

# Gender Disparity and Representation of Women and the LGBTQIA+ in the Political Sphere

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**ABSTRACT:** This study is an analysis conducted to understand the ethos of gender disparity, particularly in political institutions and societal spheres. An emphasis on the misrepresentation of women and other genders included in the LGBTQIA+ Community is taken into consideration to understand and highlight inconsistencies in political bodies, and how it has affected their decision-making. The methodology of the paper includes both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The scope of the study ranges from the 1950s to the present, as well as some suggestions for the future, concluding that governing bodies including a diverse population of multiple genders and personalities can elevate political institutions. The analysis from the primary survey summarizes an overall structural mindset of our society, with aspects like awareness, activism, and passion for change given some thought. The study is supported by multiple graphs and pie charts to strengthen the construction presented in the paper and enhance the understanding of the results. Analysis from case studies of contrasting countries draws the inference that proportionate composition in their decision-making bodies can lead to more empathetic, relatable, and accurate policies, resulting in better governance and growth.

**KEYWORDS:** Social Sciences, Sociology, Gender Disparity, LGBTQIA+ and Women, Political Gender Representation.

## ■ Introduction

Gender inequality refers to a phenomenon where a specific gender is targeted and receives unusual treatment. It has been deep-rooted in our society for as long as anyone can recollect, and has taken shape from details to huge differences that mold society into the way it is today. It does not take a sharp eye to notice, still, analysis of illustrations drawn in the latest high school textbooks shows men being portrayed as engineers, doctors, scientists, and other professionals. In contrast, women's roles are limited to those of housekeepers and nurturers, mothers, and nurses.<sup>1</sup> This research paper delves into exactly these specifics of the structure, dissecting the gender disparity that is found in the status quo as the product of past conditions and workings.

Political inequality occurs when political power and authority are distributed unevenly among a particular group. Commencing from the ethos of gender inequality in governance, the paper explores the history of governmental patriarchy and the origin of misrepresentation, followed by the spike of change in political representation in the last few decades, highlighting the key milestones, gender rights, and political trends, including the rise of feminism and also the increasing popularity of the LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual) community.<sup>2</sup> The study is descriptive, historical, and qualitative in nature. Both primary and secondary data have been used. Secondary sources include books, government documents, journals, articles, and other similar materials. The primary data is collected using survey questionnaires and a semi-structured interview with an LGBTQIA+ expert.

Case studies of key political personalities who have created a huge impact in empowering women are conducted to explore the intricacies of historical disparity and their fight against

it. The interview with LGBTQIA+ expert and activist Dr. Rimashree Borah is discussed to highlight the origin, progress, and many more details involving the community by exploring the breakthroughs and issues, and surveying grassroots-level analysis.

A primary survey with 50+ participants aims to infer about inequality at the local levels. Through the analysis presented, the paper aims to understand the underlying loopholes of the socio-political system regarding equal gender representation. The key focus of the survey revolves around the commonplaces of differentiation in tasks based on gender, public policy on women and the queer community as well as subjectivity on the question of 'how to improve the observable misogyny in our surroundings.' The intriguing patterns of answers found in varied genders and ages emphasize the importance of equal voice and the opportunity to present opinions.

The study also draws inferences on other fields that show traces of gender inequality, except in the political sphere. Further, the paper highlights a contrasting case study of two different countries, namely, New Zealand and the Maldives, to understand gender disparity in political institutions through different perspectives and circumstances, as well as acknowledge how egalitarian representation in political bodies can lead to better policy making and empathy in governments.<sup>3</sup> The reforms introduced till now in the field have been summarized in the next section, with the hope of resolution and a progressive attitude, alongside some recommendations that can be implemented.

## **Survey of Literature:**

1. Barbara Smuts conducted a study titled *The Evolutionary Origins of Patriarchy*. The study aimed to argue that feminist analyses of patriarchy should be expanded to address the evo

lutionary basis of male motivation to control female sexuality. Six hypotheses were proposed to conclude how this unusual gender inequality came about.<sup>4</sup>

2. Karen Celis conducted a study titled *Substantive Representation of Women (and improving it): What it is and Should be About?* Argues that more women MPs and the structural presence of attention for women's interests not only contribute to just and democratic politics but also enhance the quality of democratic decision-making and policymaking on a substantive level. It consists of quantitative improvements (for example, more support for women's interests by representatives) and qualitative improvements (for example, support for a broader range of women and women's interests). The paper concludes that substantive representation implies recognizing diversity and ideological conflict regarding women's interests and gendered perspectives.<sup>5</sup>

3. Melanie M. Hughes and Pamela Paxton conducted a study called *The Political Representation of Women Over Time*. It mapped trends in women's political representation from 1945 to 2015, stating that while some countries have made considerable progress, others still progress slowly. Some countries openly resent the idea. Hughes and Paxton conclude the paper by identifying and describing four basic paths to women's increased representation over time: (1) No Change, (2) Incremental Gains, (3) Fast-Track Growth, and (4) Plateau.<sup>6</sup>

4. Tyler J. Hatchel conducted a study on the *Digital Development of LGBTQ Youth: Identity, Sexuality, and the ubiquity of digital contexts*. It analyzes the limitations and disadvantages of using devices and reforms for how their use can be better utilized to achieve developmental tasks.<sup>7</sup>

5. Sherry Ortner conducted a study titled *Patriarchy*, stating that it is more than just "sexism." It is a social formation of male-gendered power with a particular structure that can be found with striking regularity in many different areas of social life. The paper concludes with statements about Right-wing politics and how it cannot be completely separated from normative heterosexuality. It closes with the question of how to formulate an activist's politics that addresses both immediate threats and long-term structural patterns.<sup>8</sup>

## ■ Objectives

The main objectives of the paper are to, firstly, understand and analyze whether the proper representation of various genders in a decision-making political body increases their relatability and leads to more empathetic policymaking. This has been done through case studies of pioneers and a comparative analysis between two contrasting countries.

