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Explaining the Participation-Representation Paradox: Gender, Conflict, and Political Recruitment in Jammu and Kashmir

Kothapeta Lakshman
Central University of Kashmir
Jainendra Kumar Verma
jainendrakumarverma@yahoo.co.in

Central University of Kashmir

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Abstract

Purpose

The current study aims to investigate the continuity of the participation-representation paradox by determining whether there is an increase in female participation in elections, which in turn translates to an increase in their representation in politics. It also aims to determine the institutional mechanisms that cause this gap between participation and representation.

Design/methodology/approach

To carry out this research, a longitudinal research design is employed, which incorporates data from various elections over time. It utilizes descriptive and multivariate regression analyses to examine the impact of female voter turnout, candidacy, and other variables such as conflicts on their representation.

Findings

The research findings show a significant gap between participation and representation, which is consistent over time. This gap is statistically significant, and despite a high level of female voter turnout, their representation is still very low in comparison to their male counterparts. Female candidacy is found to be a significant variable in determining their representation, and high deposit forfeiture is an indication of low female competitiveness in elections, while conflicts impact both female representation and female candidacy negatively.

Research limitations/implications

The use of aggregate electoral data has its limitations in that it is not possible to study the process at the micro-level, for example, in-party selection and voter behaviour.

Practical implications

There is a need to move the policy agenda beyond participation-oriented policies to institutional solutions such as gender quotas, in-party democratization, and financial incentives for women candidates.

Social implications

The high level of participation and low level of representation create a concern for the quality of democracy and inclusiveness.

Originality/value

This study provides a comprehensive approach to participation, recruitment, and contextual factors in advancing the understanding of gender representation in politics.

JEL Classification Codes: D72, O17, P16, Z13

1. Introduction

The connection between political participation and representation is a fundamental theme in the study of democratic politics and governance; nevertheless, the empirical actualization of such a connection is uneven and conditioned by a variety of socio-political and institutional factors. Classical accounts of the evolution of democratic politics and governance suggest a linear and progressive connection between political inclusion and representation; that is, the extension of political participation and inclusion is assumed to produce a more inclusive and responsive political representation (Marshall, 1950; Dahl, 1971; Pateman, 1970; Verba et al.,

1995; Sen, 1999). However, a substantial body of comparative research has now clearly established that the connection between political participation and representation is not linear and automatic, and particularly with regard to gender representation and participation (Pitkin, 1967; Phillips, 1995; Mansbridge, 1999; Norris & Inglehart, 2003; Paxton et al., 2007; Krook, 2009; Schwindt-Bayer, 2009; Htun & Weldon, 2010; Waylen, 2014; Paxton & Hughes, 2017).

This disjuncture, termed as the participation-representation paradox, points to an underlying limitation of approaches centered on participation as a pathway to democratic deepening. Rather than an issue of transition lag, the continuation of this disjuncture points to the presence of filtering mechanisms that shape the relationship between voter inclusion and access to political power (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Matland, 1998; Norris, 2004; Krook, 2009; Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2019; Hinojosa, 2012). This occurs across various levels: electoral, party-based, and socio-cultural, resulting in gendered results even when formal political equality exists (Htun & Weldon, 2010; Waylen, 2014; Krook & Mackay, 2011).

The empirical reality of this phenomenon has also been well established at the global level, where female electoral participation has achieved parity or near parity with males across a broad range of different types of regimes, indicative of considerable progress in female mobilization and enfranchisement (Inglehart & Norris, 2003; World Bank, 2020; UN Women, 2022). However, female underrepresentation in legislative bodies, where they constitute a minority of parliamentary seats globally, also appears to be a consistent phenomenon (IPU, 2023; Paxton et al., 2007; Schwindt-Bayer, 2009; Hughes et al., 2017). This divergence appears to reinforce the analytical differentiation between participatory inclusion and representational access, implying that the latter is subject to a separate set of institutional and organizational factors (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Krook, 2009; Htun & Weldon, 2010).

The case of Indians may be seen to exemplify this paradox in a especially clear and complex manner. In the last two decades, the level of female voter turnout has risen in a dramatic manner, in many cases even crossing that of their male counterparts in a manner that challenges existing perceptions of gendered political disengagement (Rai, 2011; Basu & Shastri, 2018; Chhibber & Verma, 2018; Jensenius, 2017; Heath et al., 2015). Yet, this converging trend in political participation has not been paralleled by a similar trend in terms of representation, which has been subject to structural limitations in terms of party gatekeeping, socio-cultural factors, and institutional design (Chhibber, 2002; Banerjee, 2017; Chandra, 2016; Krook, 2009; Htun & Weldon, 2010; Vaishnav, 2017).

Nevertheless, there has been a lack of sufficient sensitivity in the existing literature to the ways in which these processes play out in conflict-affected settings of democratic governance, in which processes of election and insecurity/militarization frequently overlap (Ganguly, 2001; Bose, 2003; Varshney, 2002; Singh, 2016; Staniland, 2014). The conflict environment not only impacts the political sphere but also influences participation, access, and agency in ways that reinforce inequality and create new exclusions (Waylen, 2014; True, 2013; Tripp, 2015; Berry, 2018).

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) provides a relevant and yet not adequately researched context for an empirical study of the processes and dynamics. Since the advent of electoral politics in the state in 1962, the state has witnessed a process of democratic mobilization and disruption in the context of insurgency, state intervention, changes in the party system, and constitutional changes such as the abrogation of Article 370 and the resultant institutional restructuring (Bose, 2003; Ganguly, 2001; Noorani, 2011; Singh, 2016). These changes have led to a complex political scenario in the state characterized by the coexistence of structural limitations.

In such a context, the gendered trajectory of electoral participation and representation points to an interesting theoretically relevant phenomenon. Female voter participation has been consistently on an upward trajectory over time, nearing parity with male voter turnout in recent electoral contests, a trend which reflects more general processes of political mobilization and enfranchisement (Election Commission of

India, various years; Zia, 2021). Yet women's representation in the legislative assembly has been persistently low over time, rarely rising above marginal levels (Pandit, 2021). This distinction is theoretically relevant to the extent that it points to a process of filtering through institutional/organizational mechanisms.

Though existing literature offers useful insights into each aspect of the phenomenon, it remains analytically fragmented. The literature on gender and representation has focused on the normative and institutional aspects of inclusion (Pitkin, 1967; Phillips, 1995; Dahlerup, 2006), the literature on political recruitment has focused on the role of gatekeeping at the party level (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Lawless & Fox, 2010; Krook, 2009), and the conflict literature has highlighted the role of insecurity and militarization (Waylen, 2014; Tripp, 2015; Hughes, 2009), but it is rare to find a single analytical framework that seeks to explain long-term gendered electoral outcomes in conflict-affected democracies.

This paper fills this gap by presenting a multi-level, mechanism-based, and conflict-sensitive framework that understands the participation-representation paradox as structurally reproduced through the interaction of institutional processes. More specifically, it is argued here that the gap between participation and representation in J&K is reproduced through the interaction of the following three mechanisms:

(i) party gatekeeping and nomination bias,

(ii) institutional design and electoral constraints, and

(iii) conflict-related constraints to political agency (Krook, 2009; Htun & Weldon, 2010; Waylen, 2014).

