019 to 9 women MLAs despite over 100 female candidates.

Table 2 Party-wise Distribution of Women MLAs (Recent Elections)

Election Year	Congress	BJP	JJP/INLD	Independent	Total Women MLAs
2009	6	1	1	0	8
2014	7	5	1	0	13
2019	4	3	1	1	9

Source Times of India, ABP News, Business Standard, Hindustan Times

Table 2 outlines the party-wise distribution of women MLAs in Haryana over the last three election cycles (2009, 2014, and 2019). The data indicates that the Indian National Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have consistently fielded and supported the largest share of women legislators. In 2009, Six women were elected from Congress, followed by BJP and INLD one each. In 2014, Congress led with seven women MLAs, followed closely by the BJP with five, while the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) marginally with one seat.

Figure 2

The overall count in 2014 marked the highest representation of women in the state's history at that time. In 2019, however, women's representation dropped, with Congress securing four seats, BJP three, and JJP/INLD one, while one independent candidate entered the Assembly, reducing the total to nine. The table reflects both the central role of mainstream parties in shaping women's legislative participation and the fluctuating nature of their representation across election cycles.

Table 3 Socio-Economic & Educational Background of Selected Women MLAs (2019)

Name	Party	Constituency	Background	Education
Geeta Bhukkal	INC	Jhajjar	Career politician (4-time MLA)	M.A., LL.B., B.Ed., PG Diploma
Shalley	INC	Naraingarh	Political lineage (wife of former CPS Ram Kishan Gujar)	8 th pass
Kamlesh Dhanda	BJP	Kalayat	Political lineage (husband Nar Singh Dhanda was MLA and minister in Haryana)	12 th pass
Kiran Choudhry	INC	Tosham	Daughter-in-law of ex-CM Bansi Lal	LLB
Naina Singh	JJP	Badhra	Wife of former MP Ajay Chautala	BA
Seema Trikha	BJP	Badkhal	Former teacher and councilor	LLB, PG Diploma

Table 3 provides an overview of the socio-economic and educational background of selected women MLAs elected in the 2019 Haryana Legislative Assembly. The data shows that a significant proportion of women legislators come from established political families or lineages, such as Naina Singh Chautala, Shalley, Kamlesh Dhanda and Kiran Choudhry reflecting the role of dynastic politics in facilitating women's entry into legislative spaces. Others, like Geeta Bhukkal, represent seasoned career politicians who have consolidated their position through repeated electoral success, with Bhukkal being a four-time MLA.

Meanwhile, grassroots leaders like Nirmal Rani from Ganaur and Kamlesh Dhanda highlight the participation of women emerging from modest socio-political backgrounds, although her entries are also linked to spousal political association. Educational qualifications among these women vary widely from post graduate and professional degrees (e.g., Geeta Bhukkal, Seema Trikha and Kiran Choudhry) to secondary education (e.g., Shalley class 8th pass) indicating diverse pathways through which women access political representation. Collectively, the table underscores the interplay of family legacy, socio-economic status, and education in shaping the profile of women legislators in Haryana.

5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Women's legislative representation in Haryana reflects a complex trajectory when compared with other Indian states and the broader national landscape. Despite some significant breakthroughs in recent elections, Haryana continues to lag behind several states that have demonstrated a more consistent commitment to gender inclusion in politics.

At the national level, women's representation in the Lok Sabha has gradually increased from 5% in 1952 to around 14.9% in 2019, marking the highest proportion to date. However, this figure remains lower than the global average of approximately 26% as reported by the Inter-Parliamentary Union. In contrast, states such as West Bengal, Bihar, and Rajasthan have recorded stronger performances in legislative representation, partly due to gender-inclusive policies and active mobilization by major political parties. For instance, West Bengal under the Trinomial Congress has fielded a relatively higher number of women candidates, while Bihar was one of the earliest states to introduce 50% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj institutions. Compared to these states, Haryana's record remains uneven. Despite achieving a peak of 13 women MLAs in 2014, women's share in the 90-member assembly hovers around 14%, mirroring the national average but still falling short of states like Chhattisgarh, where women's representation has crossed 20% in recent elections. Haryana's socio-cultural fabric, dominated by patriarchal norms and lineage-based politics, limits broader participation of women, as seen in the concentration of female MLAs from political families or with strong economic backgrounds.