The paper also observes how much awareness about the accurate definitions and gender equality, feminism, and the LGBTQIA+ Community has increased considerably. Additionally, it introduces some reforms as to how we can incorporate these concepts as more colloquial terms in our decision-making and domestic areas.

## ■ Methods

The surveys and case studies in this paper have been conducted in a modern setting. It involves results from a live interview as well as questionnaires taken through a telephonic conversation or written survey. The history of various pioneers

has been taken from live anecdotes and experiences and used after verification.

## *History of Governmental Patriarchy:*

Exploring the origins of patriarchy, in this section, the grassroots level and the start are discussed, delving into the causes of this inequitable domination and its prominence in earlier time periods. Going back to historical times, according to Engels' assumption, there was a natural division of labor in which women were 'producers of life' while men were 'producers of goods' and thus the primary producers in hunting, agricultural, and herding societies.<sup>9</sup>

Women's sexual subordination has been found to be institutionalized in many legal codes. Their cooperation in the system was ensured by various means: force, economic dependence on the males of the family, class privileges bestowed upon conforming, and the artificially created division into so-called respectable and non-respectable women. The book 'Creation of Patriarchy' by Gerda Lerner, widely known as the 'Godmother of Women's History' noted that women were dominant among the earliest slaves and that not only were their sexual services important in motivating their slavery but that rape in general was a major factor in keeping them enslaved and oppressed.<sup>2</sup>

The horrible manipulation and coercion involved in this process led to many generations of trauma and terror. Deep-rooted practices similar to this, if not to such a degree, continue to exist to this day in our social sphere.

As opposed to previous beliefs and myths that have not only undermined the strength and abilities of women but also reduced them and their roles to menial tasks, the feminist wave of ideologies has risen. This community, believing in not a matriarchy nor female domination, but in equal standing and equity, has taken hold over many. It is not only females who have been victims of insubordination, girls who have seen their mothers drain their lives to never be too good for society, and every other dreamer who never had the opportunity to live up to their potential; but all those willing to stand up for the fight who have envisaged the changes that are shaping the present societies.

Feminism has never been about the alternative recreation of the patriarchy, it has been about breaking it from its roots and eliminating all kinds of androcentric biases.<sup>10</sup> It is less known that patriarchy doesn't put men on the highest pedestal but creates an unbelievable image for them that builds up to high pressure and tries to classify any sort of behavior as 'normal' or excusable.

Many theories about the performing abilities of women have been debunked. For instance, the five-ounce difference in weight between male and female brains was widely thought to be the apparent cause of female cognitive inferiority, but this theory was later contradicted when it was brought to attention that absolute brain weight was not the right measure of intelligence, nor was cranial or body height.<sup>11</sup> Many such other theories have been made and erased simply based on assumptions and bias, yet they have morphed into prejudice and stereotypes with no scientific base, but are prominently observable in some groups of society more than others.

In today's political sphere, there is no doubt that a lack of representation of women prevails. However, should our politics only revolve around 2 genders as we progress into a world where gender identities are no longer tied down by conventionality, as our society grows diverse and inclusivity becomes a vital aspect to keep in mind in the upcoming generations?

In such a scenario, it has become increasingly important not to exclude the LGBTQIA+ community; our society must question whether all the development in the past decades is worth it when it cannot be fully utilized by a mass chunk of the population who is unable to gain equitable access to it.

So, several more questions continue to persist: Why are political institutions defined and controlled by male elites still the focus of narratives about political change? What justifies the continued lack of engagement with feminist deconstructionism? What would the global history of the recent past look like if one took these critiques to heart and attempted to build a different kind of epistemology, a human feminist one?<sup>2</sup>

### ***The Rise of Women in Politics 1950s Onwards:***

History has almost always been written from the perspective of men—philosophers that students have read about have also been gender-centric: from John Locke to Rousseau, the books used by the education system portray the contribution of men in textbooks when several female revolutionaries who shaped their future and the present we live in remain shadowed. Some of these are Empress Catherine of Great Russia, Rani Ahilyabai, and many other pioneers, some of whom have been explored below.

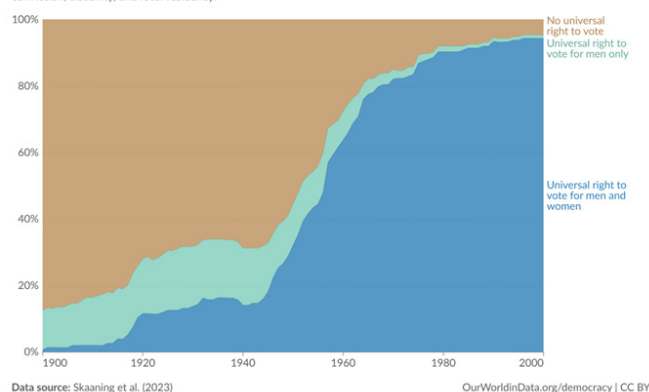
Regardless, women have spearheaded truly unprecedented and groundbreaking shifts; from new rights and cultural norms to greater agency as a category consisting of half the world population, women have slowly transformed into a rising community of politically enfranchised powers.