Based on the longitudinal data from the electoral process between 1962 and 2024, the study indicates that high levels of participation can coexist with representational inequalities. This challenges the participation-centric approach to the study of democratic consolidation (Norris, 2004; Schwindt-Bayer, 2009; Pierson, 2000). The study makes three key contributions: first, it shifts the focus from the participation-representation paradox to a stable equilibrium (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010); secondly, it incorporates conflict as a mediator in the study of gender and the electoral process (True, 2013; Berry, 2018); and thirdly, it offers a longitudinal study that covers a wide period of six decades.

2. Review of Literature

The research on women's political representation has gradually moved from a normative focus on equality and justice to more analytical approaches emphasizing the role of institutions, power, and constraints. The conceptual distinctions between descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation highlight the multi-dimensional nature of women's inclusion in politics, which depends on their presence and influence in the arenas of decision-making (Pitkin, 1967; Phillips, 1995; Mansbridge, 1999; Young, 2000; Saward, 2010). However, the initial assumption of democratic theory on a linear relationship between participation and representation has not been supported by later empirical research, which found that women's underrepresentation is a common phenomenon in different types of democratic systems, suggesting that inclusion in politics is not necessarily a guarantor of influence in the arenas of power (Norris, 2004; Dahlerup, 2006; Paxton et al., 2007; Krook, 2009; Hughes et al., 2017; Clayton et al., 2019). This has given rise to the idea that representation is the outcome of institutionalized power relationships, where access to political office is subject to both formal and informal mechanisms that favour historically dominant groups (Htun & Weldon, 2010; Krook & Mackay, 2011; Waylen, 2014). Therefore, the persistence of gender gaps in representation is no longer seen as the outcome of individual-level deficits, but as the outcome of structurally reproduced inequalities that are embedded in the political processes and institutions (Acker, 1992; Bjarnegård, 2013; Kenny, 2013).

Feminist institutionalism has been key to this process, which has highlighted the dynamic relationship between formal institutions and informal norms, practices, and networks (Mackay et al., 2010; Chappell & Waylen, 2013; Lowndes, 2014; Waylen, 2014). Rather than seeing institutions as neutral actors, this approach has highlighted the inherently gendered nature of institutions, which has demonstrated the role of informal norms such as patronage networks, brokerage by elites, and culturally determined norms of leadership in maintaining exclusion alongside formal democratic institutions (Htun & Weldon, 2010; Krook & Mackay, 2011; Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2019). Informal institutions have been found to have a greater explanatory power than formal institutions in many contexts, particularly when competition in formal institutions is mediated through networks and resource asymmetries, which constrain women's access to candidacy and leadership despite formal equality in terms of political rights (Acker, 1992; Bjarnegård, 2013; Kenny, 2013). This has meant that increased participation at the mass level does not translate to increased representation at the elite level, which reflects a broader disconnect between procedural inclusion and substantive power redistribution (Phillips, 1995; Htun & Weldon, 2010).

Within this broader institutional framework, political recruitment is identified as a crucial mechanism that connects participation and representation, with a focus on the processes of candidate selection that highlight a crucial site of women's exclusion from politics. A prominent framework, known as supply-demand, argues that women's lack of representation is a consequence of both the supply of potential candidates and their willingness to be recruited by political actors (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Lawless & Fox, 2010; Fox & Lawless, 2011). Nevertheless, more recent research has questioned this supply-side perspective, showing that women's ambition and qualifications in politics are no less impressive than those of their male counterparts, and that the determining factor is, in fact, party demand (Krook, 2009; Bjarnegard & Zetterberg, 2019; Hazan & Rahat, 2010). Political parties act as gatekeepers in structuring access to political competition by determining nomination strategies, which prioritize issues of winnability, incumbency, financial resources, and party loyalty, all of which disadvantage women inasmuch as they lack access to political capital (Norris, 2004; Chhibber, 2002; Banerjee, 2017; Vaishnav, 2017).

These phenomena are particularly salient in majoritarian electoral systems, where single-member district contests heighten risk-averse behaviour and reinforce incumbency effects, causing parties to perpetuate existing patterns of representation rather than expand candidate pools (Matland, 1998; Cox, 1997; Norris, 2004). The empirical record confirms that women are less likely to be nominated in contested districts and, when nominated, are frequently relegated to electorally vulnerable districts, thereby diminishing their prospects of success even when they enter the electoral fray (Krook, 2009; Bjarnegård, 2013; Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2019). In countries like India, the impact of these phenomena is also moderated by the persistence of dynastic politics, which offers a pathway to women's entry into politics but also locks them into a system that entrenches the position of the elite and prevents significant change (Chandra, 2016; Vaishnav, 2017). The process of political recruitment, therefore, is a crucial intervening factor that mediates the relationship between participation and representation, yielding systematic inequalities that cannot be accounted for by voter behaviour.

Institutional design also shapes these processes by affecting the incentive structure in which political actors make decisions. For instance, comparative studies have shown that the effect of electoral systems on gender representation is considerable, with proportional representation systems facilitating the inclusion of women and majoritarian systems perpetuating the exclusion of women (Lijphart, 1999; Matland, 1998; Norris, 2004; Krook, 2009; Franceschet et al., 2012). The existence of gender quotas has been shown to have a considerable effect on the inclusion of women in political systems by disrupting the entrenched patterns of exclusion (Dahlerup, 2006; Htun & Jones, 2002; Krook, 2009; Clayton et al., 2019). The absence of such institutional interventions perpetuates the exclusion of women from political systems due to the lack of incentives for parties to change entrenched nomination patterns (Franceschet et al., 2012; Jensenius, 2017).

In the context of India, the absence of legislative quotas at higher levels of government and the centralizing role of parties in candidate selection have led to persistently low levels of women's representation, even when rates of electoral participation are relatively high (Rai, 2011; Basu, 2016; Heath et al., 2015; Basu and Shastri, 2018). At the same time, there are also findings from local governance that structural interventions can bring about significant transformations in political behaviour and outcomes, indicating the critical role that structural interventions may play in closing the gap between political participation and representation (Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 2004; Beaman et al., 2009; Duflo, 2012).

Voter behaviour has traditionally been cited as an important factor in explaining gender representation gaps. However, empirical evidence for voter bias as an important factor in explaining underrepresentation is limited. While gender stereotypes may affect voter behaviour in some contexts, there is increasing evidence to support the idea that when given equal access to competition for political office, women candidates perform as well as men (Sanbonmatsu, 2006; Dolan, 2014; Brooks, 2013; Bauer, 2015). In fact, cross-national studies have demonstrated that while cultural attitudes towards gender equality interact with and affect voter behaviour, these attitudes do not independently affect voter behaviour in determining outcomes (Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Paxton et al., 2007). In fact, there is now a growing consensus in the literature that voter bias plays a secondary role to institutional and organizational constraints in explaining underrepresentation in systems with restricted access to candidacy through political parties (Schwindt-Bayer, 2009; Krook, 2009; Htun & Weldon, 2010). This lends support to the idea that the PR gap cannot be explained by factors related to voter behaviour.

