

**The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE**

**Wednesday, 19 March, 2025**

**Edition: International Table of Contents**

<p>Page 03 <b>Syllabus : GS 2 : Indian Polity</b></p>	<p><b>'Right to development a priority under fundamental rights'</b></p>
<p>Page 03 <b>Syllabus : GS 1: Art and Culture</b></p>	<p><b>Standing stones of Mudumal in Telangana on tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites</b></p>
<p>Page 04 <b>Syllabus : GS 2 : Indian Polity</b></p>	<p><b>Supreme Court to consider if Lokpal has powers over judges of constitutional courts</b></p>
<p>Page 05 <b>Syllabus : Prelims Fact</b></p>	<p><b>India takes 24th spot in free speech survey</b></p>
<p><b>In News</b></p>	<p><b>Exercise Varuna</b></p>
<p>Page 11 : Editorial Analysis: <b>Syllabus : GS 2 : Indian Polity</b></p>	<p><b>What factors influence women's political participation?</b></p>

The Supreme Court of India has set aside separate judgments of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and the Madras High Court, which had halted development activities at Auroville.

- ➔ The verdict emphasizes the need to balance environmental protection with the right to development, recognizing both as fundamental rights under the Constitution.

### Key Highlights of the Judgment:

#### ➔ Supreme Court's Observations:

- While the right to a clean environment is protected under Articles 14 and 21, the \*right to development\* through industrialization is also a fundamental right under Articles 14, 19, and 21.
- Sustainable development should strike a golden balance between environmental protection and economic progress.

#### ➔ Setting Aside NGT's 2022 Order:

- The NGT, Chennai, had halted Auroville's township project, citing the absence of environmental clearance.
- The Supreme Court ruled that the NGT exceeded its jurisdiction in stopping the development.

#### ➔ Master Plan Approval:

- The Auroville Master Plan was approved by the Auroville Foundation and the Ministry of Human Resource Development in 2001, later published in the official gazette in 2010.
- The Supreme Court upheld the plan, stating that development should proceed as per legally approved frameworks.

#### ➔ Forest Conservation Argument:

- The opposition argued that road construction would destroy Darkali forest.
- The Auroville Foundation countered that it was a man-made plantation, not a natural forest, and hence did not require clearance under the Forest (Conservation) Act,

## 'Right to development a priority under fundamental rights'

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court set aside, in separate judgments on Monday, a National Green Tribunal (NGT) order and a Madras High Court decision to halt development activities at Auroville. The decision cited lack of environmental clearance while outlining the need for sustainable development which strike a "golden balance" between the rights to development and clean environment.

"Though it is true that the precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle are part of the environmental law of the country, it is equally true that while the right to clean environment is a guaranteed fundamental right under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution, the right to development through industrialisation equally claims priority under fundamental rights, particularly under Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution," a Bench of Justices Bela M. Trivedi and P. B. Varale observed in their judgment.

A Bench of Justices Trivedi and Varale set aside the April 2022 order of the NGT, Chennai, which directed the Auroville Foundation not to proceed with further construction in its township project until environmental clearance was obtained.

Setting aside the NGT verdict of 2022, Justice Trivedi concluded that the Tribunal had "committed gross error in assuming the



The members of Auroville Foundation gather around the Matrimandir. FILE PHOTO

jurisdiction and giving directions untenable in law". The court, in a second judgment also delivered on March 17, upheld a separate appeal filed by The Auroville Foundation against a March 2024 order of the High Court.

In the judgment concerning the NGT order, the apex court explained that the grievance raised by the respondents was with regard to the construction of roads as mentioned in the Master Plan by the Foundation.

Justice Trivedi noted the Master Plan had been approved by the the Foundation and by the Minister of Human Resource Development back in 2001 and published in the official gazette in 2010.

The argument raised in the Tribunal against the construction was that it would destroy an area called the Darkali forest.

The Foundation had countered that areas cannot be treated as a forest. They contended that it was a man-made plantation which did not require environmental clearance mandated under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.

1980.

➔ **Impact on Future Development Projects:**

- The ruling reinforces the principle that development projects cannot be arbitrarily stalled if they adhere to legal frameworks.
- However, sustainable development remains key—projects must ensure environmental compliance while promoting economic growth.