Their influence in the educational, healthcare, and legal fields has shifted the face of inequality and improved the standing position when it comes to medical autonomy, use of birth control, reproductive healthcare, financial independence, and manifold other facets. Women's increasing participation in the global market as not only consumers but also producers has made products more relevant, relatable, and efficient for other females due to their empathy, understanding, and accurate knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

Since the 1900s, there has been a gradual shift leading to the acceptance of women's sexuality, creating room for discussion and policy-making. One of the major grounds for remonstrance was a denial of the most basic political right: the right to vote. The political movement for suffrage commenced with great exuberance among women, while most sections of men received the right to vote. The radicalness and intensity of the protests varied worldwide; while some countries witnessed petitions, others opted for outright civil disobedience.

### **Countries with universal right to vote, World**

This does not consider elections not being held, informal restrictions, or legal restrictions based on age, criminal conviction, disability, and local residency.



**Figure 1:** Visual representation of the gendered perspective towards the right to vote from the 1900s to the year 2000 in countries, depicting the rise of universal voting rights for both men and women.

Source: Our World in Data.<sup>12</sup>

With the right to vote, mostly after World War II, their voices and spirit amplified. Specifically in the 1920s and 30s, more and more women became interested in political participation, and there was more talk about gender inclusivity in the responsibilities of the state.<sup>2</sup>

It was found that the participation of women greatly depended on their race and the abilities and ideology of the breadwinner, i.e., the male head of the family. However, this was not the case with all women: pioneers like Mary McLeod Bethune (1884–1962) left no stone unturned to flip the trajectory of racial relations and improve the public and civil service sector.<sup>13</sup>

During the 1960s, many college-going women reported that they were influenced by the social movements of that era, even though they were not direct participants, but rather just engaged observers.<sup>14</sup> This decade opened with women's participation hovering at its fringes, but ended with a feminist movement that paced considerably with the second wave of feminism.

The 1970s included some major milestones, including the declaration of sex discrimination a violation of the 14th Amendment in the United States of America, and a surge in feminist art, literature, and research.<sup>15</sup>

In the 1980s, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) was founded to mobilize the LGBTQIA+ community and their rights. In 1985, it merged with the Gay Rights National Lobby. Currently, with approximately 1.5 million members, it is the largest organization for lesbian and gay rights in the United States.<sup>16</sup> In the 1990s, violence against women emerged as one of the global challenges. The United Nations Declaration bridged the gap between women's rights, world peace, and the elimination of violence against women.<sup>16</sup>

Feminists Bennet and Cooke spoke out against the disparity in governmental policies and pressured the male-dominated institutions to introduce progressive politics and abate the stereotypes spewing that people of certain genders or races were inferior and not deserving of equal respect.<sup>2</sup>

Through the gradual shift in the century, transformation not only in the political field but in several others led to women



in the paid workforce, economic independence that welcomed both partners sharing familial responsibilities, and several other key milestones. From every woman who had no choice but to succumb to the force of the patriarchal structure to those who sacrificed their own lives and souls to the movement, the trail of change held the footsteps of every person who contributed towards equality.

### **Case Study 1: Changemakers of our History:**

The following are some more leaders who made a mark through their work in campaigning, governance, or erasing disparity. Their pioneering spirit inspired many to take a step forward and demand an egalitarian government. **Indira Gandhi** was the first female Prime Minister of India, in 1966, who entered a male-dominated political scene. While her term was not without controversy, she is known for her decisive leadership, and she has been instrumental in initiating transformations such as the Green Revolution, which strengthened India's agricultural self-sufficiency and played a crucial role in the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. Her declaration of Emergency from 1975 to 1977, which curtailed civil liberties, remains a polarizing chapter in Indian history. Her ascension to power marked a great moment for women in politics, inspiring future generations while also portraying the complexities of leadership.<sup>17</sup>

In Sri Lanka, **Sirimavo Bandaranaike** was the first female world prime minister elected in 1960, albeit due to her husband's assassination. Her reign has been full of notable social and economic reforms; one of the significant reforms during her tenure included nationalization and the encouragement of non-alignment with the Western and Eastern blocs during the Cold War. While her policies often invited criticism for economic challenges and growing ethnic tensions, her leadership was a milestone for women globally, showcasing their ability to lead nations during tumultuous times and breaking gender barriers in the political arena.<sup>18</sup>

**Golda Meir** of Israel is known as the "Iron Lady" of Israeli politics, having served as Israel's first woman prime minister in 1969. She took a lot of responsibility and showed unbelievable toughness as she commanded the defense of Israel in 1973 during the Yom Kippur War, making complex diplomatic moves worldwide. Criticisms of how prepared the country was before the war marred Meir's premiership, but she proved to be a tough woman. At such a point in the country, she ensured her leadership stood out among the most iconic women leaders of the 20th century.<sup>19</sup>