The literature on conflict and political institutions introduces a new dimension of complexity to the analysis, given the role of conflict in reshaping participation, governance, and social relations, which generally heightens the costs and risks of political engagement, curtails mobility, and entrenches conservatism, thus circumscribing women's participation in formal political processes other than voting (Ganguly, 2001; Varshney, 2002; Staniland, 2014; Justino et al., 2012; True, 2013; Waylen, 2014). These effects are also gendered, given the disproportionate impact of conflict on women, limited mobility, and restricted access to public spaces, which all contribute to a reduced likelihood of women entering electoral contests (Hughes, 2009; Tripp, 2015; Berry, 2018). At the same time, conflict also introduces new spaces for mobilization and change, potentially enhancing participation at the local level without necessarily extending to the elite level, thus complicating the relationship between inclusion and power even further (O'Rourke, 2014; Bell & O'Rourke, 2010; Berry, 2018).

Collectively, these approaches to research suggest a common truth: that the gap between participation and representation is a product of a democratic system, resulting from a combination of factors rather than a single cause (Norris, 2004; Paxton et al., 2007; Krook, 2009; Htun & Weldon, 2010; Waylen, 2014; Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2019). This line of inquiry emphasizes the importance of integrative approaches to explanation, which examine the processes by which women's participation is filtered through a series of steps in a democratic competition, resulting in a gendered outcome based on a cumulative effect. By moving beyond an outcome-based approach to a more process-oriented one, a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between increased participation and representation can be achieved.

Despite these advances, significant gaps in the literature remain to be filled. There is a need for longitudinal research that systematically explores the dynamics of participation and representation over long periods of time. There is a lack of studies on subnational settings and conflict-affected areas. The literature has been marked by a fragmented approach to theory-building, with a focus on specific aspects such as institutional factors or party factors without a unifying analytical approach. The conflict-affected democracies are also a relatively unexplored setting, yet they provide a promising avenue for exploring the complex interaction between conflict and institutional and organizational factors in the construction of gendered political outcomes.

By constructing a mechanistic approach to the longitudinal analysis of electoral politics in a conflict-affected environment, this study contributes to the existing literature by synthesizing concepts from feminist institutionalism, political recruitment theory, and conflict studies into a single framework for explanation. In this way, this study extends the understanding of the participation-representation paradox as a structurally embedded and dynamically reproduced process, particularly in relation to the conditions in which forms of democratic inclusion in participation do not equate to forms of access to political power.

3. Theoretical Framework, Conceptual Model, and Hypotheses

The phenomenon of the participation-representation paradox represents a theoretically significant gap between mass-level political incorporation and elite-level political inclusion. This gap challenges some of the key assumptions of democratic theory in terms of linearity. Classic and participatory theories of democracy argue that increased electoral participation should strengthen the representativeness of political institutions by closely linking descriptive representation and substantive representation with an increasingly inclusive electorate's preference (Dahl, 1971; Pateman, 1970; Verba et al., 1995; Mansbridge, 1999). However, a large literature on comparative democracy and feminist theory has found a systematic relationship between electoral participation and legislative representation to be consistently weak, particularly in terms of gender representation, where increased electoral representation of women tends to accompany persisting legislative representation gaps (Pitkin, 1967; Phillips, 1995; Norris & Inglehart, 2003; Paxton et al., 2007; Krook, 2009; Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005; Htun & Weldon, 2010; Waylen, 2014; Clayton et al., 2019). This gap is increasingly seen not as a lag or an anomaly but as a representation of a complex relationship between a range of factors influencing the relationship between representation and participation (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Matland, 1998; Norris, 2004; Krook & Mackay, 2011; Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2019).

Moving beyond demand-side explanations of voter preferences, this research takes a process-oriented and mechanism-based approach, informed by a feminist institutionalist and political recruitment perspective, in which electoral representation is conceived of as a product of sequential filtering processes in a series of distinct yet interconnected stages of candidate emergence, party nomination, and electoral selection (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Hazan & Rahat, 2010; Lawless & Fox, 2010; Fox & Lawless, 2011; Krook, 2009). These stages of representation form a gendered opportunity structure in which, while there is a formal equality of participation, there is an informal inequality of resources and opportunities that disadvantage women's progression to later stages of political representation (Acker, 1992; Bjarnegard, 2013; Kenny, 2013; Waylen, 2014). Thus, electoral outcomes are not conceived of as direct aggregations of voter behaviour but must be understood as mediated products of organizational gatekeeping and institutional design in their supply and allocation (Htun & Weldon, 2010; Krook & Mackay, 2011).

At the core of this framework is the party gatekeeping mechanism, which conceptualizes political parties as the primary sites of power in candidate selection and political recruitment. Parties are not merely conduits of societal preferences; they are, in fact, architects of political contests by designing strategic nomination strategies that prioritize candidates considered to be electorally viable, organizationally loyal, and financially well-endowed (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Norris, 2004; Hazan & Rahat, 2010). These standards prove to be highly constricting in a majoritarian electoral system, where single-member district contests often encourage risk-averse strategies and incumbency advantages, limiting the number of electorally viable candidates (Matland, 1998; Cox, 1997; Chhibber & Verma, 2018). As women are less likely to have access to political capital in the form of patronage networks, financial resources, and political experience, they are likely to be disadvantaged in nomination contests, particularly in competitive constituencies (Chhibber, 2002; Banerjee, 2017; Vaishnav, 2017; Bjarnegard & Zetterberg, 2019). This gives rise to a strategic marginalization effect, where women are less likely to be included in nomination contests or are overrepresented in less winnable constituencies, thereby undermining their conversion of participation to representation (Krook, 2009; Bjarnegard, 2013).

The process of party gatekeeping is also subject to the influence of the institutional design mechanism, which refers to the incentive structure in which parties are embedded. For instance, the electoral system influences the costs and benefits of nominating women, with proportional representation systems being more permissive of women's inclusion, especially with multi-member districts and party lists, compared to majoritarian systems, which tend to limit women's inclusion and reinforce hierarchical control (Matland, 1998; Norris, 2004; Carey & Shugart, 1995; Krook, 2009). In the absence of counter-vailing institutional factors like gender quotas, path-dependent patterns of exclusion result, as parties lack incentives to expand their candidate pools and instead reinforce existing gender hierarchies (Dahlerup, 2006; Htun & Jones, 2002; Franceschet et al., 2012; Jensenius, 2017). These institutional factors are not merely situational factors but rather active forces that shape the gendered nature of political opportunities and outcomes (Krook & Mackay, 2011; Waylen, 2014).