**Conclusion**

- ➔ The Supreme Court's ruling highlights the necessity of balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability. While environmental concerns must be addressed, development projects should not face arbitrary hurdles if they comply with legal frameworks. This judgment sets a precedent for future cases involving development and environmental conservation in India.

**UPSC Mains Practice Question**

**Ques:**The right to development and the right to a clean environment are both fundamental rights under the Indian Constitution. In light of the recent Supreme Court verdict on Auroville, discuss how sustainable development can balance these rights. **(250 words)**

The menhirs or standing stones of Mudumal in Narayanpet, Telangana, have been added to the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The proposal was forwarded by the Indian government, highlighting the site's historical and astronomical significance.

# Standing stones of Mudumal in Telangana on tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites

**Serish Naniseti**

HYDERABAD

The *menhirs* or the standing stones of Mudumal in Narayanpet in Telangana have made it to the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The application was forwarded by the Centre to the world body.

Mudumal, on the banks of the Krishna that separates the State from Karnataka, has been a well-known *menhir* site.

“Nearly 1,200 large sized stones standing vertically map the skies as it existed 3,000 years ago. From them, we know the date and positions of the



The *menhirs* in Mudumal in Narayanpet of Telangana.

constellations of Leo, Ursa Major, Ursa Minor, Virgo, Taurus etc.,” says conservation architect Surya Narayan Murthy who helped

prepare the application for the Mudumal site in collaboration with DAM and Decan Heritage Academy Trust.

## Key Highlights of the News

### About Mudumal Menhirs

- ▶ Located in Mudumal, Telangana, on the banks of the Krishna River.
- ▶ Estimated to be around 3,000 years old from the Megalithic period.
- ▶ Nearly 1,200 large, vertically standing stones align with celestial constellations like Leo, Ursa Major, Ursa Minor, Virgo, and Taurus.
- ▶ Likely used as ancient astronomical markers for timekeeping and rituals.

### UNESCO Tentative List and Its Importance

- ▶ Sites on the tentative list are potential candidates for World Heritage Status.
- ▶ Inclusion increases global recognition, conservation funding, and tourism potential.

### Archaeological and Cultural Importance

- ▶ Menhirs are megalithic structures, commonly used for burial, rituals, or astronomical observations.
- ▶ Similar sites exist in Britain (Stonehenge), France, and Karnataka (Brahmagiri Megaliths).

## UPSC Mains Practice Question

**Ques** :Discuss the significance of megalithic sites in India with special reference to the Mudumal menhirs of Telangana. How do such sites contribute to our understanding of prehistoric cultures and astronomical knowledge?(250 words)

The Supreme Court has decided to examine whether the Lokpal, India's top anti-corruption ombudsman, has jurisdiction over judges of constitutional courts.

# Supreme Court to consider if Lokpal has powers over judges of constitutional courts

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**  
NEW DELHI

A Bench of the Supreme Court's senior-most judges headed by Justice B.R. Gavai on Tuesday decided to examine in detail if judges of constitutional courts come within the jurisdiction of the country's top ombudsman, Lokpal, as public functionaries including the Prime Minister, Union Ministers, Members of Parliament and Union government officials.

"We will consider the issue of the jurisdiction of the Lokpal," Justice Gavai addressed the courtroom.

The court was hearing a *suo motu* case initiated after Lokpal, through a January 27 order, assumed jurisdiction to investigate complaints against serving High Court judges. The



ombudsman classified High Court judges as public servants who came within the ambit of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 same as Government Ministers and officials.

The Special Bench had stayed the Lokpal order on February 20, terming it "very disturbing" with a potential to impact the independence of the judiciary.

Appearing on Tuesday before the Special Bench also comprising Justices Surya Kant and A.S. Oka, Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta said the "limited question" was whether judges of constitutional courts were indeed public servants under the Lokpal Act.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, assisting the court, said he wanted to go a "little further" to urge the Bench to examine if criminal complaints against judges could be registered in police stations.

"Can a complaint be ever filed outside the remit of a constitutional authority. That is the fundamental issue. Can someone go to a police station and register a first information report (FIR)?" he submitted.

However, Mr. Mehta ob-

jected to extending the ambit of the *suo motu* case. He insisted the Bench should confine its present line of inquiry to whether the judges of constitutional courts were public servants under Section 14 of the Lokpal Act.