**Margaret Thatcher** led the United Kingdom as its first female Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990. With her policies strongly branded as 'Thatcherism,' emphasizing economic liberalization, deregulation, and privatization, they left an indelible mark on international politics. Thatcher's robust leadership was also displayed in the Falklands War in 1982 when she showed that Britain was a leading power worldwide. Although her policies were polarizing and caused significant domestic unrest, Thatcher's tenure proved that women could lead with conviction and decisiveness in both domestic and international affairs.<sup>20</sup>

### **Excerpts from Interview with Dr. Rimashree Borah, LGBTQIA+ Expert:**

Homosexuality has been found in our history for longer than our textbooks want us to know, and traces are visible in many of our documents, lifestyles, and ideas at the grassroots level, where impact is vital to improve the current situation politically as well as socially. Understanding where the base influence of such a widespread community starts is crucial to building the stepping stones toward inclusivity. Thus, focusing more on exploring the frontier of representation and growth of the LGBTQIA+ community, a semi-structured interview with a renowned LGBTQIA+ expert, Dr. Rimashree Borah, was conducted.

*Q. Do you believe that there is a lack of representation of the queer community in government bodies?*

Dr. Reemashree: Yes, there is a lack of awareness leading to misrepresentation of the queer community in government bodies. There is a social stigma attached to non-heteronormative identities in our society, often resulting in a distorted view of homosexuality and discrimination against LGBTQIA+ persons in their workplace.

*Q. Where and how, according to you, does this homophobia or disparity stem from historically and politically?*

Dr. Reemashree: Indian culture has always exhibited the essence of pan-genderism and queerness: the autochthonous nature of our society was steamrolled with the advent of the British colonial government; the Victorian Puritans strove to regulate homoerotic desires by controlling bodies and repressing sexuality. In the post-colonial era, Hindu culture was reconstructed, based on social mores and heteronormativity. The Indian Nationalists, along with the Hindu extremist forces, tried to eliminate homosexuality from our society, declaring it as a "Western burrowing."

*Q. How important is it to make an impact at the grassroots level to improve the current situation politically as well as socially? More importantly, where does the base influence of such a widespread community originate?*

Dr. Reemashree: It is crucial to make an impact at the grassroots level for the advancement of LGBTQIA+ rights in our society. The current situation pertaining to LGBTQIA+ rights would improve with greater engagements in discussions around the pressing topics related to queer rights, mental health, sexual health, environmental challenges, and livelihood opportunities. If we can address the critical issues faced by the queer community at the local level, the existing condition would revamp at the political and societal level.

The base influence of the queer community starts with the social-cultural and socio-legal practices, nature of regimes, and lack of upright policies for the furtherance of inclusive laws towards the development of the LGBTQIA+ community. By working towards them, we can hope to advance in this field to a considerable length.

*Q. What more can be done so that policies can be made in the right direction, and can the community be properly represented?*

Dr. Rimashree: There should be just awareness concerning non-heteronormative identities and practices, and that we need to address the intersectionality of race, caste, class, re

gion, language, color, gender, and sexuality. The legal, social, and health-related challenges faced by the queer and transgender people are diverse, thus, to build effective policies for the LGBTQIA+ community we need to understand the diverse history and the gender consciousness within the community and the society at large. The legislative actions should support the autonomy and safety of the queer individuals. The government can create laws that protect LGBTQIA+ people from violence, discrimination, and hate crimes. This can include laws that protect transgender people and ensure that the LGBTQIA+ community has access to healthcare that meets their needs. It is important to educate people about LGBTQIA+ rights. Schools and universities should train staff to provide the necessary knowledge and skills to deal with abuse. Both the public and private sectors should create anti-discrimination policies and take steps to eliminate homophobic stereotypes. Organizations should implement policies to ensure that no one is discriminated against based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expressions. When creating policies, it's important to consider local conditions. It is important to get guidance from local LGBTQIA+ persons to identify the right approach and tone. In this regard, open and accessible forums for discussions among the queer community members including the allies could be a sensible approach.

*Q. Do you think reservation is a viable solution to reduce this unequal gap of representation in government bodies?*

Dr. Rimashree: Reservation would aid in reducing the unequal gap of representation of specifically transgender persons in government bodies since they face unique challenges, and to ensure they are represented inclusively, horizontal reservation could be a pertinent solution.

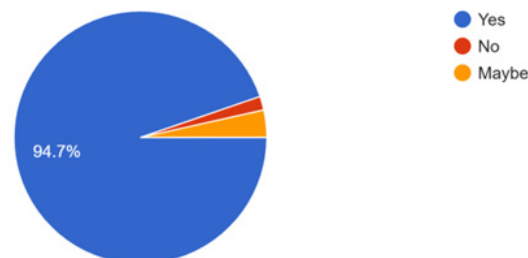
*Q. Have the political trends been affected in any way as the community has become increasingly popular in the past years?*

Dr. Rimashree: Yes, to some extent. Discussions and debate surrounding the rights and inclusive laws as well as policies that have been in the agenda of every queer organization and LGBTQIA+ persons. Referring to contemporary jurisprudence, although we observe a passive and facilitative role of the Indian judiciary in the current times, it seems to have a gradual impact on the legislative framework of the government concerning LGBTQIA+ laws. We can observe that the government's approach is characterized by several concerning actions that highlight a move towards hegemonic control, significantly affecting various sections of society. The legislative actions specifically targeting the queer community are particularly alarming, referring to The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2019 and the Draft Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Care and Rehabilitation) Bill of 2021.