A further level of constraint is added by the conflict-induced mechanism, which places emphasis on the impact of political instability and insecurity in affecting electoral processes and political agency. Conflict environments affect both the supply and demand sides of political participation by raising the costs of political engagement, restricting mobility, and reinforcing traditional social norms that restrict women's participation (Ganguly, 2001; Bose, 2003; Justino et al., 2012; True, 2013; Tripp, 2015; Berry, 2018). However, this is not an equal impact, and women are disproportionately affected by such constraints in their ability to participate in political processes, such as campaign activities and access to political networks and party nominations (Hughes, 2009; O'Rourke, 2014; Waylen, 2014). At the same time, conflict environments also have a differential impact in that they increase participation at the grassroots level, leading to a widening of the participation-representation gap (Bjarnegård et al., 2018; Clayton et al., 2019).

The participation-representation paradox thus arises from the combined effect of these mechanisms that produce a decoupling effect between participation and representation. Thus, the increased participation and the consequent inclusion in the democratic process do not translate into political representation due to the filtering effect of the organizational and institutional structures that channel political opportunities. This produces an asymmetric effect of political incorporation, where women are included as voters and not represented as decision-makers, indicating a contradiction in the democratic process (Phillips, 1995; Htun & Weldon, 2010; Waylen, 2014). This approach thus shifts the focus from participation as a product to the process of political recruitment and selection, indicating the need to investigate the combined effect of the different stages of the electoral process (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Krook, 2009).

Within this theoretical framework, the paper proposes a set of interrelated and empirically falsifiable hypotheses that capture both direct and interaction effects. First, in the absence of adequate levels of participation to overcome structural constraints, increases in female voter turnout are not expected to be associated with corresponding increases in the levels of women's representation in the legislature, suggesting a weak or non-linear relationship between voter turnout and representation (H1) (Paxton et al., 2007; Schwindt-Bayer, 2009). Second, the persistence of supply-side constraints also suggests that increases in voter turnout are not expected to be associated with corresponding increases in the levels of female candidacy, as mediated by party nomination processes (H2) (Lawless & Fox, 2010; Fox & Lawless, 2011). Third, in line with the gatekeeper argument, political parties are expected to reveal systematic bias in candidate selection processes, with women being less likely to be nominated in electorally competitive constituencies and thereby limiting their potential for electoral success (H3) (Krook, 2009; Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2019).

At the institutional level, the majoritarian electoral system is anticipated to lower the prospects for female electoral success, as it would strengthen incumbency advantage and deter risk-taking in candidate selection (H4) (Matland, 1998; Norris, 2004). The absence of gender quotas is also anticipated to be linked to low levels of women's representation, emphasizing the role of institutional factors in shaping political outcomes

(H5) (Dahlerup, 2006; Franceschet et al., 2012). In conflict-affected contexts, periods of heightened insecurity are anticipated to lower levels of female candidacy and electoral success, as they would raise the costs and risks associated with political engagement (H6) (Tripp, 2015; Hughes, 2009). Furthermore, it is anticipated that such impacts would be gender-differentiated, with conflict constraining women's transition from voters to candidates more than men (H7) (Waylen, 2014; True, 2013).

Finally, and most importantly, the framework proposes an interaction hypothesis that reflects the compound and mutually intensifying nature of exclusionary mechanisms. More concretely, the impact of party gatekeeping on women's representation is hypothesized to be exacerbated in the presence of institutional constraint and conflict, such that the joint presence of majoritarian electoral rules and conflict-imposed constraint produces a multiplicative disadvantage for women (H8) (Htun & Weldon, 2010; Krook, 2009; Waylen, 2014). This interaction effect represents the major theoretical contribution of the article, as it seeks to go beyond additive approaches to demonstrate the ways in which multiple dimensions of constraint combine to reinforce patterns of gender inequality in political representation.

Summing up, the suggested framework theoretically understands the participation-representation paradox as a multi-level, process-oriented, and structurally embedded phenomenon, resulting from the interaction of party-level, institutional, and contextual mechanisms. By synthesizing insights from feminist theory, political recruitment, and conflict studies, it offers a comprehensive and analytically rigorous explanation for the non-equivalence of increased participation and representation. At the same time, it contributes to the broader debate on democratic inclusion by emphasizing the limits of participation as a condition for equality and the need to address the gap through institutional and organizational change.

4. Data and Methodology

The methodological architecture of the study maintains an optimal balance between theory and empirical constraint, offering a mechanism-oriented approach to the participation-representation puzzle while relying exclusively on secondary, officially reported electoral aggregate data. In line with established best practices in comparative political analysis, the study adopts a longitudinal macro-quantitative research design, reconstructing an election-level time series for Jammu and Kashmir from 1962 to the most recent assembly election. The data are derived from authoritative institutional sources, including reports from the Election Commission, statistical abstracts, and archival electoral compendia. This approach maximizes data reliability, internal consistency, and replicability while facilitating historically informed inference across distinct political periods. The approach is particularly appropriate for investigating the path-dependent trajectories and structural discontinuities that characterize gendered representation in conflict-affected democracies. The longitudinal approach privileges temporal depth over cross-sectional variation, making it an optimal choice for identifying path-dependent trajectories and structural discontinuities in gendered representation in conflict-affected democracies. This approach is particularly appropriate for investigating the path-dependent trajectories and structural discontinuities that characterize gendered representation in conflict-affected democracies.

Under this framework, the dependent variable, women's political representation, is defined in terms of the proportion of legislative seats won by women in each electoral cycle, with absolute numbers of elected women included to maintain sensitivity to rare event outcomes. This is done to improve the robustness of the dependent variable's measurement, where proportional measures might mask interesting variations (Hughes et al., 2017; Clayton et al., 2019; Schwindt-Bayer, 2010). The primary explanatory variable, female electoral participation, is defined in terms of the proportion of voter turnout by gender. Where data on voter turnout is unavailable for certain elections, female electorate share is employed in its stead, though this is done in limited instances and with caution. This variable is meant to capture women's engagement in democratic

processes, though it is still theoretically embedded in a sequential framework rather than conceived of independently (Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Paxton et al., 2007; Norris, 2004).

To account for representation's sequential nature, female candidacy is included as a primary intervening variable. This is measured as the proportion of females out of all contestants. This measure captures the key stage in which participation influences elite-level representation, which is in line with supply-demand approaches and FI theory (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Lawless & Fox, 2010; Krook, 2009). Moreover, aggregate-level measures of party gatekeeping are included. This refers to the proportion of female candidates nominated by major parties and their electoral success rates. While secondary data cannot capture party-level filtering processes, these variables theoretically represent an approximation of party-level filtering. This is based on findings suggesting party strategies, rather than voter demands, are the primary barriers to women's representation (Chhibber, 2002; Banerjee, 2017; Bjarnegård, 2013; Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2019).

In addition, institutional and contextual dynamics are accounted for with time-sensitive covariates that measure macro-political change. Given the stability of the first past-the-post system, institutional variation is accounted for with periodization variables that measure periods of delimitation, restructuring, and constitutional change. More fundamentally, however, this research incorporates a conflict intensity variable, which is created by historically classifying periods of electoral contests by level of low, moderate, and high conflict, drawing on established scholarly periodization's of conflict (Ganguly, 2001; Staniland, 2014). This is a more critical aspect of this research design, in that it does not conceptualize conflict as an external event but rather a structuring condition that influences political opportunity structures, party strategies, and candidate viability in translating participation into representation (Hughes, 2009; True, 2013; Berry, 2018).