Regionally, Haryana's progress stands in contrast with its neighboring states. Punjab and Uttar Pradesh have also struggled with limited female legislative representation, though recent elections show an upward trend due to greater mobilization of women voters. Delhi, by contrast, with its urban and cosmopolitan electorate, has managed relatively higher inclusion of women in political leadership. Overall, Haryana's experience aligns with the national trend of slow but steady growth in women's legislative participation. Yet, the state lags behind pioneering examples like West Bengal and Chhattisgarh, highlighting the need for structural reforms, party-level commitments, and sociocultural change to enable wider representation of women leaders.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of women's legislative representation in Haryana highlights both encouraging progress and persistent structural limitations. The electoral data from 1967 to 2019 demonstrates a gradual increase in women's participation, with peaks observed in 2014 when 13 women MLAs entered the 90-member Assembly. However, this still translates to less than 15% of total representation, reflecting a significant gender gap in political leadership. Compared to states such as Chhattisgarh or West Bengal, Haryana continues to perform below the national leaders in women's legislative inclusion.

A key finding is the dominance of political lineage and socio-economic capital in shaping women's entry into the Assembly. Large shares of elected women MLAs belong to established political families, such as Kiran Choudhry, Shalley, Kamlesh Dhanda and Naina Singh Chautala. This trend indicates that political dynasties remain one of the primary gateways for women in to politics in Haryana, thereby limiting opportunities for women without elite

networks. At the same time, grassroots leaders such as Geeta Bhukkal and Seema Trikha reflect a parallel but less common pathway, where women with modest educational and social profiles secure legislative positions through party-level support and community mobilization.

The findings also suggest that party strategies play a decisive role in shaping outcomes. Congress and BJP together account for the largest share of women legislators in Haryana, consistently fielding more female candidates compared to smaller parties. However, the distribution remains uneven, as women are often nominated in constituencies perceived as less competitive, reflecting a symbolic rather than substantive approach to gender inclusivity. From a broader perspective, women's legislative presence in Haryana has had significant implications for empowerment and social change. While their numbers remain relatively small, the visibility of women leader's challenges entrenched patriarchal norms and provides aspirational role models for younger generations. Their involvement has contributed to raising issues related to gender equality, education, and social welfare within legislative debates, thereby linking representation with empowerment. Nonetheless, the persistence of structural barriers such as cultural resistance, lack of financial independence, and male-dominated party hierarchies indicates that women's legislative participation alone does not automatically translate into broader gender equity.

The discussion underscores that while women's representation in Haryana has improved in recent decades, it remains constrained by political dynasties, limited party support, and patriarchal social structures. Greater institutional mechanisms such as legislative reservations for women, equitable candidate selection processes, and capacity-building initiatives are required to convert representation into meaningful empowerment and sustainable social change.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following conclusions are drawn from the current study, which is as following:

- Women's representation in the Haryana Legislative Assembly has gradually improved over the decades, with significant peaks in 2014 when 13 women MLAs were elected.
- Despite these gains, women still constitute less than 15% of the Assembly, reflecting continued under representation.
- Political lineage, socio-economic privilege, and elite networks remain dominant entry points for women, while grassroots leaders face greater barriers.
- Major political parties such as Congress and BJP have played the most significant role in fielding women candidates, though often in less competitive constituencies.
- While women's legislative presence has improved visibility and challenged patriarchal norms, systemic barriers like limited party support, financial constraints, and cultural resistance persist.

Recommendations

- Implement one-third reservation for women in state legislatures to institutionalize gender inclusivity.
- Ensure political parties adopt gender-sensitive ticket distribution and provide substantive support rather than symbolic representation.
- Launch leadership development and capacity-building programs focusing on campaign management, financial resources, and grassroots mobilization.
- Encourage women's participation at the Panchayati Raj and urban local body levels as a pipeline for state and national politics.
- Strengthen mentorship and support networks for women leaders to sustain their political engagement.
- Promote awareness campaigns to address socio-cultural barriers and reshape societal perceptions of women in leadership.
- Conduct continuous monitoring and evaluation of women's performance in legislative roles to highlight their contributions and strengthen accountability.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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