### Primary Survey Result :

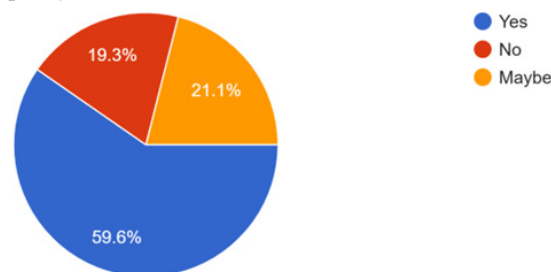
The status of both these groups can be further understood through a primary survey conducted on approximately 60 participants of multiple genders spanning from ages 13 to 60+.

It was inferred that, of the total responders, almost 95% were aware of the terms 'misogyny' and 'gender disparity', while 1% were not aware, and the rest of the 4% were not sure of it.



**Figure 2:** Composition of awareness of the terms 'misogyny' and 'gender disparity' among responders, with the majority responding in the affirmative while only a few take the opposite stand.

This, held in contrast to the unpopularity of these words during the 1990s due to taboos and misconceptions, depicts how their use has increased with a rise in awareness about gender disparity and woke culture.

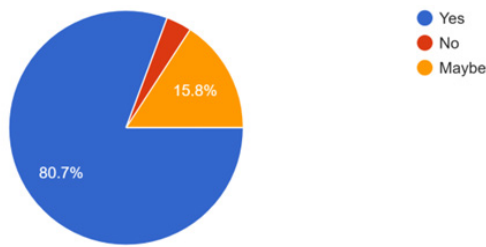


**Figure 3:** Responders who support the statement that there has been increased awareness of these terms and concepts. While almost half of them are unsure or reply in the negative, the rest acknowledge the surge in their usage.

Even more weight can be added to this argument by the finding that 100% of the responders, though they are not aware of the term misogyny or gender disparities, know that they are associated with a societal bias. It can be concluded that while the terms may be new, gender bias and disparities are age-old issues in our society.

An important discovery made through this survey showed that while 96% of females were aware of these terms, only 88% of males showed signs of knowing them, proving that more knowledge and campaigning are required to eradicate this gap and to assist more people in grasping the concept.

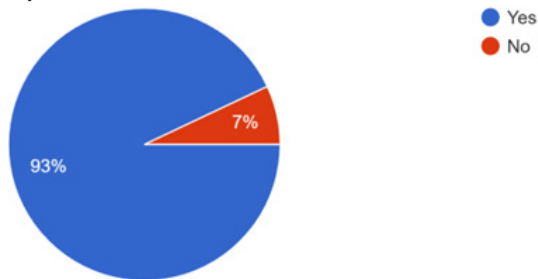
Among those aware of these terms, 81% believed that misogyny was prevalent in politics and that it is deep-rooted in Indian society through culture, traditions, and opinions being passed on to the next generations, starting from birth to the extent of education, marriage, and career paths.



**Figure 4:** Composition of responders who believe misogyny is prevalent in politics, with only a few denying that its role is of any importance in the scenario, while most reply in the affirmative.

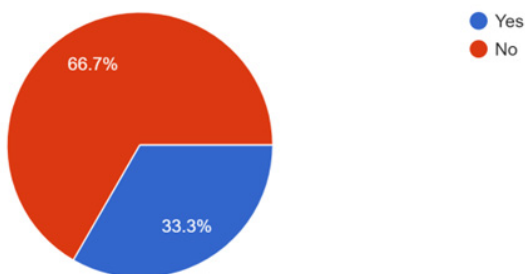
In terms of political leadership, 60% think that there have been significant changes in terms of gender representation at a political level all the years, claiming that given free access to education, women could pave a path for themselves.

Coming to how this rate of representation could be better, the percentage of responders supporting reservation for women in political bodies was 100%, portraying a paradigm shift in Indian history.



**Figure 5:** Composition of participants who do/do not believe that there should be reservations for women in poorly represented political institutions. A whopping majority affirm that there is such a need in the status quo, according to the survey.

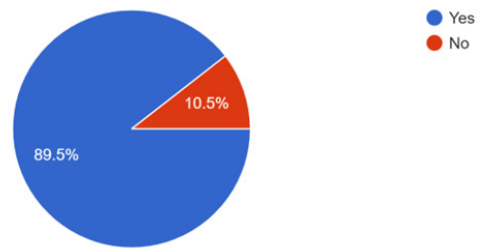
Out of these, 33% supported the 1/3rd reservation mandate, while the other 67% believed that proper representation involved an equal proportion of genders in the committee. For instance, instead of just 33% of women in a political body, the ratio would be better suited as approximately 50% to depict the equal sharing of opinion from proportional gender communities.



**Figure 6:** Percentage of those who believe it is right to reserve only 33% of the seats for women in governing bodies when they comprise approximately 50.0% of the total population. Most responders believe it is not right and that this aspect of the reservation system needs to change.

The agreements and disagreements regarding women's representation are found to be based on the historical context and the changes that were ushered in due to India's constitutional provisions for its citizens.