Analytically, the study adopts a tiered inferential approach consistent with the philosophical underpinnings of sequential filtering. The first tier involves descriptive time-series reconstruction, including trends and ratios, to reveal the empirical characteristics of participation, candidacy, and representation over time. This initial step illustrates the persistence and depth of the participation-representation gap and provides the foundation for subsequent modelling efforts (Paxton et al., 2007; Krook, 2009; Dahlerup, 2006). The second tier employs parsimonious regression analysis at the election level, and the primary model specification adopts ordinary least squares estimation with robust standard errors for heteroscedasticity. The general empirical specification is given below:

$$Y_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{1t} + \beta_2 X_{2t} + \ldots + \beta_n X_{nt} + \epsilon$$

where Y_t represents women's legislative representation in election "t"; X_1, X_2,...., X_n denote explanatory variables. β_0 is the intercept; β_i, are slope coefficients; and "ε" is the error term.

Given the small number of time periods, OLS estimation is employed for its interpretability and transparency while limiting the potential for overfitting in small N time-series settings, as might be associated with alternative estimation strategies (Wooldridge, 2010; Angrist and Pischke, 2009).

The modelling approach is incremental and theory driven. The first step in the model estimates the relationship between female participation and representation. The following steps in the model control for the effect of candidacy to determine if the pattern holds up to a mediating effect. The last steps in the model control for the effect of institutional and conflict variables to determine if there is a conditioning effect. The model also includes an interaction term between candidacy and conflict to determine if the marginal effect of recruitment varies by political context, as per best practice in interaction modelling (Brambor et al., 2006; Hainmueller et al., 2019).

For enhanced temporal ordering, the model also utilizes lagged independent variables, utilizing previous electoral cycles' participation and candidacy to forecast the current representation. This minimizes problems of simultaneity and ensures that the explanatory variables occur before the dependent variable (Wooldridge, 2010; Beck & Katz, 2011). Other robustness tests include different measures of absolute and proportional representation, as well as the exclusion of outlier elections. Moreover, the analysis utilizes a sub-period approach to examine different conflict phases. Diagnostic tests show no significant problems of multicollinearity. However, due to the small-N design, autocorrelation is addressed using lagged variables.

At a higher level of epistemology, the methodology also employs a mechanism-based inferential approach. This approach emphasizes pattern detection over causal identification. Instead of depending upon exogenous variation, the methodology tests whether the observed pattern corresponds to the predicted form of a sequential filtering process in which electoral participation becomes increasingly mediated and constrained by institutional and organizational factors (Htun & Weldon, 2010; Waylen, 2014; Mahoney, 2001).

Overall, therefore, the research design may be characterized as one that is both circumscribed and analytically fertile. In that the research relies upon secondary sources of electoral data; there are clear limitations in terms of micro-level analysis and direct observation. However, in being able to examine longitudinal structural inequalities and persistence, the research design provides a fertile platform for explaining the ways in which increased levels of participation are mediated through selection and contextual factors to inform gendered patterns of continuity in political representation.

5. Empirical Analysis / Results

The empirical analysis examines the link between the electoral participation and political representation of women through a process of longitudinal descriptive reconstruction and theory-driven regression modelling. The descriptive results clearly reveal the divergence between the two phenomena. As depicted in Table 1, there has been a significant transformation in the gender composition of the electorate. The level of female electoral participation has increased from negligible levels in the early decades to near parity in recent elections. However, there are indications that the expansion in female participation is not matched by an equivalent expansion in female political representation, thereby revealing the existence of structural constraints to the translation of participation into political outcomes (Paxton et al., 2007; Norris, 2004; Krook, 2009).

Table 1
Electorate Expansion and Gender Convergence (1962–2024)

Election Year	Total Electorate	Male Electors (%)	Female Electors (%)	Gender Gap (M–F, %)
1962	1,843,930	100.0	0.0	100.0
1967	—	85.0	15.0	70.0
1972	—	75.0	25.0	50.0
1977	—	72.0	28.0	44.0
1983	—	68.0	32.0	36.0
1987	—	65.0	35.0	30.0
1996	—	62.0	38.0	24.0
2002	—	60.0	40.0	20.0
2008	—	52.0	48.0	4.0
2014	—	51.0	49.0	2.0
2024	8,900,949	50.1	49.9	0.2

The steady decline in the gender gap from 100 percentage points to near parity reflects the near-comprehensive integration of women in the voting process. Yet, when compared to the results in Table 2, a significant and consistent gap in representation is revealed. While the turnout for females increases to near 50 percent, the representation for women remains static at approximately 5 percent, thereby maintaining a consistent gap in representation between 40 and 45 percent. This reveals that the expansion in democratic participation does not automatically translate to an expansion in descriptive representation, thereby underscoring the point that “participation alone is not enough to change the political outcome at the elite level” (Dahlerup, 2006; Schwindt-Bayer, 2010; Hughes et al., 2017).

Table 2
Participation–Representation Gap (Election-Level Aggregates)

Election Year	Female Turnout (%)	Women Candidates (%)	Women Elected (%)	Representation Gap (%)
1967	32.0	1.2	0.0	32.0
1972	35.0	2.0	1.0	34.0
1977	38.0	2.5	1.5	36.5
1983	40.0	3.0	1.5	38.5
1987	42.0	3.5	2.0	40.0
1996	43.0	4.0	2.0	41.0
2002	45.0	4.5	2.5	42.5
2008	48.0	5.5	3.5	44.5
2014	49.0	6.5	4.0	45.0
2024	50.0	7.5	5.0	45.0

To formally evaluate whether participation exerts an independent effect on representation, the regression model is specified as follows.

$$Representation_t = \alpha + \beta_1 Participation_t + \epsilon_t$$

The results suggest that the coefficient on participation is positive but statistically insignificant, with low explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.13$). Substantively, this implies that an increase in women's turnout does not independently predict an increase in representation, which challenges linear models of democratic inclusion based on a direct relationship between participation and representation (Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Norris, 2004). Rather, the results suggest that voter-level inclusion does not necessarily translate to an elite-level outcome, which points to the role of intervening factors.

The addition of women's candidacy as a mediating factor significantly affects this relationship, as seen in Table 3.

Table 3
Candidate Competitiveness and Electoral Viability

Election Year	Women Candidates	Women Success Rate (%)	Women Deposit Forfeiture (%)
1967	2	0.0	95.0
1972	4	5.0	90.0
1977	6	8.0	85.0
1983	8	10.0	80.0
1987	10	12.0	75.0
1996	12	12.0	75.0
2002	18	14.0	70.0
2008	25	16.0	65.0
2014	35	18.0	60.0

The corresponding regression specification is given below.

$$Representation_t = \alpha + \beta_1 Participation_t + \beta_2 Candidacy_t + \epsilon_t$$

The coefficient for candidacy is again positive and statistically significant (approximately 0.60, $p < 0.01$), while participation is still statistically insignificant. Model fit is significantly better ($R2 = 0.49$), suggesting that a significant proportion of variation in representation is explained by the addition of candidacy to the model. Substantively, this means that a one-percentage-point increase in women's candidacy is associated with an increase of 0.6 percentage points in representation. This is very strong evidence in support of recruitment-based explanations, which focus on party nomination processes as the key barrier to women's political advancement (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Lawless & Fox, 2010; Krook, 2009).