The top law officer contended that the Constitution Bench had already, in a majority judgment in the *K. Veeraswami* case of 1991, settled the question of whether the police could register an FIR against a sitting High Court or Supreme Court judge.

The Lokpal has effectively bypassed long Constitutional and procedural formalities by directly assuming jurisdiction to investigate High Court judges.

In its January 27 order, the Lokpal had found the

argument that a High Court judge was outside the ombudsman's jurisdiction "too naive".

It concluded that a High Court judge came well within the ambit of clause (f) of Section 14(1) of the 2013 Act.

Clause (f) of Section 14 notes the Lokpal has jurisdiction over "any person who is or has been a chairperson or member or officer or employee in any body or Board or corporation or authority or company or society or trust or autonomous body (by whatever name called) established by an Act of Parliament or wholly or partly financed by the Central government or controlled by it".

The Lokpal interpreted the term 'any person' in the clause to include a judge of a High Court.

- This issue arose after the Lokpal assumed jurisdiction to investigate complaints against serving High Court judges in a January 27 order. The Supreme Court stayed the Lokpal order on February 20, calling it "very disturbing" as it could impact the independence of the judiciary.

## Key Issues in the Case

### ➤ Jurisdiction of Lokpal Over Judges

- The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 gives Lokpal the power to investigate public functionaries such as the Prime Minister, Union Ministers, MPs, and officials.

## Daily News Analysis

- The Special Bench of the Supreme Court is now examining if High Court and Supreme Court judges fall under the category of public servants under Section 14(1)(f) of the Lokpal Act.
- The Lokpal argues that High Court judges are covered under this section, while the Supreme Court has raised concerns about judicial independence.
- **Impact on Judicial Independence**
  - If the Lokpal can investigate High Court judges, it could compromise the separation of powers between the judiciary and executive.
  - Judicial accountability is necessary, but it must be ensured through constitutional mechanisms like the impeachment process under Articles 124 and 217 of the Constitution.
- **Reference to the K. Veeraswami Case (1991)**
  - The Constitution Bench in the K. Veeraswami case ruled that a First Information Report (FIR) against a sitting High Court or Supreme Court judge could only be registered with the prior approval of the Chief Justice of India.
  - The Solicitor General argued that this precedent must be upheld, preventing any direct police action or Lokpal intervention without constitutional safeguards.

### UPSC Mains Practice Question

**Ques** :Examine the constitutional validity of the Lokpal's jurisdiction over High Court and Supreme Court judges. How can judicial accountability be ensured while maintaining judicial independence?(250 words)

A global survey conducted by the Future of Free Speech, an independent U.S.-based think tank, has ranked India 24th out of 33 countries in terms of support for free speech.

# India takes 24th spot in free speech survey

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

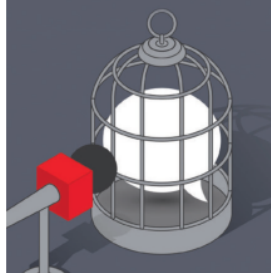
A new global survey by the Future of Free Speech, an independent U.S.-based think tank, has ranked India 24th out of the 33 countries surveyed on the question of support for free speech. Its report, titled ‘Who in the world supports free speech?’ states that “while abstract support for free speech remains strong, commitment to protecting controversial speech is eroding in many parts of the world.”

The survey, conducted in October 2024, also revealed that “more countries have seen declines rather than improvements in free speech support since 2021, with some of the biggest drops occurring in democratic nations like the United States, Israel, and Japan”.

Scandinavia dominated

### The right to free speech

India, with a score of 62.6, was placed between South Africa (66.9) and Lebanon (61.8)



- Scandinavia dominated the top rankings, with Norway and Denmark finishing at the apex of the Future of the Free Speech Index
- Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan showed the biggest improvements, though they remained at the lower end of the ranking
- Some authoritarian-leaning nations— such as Hungary (85.5) and Venezuela (81.8) — scored high
- The survey found that a majority of Indians consider it very important to speak freely without government censorship, but support for criticism of government policies was below the global average

the top rankings, with Norway and Denmark finishing at the apex of the Future of the Free Speech Index with scores of 87.9 and 87.0.