Considering the LGBTQIA+ community, 96% of the respondents opined that their policies should be incorporated into the policies of the governing body. This displayed an inclusive society where everybody is accepted for who they are and gender-affirming practices are encouraged and followed.



**Figure 7:** The Majority of the respondents believe the LGBTQIA+ community and their policies should be represented in the governing bodies (This does not necessarily mean having reservations).

When asked about the best countries that the participants would associate with having the most ideal representation in governing bodies, Canada was chosen as a classic example for LGBTQIA+, while many responded with New Zealand for women's representation.

Most of the responders said that the 3 places where they have witnessed gender inequality are: Home, Education (schools, textbooks), and the workplace.

Since these 3 situations are critical for the upbringing of a child to shape their thoughts and inculcate values of respect, equality, and inclusivity to mold them into compassionate and welcoming humans, there is a need to continuously inculcate a culture of diversity and embrace each other regardless of their identity in our homes and society.

### ■ Results of Case Studies of LBTQIA+ and Women's Representation in Government Bodies: Maldives and New Zeland

To understand more about the growth scenario of both women and the LGBTQIA+ communities in specific countries, the following case study involves the analysis of 2 countries. According to the primary survey conducted, New Zealand and Canada have proved their worth in creating inclusive policies for women and the LGBTQIA+ Community, while some other countries, such as the Maldives, still have a long way to go. By analyzing their governance, laws, and current situation, a clear picture of their status in representation and accuracy of policies can be gathered.

#### Maldives:

From legislation in the interests of women and the LGBTQIA+ to the number of seats occupied by them in the parliament, every political aspect of the Maldives has a lot of room for improvement. Out of the 77 seats in the Maldivian National Parliament, only 5 are held by women and no laws against domestic violence have been passed yet, even though according to the Maldives Study on Women's Health and Life Expectancy 2007, 1 in 3 women in the country have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.<sup>22</sup>

In fact, the situation had only worsened in 1968, when the freshly adopted Constitution of the Maldives barred women from running for the office of the President, emphasizing the



dire situation of women in the modern world. However, later in January 2008, the Constituent Assembly removed the gender ban.<sup>23</sup>

The reasons for poor representation of women in Maldivian politics involve factors such as a lack of information and financial resources, the deeply rooted patriarchal culture challenging those who dare to step outside the borders of traditional norms and values, as well as rigid mindsets refusing to welcome non-conforming ideas.

Article 17 of the constitution prohibits discrimination based on gender and legitimizes temporary special measures (TSM) to review any inequalities, yet no attempts to introduce TSM have worked despite the legal framework protection provided to do so. This situation speaks volumes about the lack of requisite political will to bring about structural changes to increase women's representation.<sup>24</sup>

A major reason for this poor portrayal of equality is the lack of financial backing and support from their families. Since women in the Maldives also have a lower employment rate than men, it is tussling for them to fund their campaigns personally as well.

This is a matter of heavy concern as according to a study, developing countries that have a higher share of women parliamentarians are more likely to pass comprehensive laws on sexual harassment, rape, divorce, and domestic violence.<sup>25</sup> With only 4.6% women's representation in the Maldivian Parliament, all those who have survived from the trenches of a lack of legal protection are constantly endangered.<sup>25</sup>

Key instances that highlight the burgeoning political status of women are issues with inheritance, where women receive less than their male relatives. This is derived from the Islamic values of male guardianship and responsibility for their female siblings and relatives, reinforcing the domestic role of women and the need for maintenance and protection.<sup>26</sup>

Another stringent measure is the Penal Code of 2014, criminalizing same-sex marriage as the provision carries a maximum penalty of eight years imprisonment and 100 lashes if found guilty.<sup>27</sup>

### ***New Zealand:***

On the other hand, the example of New Zealand depicts a significantly better representative state, as it was the first nation to grant female suffrage.<sup>28</sup> We can observe a 40:60 ratio of women and men in the parliament in 2019. New Zealand also made history in October 2022 when the 53rd New Zealand Parliament marked the milestone of having a majority of women Members for the first time, with 60 women and 59 men. As of May 2024, there were 57 women (46%) Members of Parliament elected to the current 54th Parliament of New Zealand.<sup>25</sup>

Women also hold several significant positions in the New Zealand Parliament, including former Governor-General Dame Patsy Reddy, former Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, Deputy Speaker Anne Tolley, and former member of the parliament Poto Williams.<sup>29</sup>

The second youngest MP of the New Zealand parliament, representing Te Pāti Māori, Hana-Rawhiti Maipi-Clarke, has been widely recognized for her dedication towards popular-

izing her culture and proudly acting upon a recent bill that would define the principles of the treaty between Māori and The Crown.<sup>30</sup>

Some key figures that show improvement in the representation of women in public sector leadership according to the Stocktake of Gender, Māori, Pacific and Ethnic Diversity on Public Sector Boards and Committees (2023):

In June 2018, the Government set a target of 50% women's participation on public sector boards and committees. This target was met in 2021 and remained so for three consecutive years. As of December 2022, women held 53.1% of state sector board and committee roles—the highest ever proportion achieved. As of 30 June 2023, women made up 53.7% (22 of 41) of public sector Chief Executive roles, compared with 24.1% in 2012. The percentage of women in the top three tiers of public service roles is about 56% (up from 41.5% in 2013).<sup>31</sup>

As for the LGBTQIA+ community, Budget 2022 allocated NZD 4 million to establish engagement mechanisms for communities to work with the government in developing approaches to tackle family violence and sexual violence. This fund was specifically for communities that are disproportionately affected by family violence and sexual violence, such as the LGBTQIA+ community. Support for these groups has been found in New Zealand in abundance.<sup>31</sup>

Better comprehensive laws make the country open and friendlier to international students as well, especially those from the respective community.