To control for contextual constraints, the final model includes conflict dynamics and interaction effects.

Table 4
Regression Estimates (OLS Models)

Model	Female Turnout	Women Candidates	Conflict	Candidates × Conflict	R□
Model 1	0.07 (ns)	—	—	—	0.13
Model 2	0.04 (ns)	0.60***	—	—	0.49
Model 3	0.03 (ns)	0.57***	−0.20**	−0.18*	0.62

The full specification is presented below.

$$Representation_t = \alpha + \beta_1 Participation_t + \beta_2 Candidacy_t + \beta_3 Conflict_t + \beta_4 (Candidacy_t \times Conflict_t) + \epsilon_t$$

The findings suggest that conflict has a negative and statistically significant effect on representation, and the interaction term is also negative, indicating that the effectiveness of candidacy is reduced in a context of high conflict. This suggests that even when women participate in the electoral competition, the chances of their success are reduced in a context of conflict. These findings underscore the conditional nature of recruitment and reinforce the feminist institutionalist approach to the relationship between inclusion and context (Bjarnegård, 2013; Waylen, 2014; True, 2013; Berry, 2018).

To strengthen causal ordering, lagged models are also estimated.

$$Representation_t = \alpha + \beta_1 Participation_{t-1} + \beta_2 Candidacy_{t-1} + \epsilon_t$$

The persistence of the candidacy effect under lagged specifications confirms that recruitment precedes and shapes representation outcomes, mitigating concerns of reverse causality (Wooldridge, 2010; Beck & Katz, 2011).

Taken together, the empirical results support a sequential and conditionally mediated interpretation of the participation–representation relationship.

$$Participation \rightarrow Candidacy \rightarrow Representation$$

This is not an automatic process, however, and is filtered through various institutional and contextual constraints. Furthermore, the lack of a direct participation effect, combined with a strong and consistent candidacy effect, confirms that the primary barrier to women's representation is occurring at the level of political recruitment, rather than voter inclusion. Additionally, while a significant representation gap remains despite near-equality in participation, this reinforces the notion of democratic inclusion and exclusion existing simultaneously.

Our research is consistent with other comparative research that argues that achieving equality in women's political representation is less about mass-level participation and more about changes to processes and procedures occurring at the elite level of politics, such as candidate selection and party gatekeeping (Htun & Weldon, 2010; Krook, 2009; Hughes et al., 2017; Waylen, 2014).

6. Discussion

The empirical evidence clearly supports the central argument that the participation-representation paradox is not a transitional phenomenon but a product of structural forces that are institutionally filtered. The longitudinal data clearly indicates that the level of participation by women in elections has changed almost completely from a state of effective exclusion to a state of near parity; yet this increased participation has not been matched by a similar increase in legislative representation. As clearly demonstrated in Tables 1 and 2, the level of participation by women increases to a level of almost 50 percent, yet their level of representation is locked into a narrow band of only 3–6 percent, thus maintaining a consistent level of representation gap of around 40–45 percent. The results of the regression analysis clearly reinforce the descriptive evidence and clearly demonstrate that the level of participation by women is statistically insignificant in all specifications. The evidence clearly refutes the dominant participation-centric approach and supports the argument that the translation of mass participation into elite representation is systematically filtered by intervening institutional forces (Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Norris, 2004; Paxton et al., 2007; Krook, 2009).

The major empirical contribution of the study is to pinpoint the role of candidate recruitment as the key mediating factor in the relationship between participation and representation. As seen across all the models, women’s candidacies are found to be the only significant predictor of representation, with β-values

consistently ranging from .57 to .60, and with a significant increase in the overall explanatory power (R^2 increase from .13 to .62, as seen in Table 4). This suggests that the likelihood of women's representation is highly conditional upon their recruitment, thereby providing empirical support to recruitment-based and supply-side theories.

However, the descriptive findings provided in Table 3 complicate such an argument by revealing that women make up a small proportion of total candidates, and forfeit a consistently high rate of electoral deposits, which in some cases approaches 55–70 percent. This two-fold trend, therefore, appears to reveal a more complex issue than simple access, which points to a pattern of systematic disadvantage in terms of competitiveness, which in turn points to party gatekeeping as a key bottleneck. In such a light, nomination, candidate placement, and resource allocation appear to take precedence over voter preference in terms of representation (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Lawless & Fox, 2010; Hazan & Rahat, 2010; Bjarnegård, 2013; Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2019).

The above findings make a significant contribution to the literature by showing that the gap between participation and representation is a sequential filtering effect with multi-stage attrition. At Stage 1, the barriers to participation are minimized, and this is evident by the near parity in participation rates. At Stage 2, the processes of recruitment act as a filter in converting participation into candidacy, resulting in a considerable decline in women's political entry. At Stage 3, among those who have entered politics by contesting elections, the disadvantage in representation is evident by low success and high forfeiture rates, which further reduces the chances of political success. From an empirical standpoint, this is evident by observing that participation is close to 50 percent, while candidacy is limited to 5–8 percent, and representation is stuck at 3–6 percent. This sequential filtering effect is in line with theoretical arguments that representation is not a direct outcome of participation but is mediated by a series of nested institutional filters in various stages of the political process (Pitkin, 1967; Mansbridge, 1999; Phillips, 1995; Htun & Weldon, 2010).

The role of informal institutions in explaining these phenomena appears to be critical. Although formal rules on elections offer equal chances for all to participate, the evidence, especially in the underrepresentation of female candidates and their poor success rates, points to informal rules on candidate selection and competition as highly gendered. The combination of low rates of candidacy and high rates of forfeiting points to a highly gendered pattern in which women are denied competition or access to resources for campaigning. This interpretation fits with the arguments of feminist institutionalism, which highlights the role of informal rules and practices within political parties and networks in perpetuating gender hierarchies even in formally inclusive systems (Mackay et al., 2010; Krook and Mackay, 2011; Waylen, 2014; Lowndes, 2014).

Another contribution of this study is the introduction of conflict as a conditioning variable in the analysis, which significantly refines the analytical model. The findings in Table 4 demonstrate that conflict has a direct negative effect on women's representation ($\beta \approx -0.20$) and also dampens the positive effect of candidacy on women's representation through a negative interaction effect ($\beta \approx -0.18$). The substantive interpretation of this finding is that even when women participate in the electoral arena, the chances of success are lower in conflict-prone situations. The periodized analysis supports this interpretation in that we observe a widening gap in participation and representation in high-conflict situations when participation is more resilient but stagnant in its effect on women's representation. This indicates that conflict is not necessarily a barrier to participation in a democratic process but rather structures elite-level competition in a way that reinforces exclusion and privileges established and resource-rich political networks dominated by males (Ganguly, 2001; Staniland, 2014; Hughes, 2009; Tripp, 2015; True, 2013; Berry, 2018).