### Disconnect flagged

Indonesia (56.8), Malaysia (55.4), and Pakistan (57.0) showed the biggest improvements, though they

remained at the lower end of the ranking. India, with a score of 62.6, was placed 24th, between South Africa (66.9) and Lebanon (61.8). At the same time, some authoritarian-leaning nations – such as Hungary (85.5) and Venezuela (81.8) – scored high, “suggesting a disconnect between government restric-

tions and public attitudes”.

As regards its findings concerning India, the survey found that while a majority of Indians consider it very important to speak freely without government censorship, support for criticism of government policies was below the global average.

For instance, 37% of Indian respondents supported the statement that “governments should be able to prevent people” from criticising government policies – the highest percentage among all the countries surveyed.

### Public sentiment

In contrast, 5% of the respondents supported this statement in the U.K., while only 3% endorsed this sentiment in Denmark.

In general, nations that are more supportive of free speech tend to enjoy more freedom of expression in

practice and vice versa. But India was an exception to this pattern. “The most substantial disconnects from the general pattern are represented by India, Hungary, and Venezuela where the actual protection of free speech is very low compared to the popular support. These are all cases of democratic backsliding in countries that previously demonstrated high levels of respect for political liberties, including freedom of expression,” the report stated.

When asked whether their ability to speak freely about political matters has improved or worsened over the past year, “Indians and South Africans believe that they have undergone the most significant progress, although observers and rankings tend to agree that the situation in India has become worse, if anything,” the report noted.

- The report, titled "Who in the World Supports Free Speech?", highlights that while abstract support for free speech remains strong globally, commitment to protecting controversial speech is declining.

## Key Findings of the Survey

### ➤ Global Trends

- Countries like the United States, Israel, and Japan saw a decline in support for free speech since 2021.
- Norway and Denmark topped the rankings with scores of 87.9 and 87.0, respectively.



- Indonesia (56.8), Malaysia (55.4), and Pakistan (57.0) showed the biggest improvements but remained at the lower end.

### ➔ **India's Position**

- India ranked 24th with a score of 62.6, placed between South Africa (66.9) and Lebanon (61.8).
- A majority of Indians consider free speech important, but support for criticism of government policies is below the global average.
- 37% of Indian respondents agreed that the government should have the power to prevent criticism of its policies—the highest among all surveyed countries.

### ➔ **Disconnect Between Public Opinion and Government Policies**

- Some authoritarian-leaning nations like Hungary (85.5) and Venezuela (81.8) scored high, showing a disconnect between government restrictions and public attitudes.
- The survey noted India, Hungary, and Venezuela as key examples of democratic backsliding, where public support for free speech remains strong, but actual protection is weak.

### ➔ **Perception vs. Reality in India**

- Many Indians believe their ability to speak freely has improved, but global rankings and observers suggest the opposite—that free speech protections in India have deteriorated..

## UPSC Prelims Practice Question

**Ques :Which of the following countries ranked highest in the Future of Free Speech Index?**

- a) United States
- b) Norway
- c) India
- d) Japan

**Answer: (b) Norway**

In News : Exercise Varuna

- ▶ The Indian and French Navies are gearing up for the 23rd edition of their bilateral naval exercise, VARUNA 2025.



**About Exercise Varuna**

- ▶ It is the bilateral Naval Exercise between India and France.
- ▶ Initiated in 1993, the exercise was christened 'Varuna' in 2001 and has become a hallmark of the India-France strategic bilateral relationship.
- ▶ VARUNA 2025 is the 23rd edition of the exercise and will take place in the Arabian Sea.
- ▶ It will showcase a series of high-intensity naval drills, emphasizing joint operations across sub-surface, surface, and aerial domains.
- ▶ The Indian Navy's aircraft carrier, INS Vikrant, and the French aircraft carrier, Charles de Gaulle, will participate alongside their fighter aircraft, destroyers, frigates, and an Indian Scorpene-class submarine, demonstrating the combined strength and operational capabilities of both naval forces.

## Daily News Analysis

- ▶ One of the key highlights of the exercise will be advanced air defence drills and mock air-to-air combat scenarios between the French Rafale-M and Indian MiG-29K fighter jets.
- ▶ These exercises aim to enhance tactical coordination and refine combat readiness.
- ▶ Additionally, anti-submarine warfare drills will focus on strengthening underwater domain awareness, while surface warfare operations will test the ability of both navies to execute synchronized engagements and manoeuvres.