## **■ Results and Discussion**

As inferred from the detailed study of both countries, it is visible that the efficiency of creating empathizing and nurturing laws to cater to diverse communities is more apparent in countries that have more women representation as well as attention towards other groups as women in all levels of public office seem to move in a more feminist direction. Female legislators are more likely to understand and be aware of women's problems for two reasons: they have experienced them firsthand or through their association with other women. They may be experts in solving the types of problems women have confronted and can look at policymaking through their own experiences and expert perspectives.<sup>32</sup>

The gendered perspective between men and women prevails greatly as their inferences from different situations vary a lot. This divergence in outlook prevents the accuracy and number of insights each can have when it comes to making policies or impacts for the opposite gender, making it vital to introduce all genders in the policymaking body.

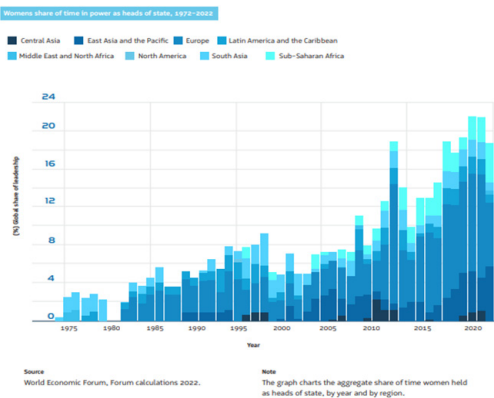
Many times, political bodies do not act on a problem simply because they are not aware of the intensity of it or that it exists at all. This can only be tackled by including as many people of diverse opinions and backgrounds as possible.

### ***Progress in the Status Quo:***

Moving from country-specific research, at a global level, to create a comprehensive framework of all the progress made in the status quo concerning representation and growth of women in political bodies, a compilation of some key facts to support the developments made has been presented.

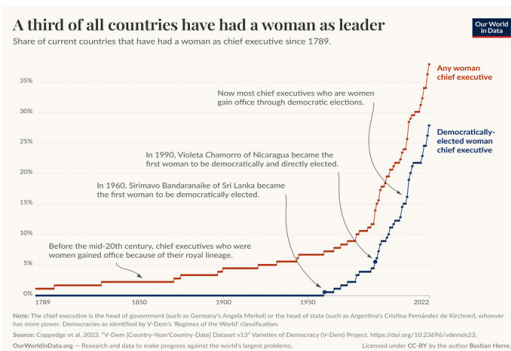
According to the World Government Summit (2023), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) was adopted by the UN at the end of the Fourth World Conference and set out an internationally agreed-upon target to achieve balanced political participation and power-sharing between women and men in decision-making.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, figures state that women have been increasingly involved in political decisions, as they now make up 21% of government ministers, with 14 countries having achieved 50% or more women in cabinets. In 2019, the proportion of women in senior management roles, both public and private, grew to 29%, the highest number ever recorded and the number of women as heads of state, the highest level of public office, has been increasing over the past 50 years, even though it has not risen equally or evenly across regions.<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 8:** Times women have held the position of Heads of State in different regions over the years, portraying a spike in recent years. Source: World Economic Forum, Forum Calculations, 2022<sup>33</sup>

While it is true that a female leader can make a huge difference in a workplace, studies conclude that without at least 30% female representation, there will be no significant benefits of having more senior female leaders, highlighting how vital it is to introduce more of them in the task force for effectiveness and support.<sup>34</sup>



**Figure 9:** The Rise of Women as Chief Executives or Heads of State from 1789 to 2022, depicting increasing prominence and global leadership. Source: Our World in Data<sup>12</sup>

Data over the years states that women in government often prioritize social policies that improve health, education, and welfare. For example, a study in Germany found that adding just one woman to a local council increased the rate of child-care expansion by 40%, highlighting their role in addressing

family-centric policies. This statement highlights how immensely a new perspective can influence policy-making and foster a positive environment for development.<sup>3</sup>

After considerable provisions and stipulations, the stagnancy in representation has abated significantly all these years, and by exploring some recommendations to target further growth, we can identify more key areas that require utmost focus to reach our goals for inclusivity.

## ■ Recommendations

Addressing the entrenched patriarchy and homophobia to foster gender equality in politics requires a comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach. The following recommendations outline actionable steps to mitigate patriarchal barriers and enhance women and queer participation and representation in political spheres:

### 1. Legal Reforms:

A. Gender quotas implementation – Incorporating a percentage of vulnerable social groups should be guaranteed in legislatures. For example, the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa has instituted a minimum of 50% representation of women in all elected positions. This also keeps in mind proportional representation, something that has been emphasized earlier in the paper.<sup>35</sup>

B. Implement anti-discrimination policies: It is important to sensitize and reinforce laws that address discrimination and harassment based on gender orientation and sexual identities in social and political institutions. Such measures encourage a more inclusive and equitable political landscape.