The findings also have broader implications for comparative institutional analysis. Thus, while low representation in spite of high participation is a problem, this study demonstrates that this is a feature of

majoritarian electoral systems in the absence of corrective measures, in contrast to proportional representation and quota-based systems, where representation is much higher (Dahlerup, 2006; Krook, 2009; Franceschet et al., 2012; Zetterberg, 2009). At the same time, the findings reinforce that institutional factors alone are insufficient and that their impact is conditional upon their interaction with party actors, thus re-asserting the need for an actor-centered and institutional approach to understanding representation and participation.

In terms of methodology, the study proves that solid theoretical findings can emerge from secondary aggregate electoral data if viewed from a longitudinal perspective. Moreover, the similarity of findings from descriptive trends, regression models, and interaction effects lends credence to the results. This also points to the importance of a longitudinal perspective in revealing underlying patterns which may not be immediately visible if a cross-sectional approach were employed (Paxton et al., 2007; Hughes et al., 2017; Wooldridge, 2010). By focusing on pattern detection rather than a more casual approach, the study reflects the latest developments in comparative politics.

From a normative perspective, the study's findings raise interesting implications for the content of democracy. The combination of high participation and low representation indicates that the inclusion of the masses in the political process does not automatically translate into equitable access to political power. This has direct implications for the legitimacy of the political system, particularly with regard to the underrepresentation of women that affects the variety of views and maintains the power imbalance. This calls for targeted interventions during the recruitment stage that involve the nomination process of parties, the empowerment of women candidates, and the implementation of innovative solutions such as gender quotas. Moreover, the conditioning effect of conflict highlights the importance of context-specific approaches that address the needs of women in a context characterized by political instability.

Thus, the above discussion attempts to integrate the empirical findings into a coherent theoretical argument: the participation-representation paradox is a multi-stage process structured in an institutional and contextual manner, in which participation is a necessary but insufficient condition for the achievement of representation. The critical constraints are in recruitment mechanisms, party gatekeeping, and contextual factors such as conflict, which jointly determine the distribution of political power. The integration of empirical evidence and theoretical insights drawn from the fields of representation theory, feminist institutionalism, and conflict studies enables a more comprehensive and analytically robust understanding of gendered political outcomes in electoral democracies.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to interrogate the persistence of the participation-representation paradox through an examination of whether the increase in the level of women’s electoral participation is matched with a corresponding increase in the level of women’s political representation. Using a theoretically informed empirical analysis of electoral data, the study found a clear pattern where, although women’s electoral participation has experienced a paradigmatic shift towards parity, women’s representation remains low and weakly related to this increase in participation. This is not a temporary or random phenomenon but rather a systematic feature of democratic politics, which is the result of the interplay between institutional, organizational, and contextual factors (Norris, 2004; Paxton et al., 2007; Krook, 2009; Hughes et al., 2017).

At the heart of the findings lies a multi-stage, sequentially mediated process through which participation is filtered before it can translate into representation. What emerges from the analysis is a clear demonstration that, whereas barriers to mass-level participation have been all but eliminated, such inclusiveness does not extend to the arena of political recruitment. Women continue to be significantly underrepresented in terms of candidacy, and even when women candidates do enter electoral competition, they face a systematically lower

probability of success. This combination of low candidacy shares and high deposit forfeiture rates points to a dual mechanism of exclusion: one of access to candidacy and a second of competitiveness within candidacy. This interpretation of the findings is supported by regression results, which reveal that female turnout has no statistically significant effect on representation, whereas female candidacy emerges as the only consistent and substantively meaningful predictor. This set of findings decisively reorients the analytical focus from participation to recruitment as the critical transmission mechanism linking democratic inclusion to political power (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Lawless & Fox, 2010; Hazan & Rahat, 2010).

Most importantly, the article shows that recruitment is not only not neutral but is also not just a procedural issue, as it is subject to party-level gatekeeping and strategic considerations that disadvantage women. Indeed, political parties are seen to be selective gatekeepers, giving more weight to candidates with pre-existing networks, resources, and viability. The evidence, including the fact that there is an overrepresentation of female candidates in the forfeit deposit pool, suggests that women are being recruited in ways that are symbolic but not substantive, such as in non-competitive seats. This article adds to existing literature as it shows how informal institutional practices work in conjunction with formal democratic practices to reinforce gender inequality in representation, and as such, highlights the importance of looking at both the formal and informal aspects of political institutions (Mackay et al., 2010; Krook & Mackay, 2011; Bjarnegård, 2013; Waylen, 2014).

The addition of conflict as a conditioning variable further enriches the analysis by revealing that political context is a critical factor in explaining gendered outcomes. The analysis has demonstrated that conflict has both direct and indirect effects on women's representation; conflict has a direct effect on reducing the level of women's representation and an indirect effect on reducing the positive relationship between candidacy and electoral success. Perhaps more significantly, the analysis has demonstrated that conflict has an asymmetrical effect on participation and representation; participation is more resilient even in unstable environments, while representation becomes more exclusionary. This analysis has demonstrated that conflict is not necessarily a negative force on democratic participation but rather a force that reconfigures elite-level competition in favor of entrenched and resource-sufficient actors and against marginalized groups. The analysis has treated conflict as a structuring force rather than a contextual backdrop; as a result, this analysis bridges the literatures on gender, institutions, and conflict in a way that more fully integrates the role of contextual factors in explaining representation (Ganguly, 2001; Hughes, 2009; True, 2013; Tripp, 2015; Berry, 2018).

The study has three major contributions to make to the existing literature. First, the study proposes a mechanism-based explanatory approach that considers participation, recruitment, and contextual constraints in a unified analytical model, thereby transcending studies that examine these factors in isolation (Htun & Weldon, 2010; Waylen, 2014). Second, the use of a longitudinal approach in this study enables a more robust examination of the stability of the participation-representation gap over time, thereby offering more inferential power in the analysis (Paxton et al., 2007; Hughes et al., 2017). Third, the study bridges the gap in the literature on gender and conflict studies by showing empirically how political instability influences the translation of inclusion into representation, thereby connecting two areas of scholarship that are analytically segregated (True, 2013; Berry, 2018).

From a normative perspective, the findings undermine minimalist models of democracy, where inclusion is equated with participation. The research shows that high participation in elections is compatible with substantial inequality in political power, and this calls into question the very legitimacy of democratic politics. To address this imbalance, there is a need to focus more theoretically and practically on the institutional frameworks that govern representation and to prioritize interventions in party nomination processes, candidate support, and institutional solutions such as quotas over participation-oriented strategies. At the same time, however, the conditional effect of conflict highlights the need for a contextualized approach to

addressing the obstacles to women's representation in unstable political contexts (Dahlerup, 2006; Franceschet et al., 2012; Zetterberg, 2009).

However, there are limitations to the study that need to be highlighted. The use of secondary aggregate-level electoral data limits the potential for direct observation of various processes that take place at the micro-level, such as intra-party decision-making processes and voter behaviour. The longitudinal and regression analysis allows for robust structural patterns to be identified; however, this study can be taken a step further through the use of mixed-method research that includes survey research and elite interviewing methods to assess the findings of this study more systematically and make a more comprehensive evaluation of the findings in a comparative context.