C. Protection of Maternity and Parental Rights: The introduction of programs that encourage female politicians to have greater involvement in politics by allowing them to take maternity leave and adjust their working hours will help realize the goal. Making similar adjustments for queer people can also lead to more participation and inclusion in everyday roles.

### 2. Educational and Awareness Campaigns:

A. Raise the political consciousness of the public: Incorporating campaigns and workshops for women and LGBTQIA+ to enhance their understanding of their political rights and encourage active involvement could boost their participation in politics. For instance, UN Women and other institutions for social development are recommended to enhance the strength of these groups in politics.<sup>36</sup>

B. Challenge gender stereotypes: It is crucial to use media, training programs, and social conversations to eradicate patriarchal and homophobic stereotypes regarding leadership positions. Teaching journalists how to report can be an intervention that aims to lessen discrimination in the media.<sup>37</sup>

### 3. Institutional Support:

A. Establish representational equality committees: Setting up oversight bodies to monitor and address gender disparities in political institutions can ensure accountability and progress toward proportionate representation.

B. Provide mentorship programs: Matching aspiring diverse politicians with experienced mentors and activists in the field will guide their careers and help them navigate political landscapes effectively.



#### **4. Economic Empowerment**

A. Funding diverse candidates: Financial aid to women and queer candidates can eliminate many economic impediments afflicting their pursuit in the political arena. Programs that promote their political participation understand that economic empowerment is a means toward gender equality.<sup>38</sup>

B. Encourage them in leadership roles: Increasing the resources and training dedicated to preparing aspiring leaders for high-level political positions helps instill confidence and competency in leading properly.

#### **5. Media Representation**

A. Promote positive representation: Encourage media houses to depict women and queer politicians as effective leaders rather than dwelling on gendered and homophobic issues such as looks or personal lives. This can shift public opinion and eliminate stereotypes.

B. Counter misinformation and bias: Monitoring and countering the spread of sexist narratives and disinformation campaigns with no scientific base in politics is essential to creating a fair and unbiased media environment.

#### **6. Community-Level Interventions**

A. Engage grassroots movements: Mobilizing local communities to support equal political participation creates a bottom-up approach to equality, thus achieving widespread societal change.

B. Foster male allies: Encouraging men in politics and communities to support gender parity and actively challenge patriarchal norms can result in more inclusive political environments.

#### **7. Global and Regional Collaboration**

A. Learn from best practices: Sharing ideas and strategies with countries that have increased political participation can be valuable in terms of insights and models for implementation.

B. Encourage international support: The use of international organizations and frameworks to hold governments accountable for the promotion of equality in politics ensures that commitment and progress are sustained.

#### **8. Technological Tools and Platforms**

A. Leverage digital campaigning: Empowering politicians from different backgrounds with the ability to utilize social media and digital platforms for political outreach and advocacy will increase their visibility and engagement with constituents.

B. Protect against online harassment: Creating legal frameworks and technological solutions to counter cyberbullying and online threats against anyone in politics is important for their safety and participation.

#### **9. Cultural and Social Transformation**

A. Encourage gender-responsive education: Incorporating school curricula with discussions about gender equality and leadership can shape progressive attitudes from a young age toward a long-term change in society.

B. Celebrate women and queer leaders: Recognition of their work in politics can inspire and motivate future generations to pursue the leadership role, making the political landscape more gender inclusive.

By implementing these recommendations, political systems can move towards dismantling patriarchal and homophobic structures that ensure an environment is inclusive and equitable for the contribution of women and the LGBTQIA+ Community to governance and leadership. This is not just a necessity in terms of gender equality, but is also important to foster diverse and representative political decision-making processes. While they have created some extent of impact in all these years, consistency and adapting to the current situation are integral in ensuring the solution remains relevant. This can be done through avoiding rigid and inflexible solutions and understanding what tangibly benefits society. While digital campaigns and community support are spearheading change on a large scale, media representation and institutional support still require considerable attention, specifically encouraging news channels that provide accurate content without any institutional bias or political pressure.

### **■ Conclusion**

The survey findings present a paradigm shift in varied age groups, ranging from teenagers to senior citizens over the years. It analyzes the current perspective of misogyny and gender disparity, specifically in the political sphere, centering on how the reservation policy present in India can be improved and whether it should be there at all, as well as some countries that have the most and least ideal policymaking for women and the LGBTQIA+ Communities. The interview with a renowned LGBTQIA+ activist and expert, Ms. Rimashree Borah, has been presented. A detailed discussion on their inclusion at the grassroots level as well as policymaking stresses the urgent need to make further progress, as well as explore more solutions, except for reservations in political institutions to promote accurate governance. Contemporary jurisprudence has occupied the foreground in the latter part of the interview as we question how political trends have changed with the increasing popularity of the community. Analyzing two countries; Maldives and New Zealand on their gender political representation, the key difference noted is the wide gap in policies related to diversity and inclusivity in comparison to the degree of women and queer representation in their political institutions and their position in society.

The overall conclusion of the study is that it is vital to include more perspectives in political institutions for the betterment of a state. Involving more genders in decision-making not only leads to diverse opinions but also encourages empathetic, multi-faceted laws for the well-being of all. It is important to act on this situation now so that we can create accurate policies for future generations to properly benefit from them and take advantage of their potential through equitable opportunities for the progress of the nation.

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