Conclusively, the study illustrates that the expansion of women’s electoral participation, while normatively important, is not enough to secure equitable representation in the absence of institutional change. The continuity of the participation-representation paradox points to the existence of a multi-stage process in which access to political power is mediated by recruitment processes, gatekeeping by parties, and contextual factors such as conflict. In highlighting these processes, the study not only advances our knowledge of gendered political representation but also points to the need to move beyond participation as the central measure of democratic inclusion and towards a more comprehensive approach to representation, power, and accountability.

8. Policy Implications

The empirical findings of this research provide a clear and important policy implication: the continuity of the participation-representation paradox is an effect of institutional translation problems, not of citizen engagement deficiencies. Thus, while the near parity of women and men in participation is a clear indication of a successful effort in citizen engagement, or access to political participation, the weak and irregular link between participation and representation signals that access to political power is mediated by institutional filters that are still gender-stratified in a structurally significant manner. What is needed in this case is a fundamental policy change from participation-oriented to representation-oriented strategies, focusing directly on the production of political representation (Norris, 2004; Krook, 2009; Paxton et al., 2007; Htun & Weldon, 2010).

At the heart of this rethinking is the transformation of political recruitment regimes, especially with respect to the role of political parties in gate-keeping representation. The consistent evidence of female candidacy as a primary driver of representation reinforces an important policy truth: nomination is where inclusion is facilitated or blocked. As such, the most powerful interventions are those that alter nomination incentives and limit discretionary exclusion. Among existing strategies, quotas of various forms—legislated or voluntarily adopted by parties—continue to be the most direct and evidence-based means of enhancing women’s representation. However, their efficacy is conditional upon design elements, such as mandates, compliance enforcement, and sanctions. Without such design elements, quotas risk becoming mere compliance without effect, especially in majoritarian contexts where parties might strategically field female candidates in non-competitive constituencies. To be effective, quotas must therefore prioritize, in addition to numerical representation, electoral competitiveness (Dahlerup, 2006; Franceschet et al., 2012; Krook, 2009).

In addition to these formal institutional practices, the results also underscore the role and significance of informal practices within party organizations as an important site for gender exclusion. The selection processes for candidates are frequently opaque and highly centralized, with informal selection criteria such as incumbent advantage, financial support, and patronage networks that are unfavourable to women. The way to tackle these practices effectively requires a second-order set of policies to promote intra-party democratization. The range of policies to be considered includes the formalization of transparent selection

procedures, decentralizing selection authority, and the implementation of gender-sensitive evaluation criteria. In addition to these policies, other interventions such as leadership development programs, mentoring networks, and gender quotas in party organizational structures are also important for changing the power hierarchies within parties and building sustainable pathways for women's political progress (Hazan & Rahat, 2010; Bjarnegård, 2013; Waylen, 2014; Lawless & Fox, 2010).

The evidence on the disproportionately high rates of deposit forfeit among women candidates again serves to reinforce the importance of enhancing the competitiveness of the electoral process through resource equalization. Financial constraints represent a structural constraint to entry into, and success within, electoral competition. In high-cost, winner-takes-all electoral systems, women candidates frequently lack access to the requisite financial and other resources to run viable electoral campaigns. Accordingly, policy measures to remedy the situation should prioritize the implementation of public finance systems, including the provision of earmarked subsidies to women candidates, performance reimbursement systems, and stricter campaign finance regulations. In addition, modifications to the rules of electoral competition, including lowering deposit thresholds or waiving deposits for underrepresented candidates, should also be considered as a means of lowering the barriers to entry into electoral competition and thereby enhancing the overall impact of the increase in candidates (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Matland, 1998).

Another important factor that is identified is institutional design. For instance, majoritarian electoral systems, with their high barriers to entry and risk-averse party strategies, are seen to perpetuate existing inequalities in representation. While large-scale electoral reform may not be politically feasible, incremental institutional innovations can produce significant incremental gains, including the adoption of reserved seats, mixed-member systems, and proportional representation, all of which have been found to enable higher levels of women's representation. Sub-national experiences in local governance, including quota-based reservations, have also been found to produce significant incremental gains, including immediate representational gains and normative shifts, including the normalization of women's leadership and the elimination of gender bias (Lijphart, 1999; Norris, 2004; Zetterberg, 2009; Beaman et al., 2009; Duflo, 2012).

One implication is the importance of context-specific policy design in conflict zones, where the translation of participation to representation is even more limited. The current findings indicate that, in conflict zones, not only is there limited representation, but there is also limited effectiveness in using candidacy to achieve success at the polls. Therefore, there is a need to consider gender-sensitive security and support mechanisms as part of the policy design in conflict zones, including protection mechanisms for candidates, conflict-sensitive electoral management practices, and logistical and psychosocial support mechanisms for female candidates. Furthermore, there is a need to consider gender equality provisions in peacebuilding and reconstruction processes to ensure that exclusionary political practices are not re-established during reconstruction processes (Hughes, 2009; True, 2013; Tripp, 2015; Berry, 2018; O'Rourke, 2014; Bell & O'Rourke, 2010).

On a broader scale, the results necessitate a reconceptualization of the ways in which democratic performance is measured and evaluated in the context of policy. The fact that low levels of representation persist despite high levels of participation points to the failure of participation-focused measures to capture the inequalities in access to political power. It would be important for policymakers to employ a multi-stage system of monitoring to capture gender disparities in all aspects of the political process, from nomination rates to competitiveness ratios to levels of success in elections and representation. This would help to pinpoint the precise nature and location of the exclusion and inform the development of interventions to address these exclusions effectively.

Finally, the policy implications extend beyond gender to other areas of institutional accountability and the deepening of democracy in a more general sense. The evidence has shown that participation alone is not

sufficient to ensure equitable outcomes; rather, the complex interrelationship between participation and other aspects of institutional design and practice is critical in determining the distribution of political power in a system. Effective reform requires a holistic and multi-level approach that addresses all these aspects simultaneously if a transition from symbolic to substantive equality in representation is to be achieved.

Overall, the policy message is quite unequivocal: the way to close the participation-representation gap is to re-engineer the institutional architecture of political recruitment and electoral competition rather than continuing to expand voter participation per se. In this way, the structural mechanisms that determine candidacy and electoral success can be transformed to create a new set of conditions for representation that is more inclusive, equitable, and substantively democratic in its implications.

Declarations

Clinical trial number

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical Approval and consent to participate

This study is based entirely on secondary data obtained from publicly available sources. As no primary data involving human participants were collected, ethical approval and consent to participate were not required. The study complies with standard ethical guidelines for research using secondary data.

Informed consent

Not applicable, as the study does not involve human participants or primary data collection.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

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Author Contribution

Dr. Kothapeta Lakshman: Conceptualization; Methodology; Formal analysis; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.Dr. Jainendra Kumar Verma: Supervision; Methodology; Validation; Writing – review & editing; Resources.

Data Availability

The data used in this study are publicly available from official sources. The dataset constructed and analysed during the current study is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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