Page : 11 Editorial Analysis

# What factors influence women's political participation?

While discussions on women's participation often highlight the social and cultural biases that hinder their electoral success, less attention is given to how everyday women engage with the electoral process

Rebecca Rose Varghese

Deshpande R., 'Shaping of the Woman Constituency in Indian Elections: Evidence from the NES Data', Studies in Indian Politics, Vol 12 Issue No. 2, 303-317, November 16, 2024

The participation of women in Indian politics has been a subject of extensive discourse among scholars, especially given the paradox that while India has produced several influential women leaders, overall political engagement among women remains poor. Unlike many countries where the gender gap in political participation began narrowing in the 1990s, India saw this shift only in the 2010s.

While discussions on women's participation often highlight the social and cultural biases that hinder their electoral success, less attention is given to how everyday women engage with the electoral process when opportunities arise. Their voting patterns, choices, and agency in shaping election outcomes remain under-explored. And, though political parties and women's movements frequently celebrate women voters during elections, this recognition often treats them as a homogeneous group, overlooking the intersections of caste, class, religion, and region that shape their political behaviour. Women's support for Donald Trump in the 2016 U.S. elections, and their participation in the riots of the 1990s in India illustrate how women's political engagement is far more complex and requires in-depth understanding.

It is within this context that Rajeshwari Deshpande's study, 'Shaping of the Woman Constituency in Indian Elections: Evidence from the NES Data', becomes significant. Her analysis of National Election Studies (NES) data sheds light on the increasing voter turnout among women and their growing participation in the political sphere. By examining how women vote and whether their choices are influenced primarily by gender or by other social identities, her research provides a nuanced understanding of the evolving role of women in Indian elections. Her findings help to understand whether we are closer to shaping a women's constituency in Indian elections. This study offers critical insights into the gendered dimensions of Indian elections, highlighting key patterns, contradictions, and challenges in women's political agency and its broader socio-political implications.

**More beneficiaries or active agents?** As mentioned earlier, it was only in 2010 that there was a significant increase in the share of women who voted; and all political parties sought to capitalise on this shift by introducing policies and schemes specifically targeting women. However, these policies often frame women as passive beneficiaries rather than political agents. Welfare programs like Ujjwala and the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana were pivotal to the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) victory in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, while schemes like 'Ladli Behna' and 'Ladli Laxmi' were credited for the party's success in Madhya Pradesh. These initiatives reinforce the



Women voters after casting their vote in the Lok Sabha elections in Prayagraj, on May 25, 2024. AP

notion of women as dependents, with political leaders positioned as benevolent providers rather than recognising women as autonomous decision-makers.

Deshpande argues that high voter turnout does not necessarily translate to real political power. For years, women were considered marginal participants in politics, with efforts made to carve out a 'non-political' political constituency for them. Despite their growing presence at the polls, political parties and media continue to frame their votes as driven by welfare benefits. Analysing NES data helps assess whether the rise in women voters signals real political agency or mere surface-level inclusion.

**Beyond voting**

While the increasing turnout of women voters in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections is noteworthy, voting is not the only form of political participation. Participation in rallies, campaigns, political affiliations, and policy advocacy also indicates political involvement. In these areas, women still lag behind men. Only 14% of women report seeking advice from their spouses on voting decisions – indicating growing agency – but this remains significantly higher than men's. This

suggests that despite increased voter participation, deeper political engagement faces social and structural barriers.

One explanation scholars offer for the increased turnout of women is the self-empowerment hypothesis, which suggests that rising literacy rates and employment opportunities have empowered women to vote independently. Efforts by the Election Commission to ensure women's voter registration could also be attributed to the increased turnout.

However, the author challenges this explanation, pointing out two critical contradictions: women's overall workforce participation remains low, weakening the argument that economic independence is driving higher turnout. Additionally, the proportion of registered female voters compared to male voters remains imbalanced, indicating that fewer women are being registered.

An alternative explanation for the increased women voter turnout could be the large-scale male migration of men contributing to higher turnout among women in States traditionally considered socially and economically 'backward'. These trends highlight that while

turnout has increased, broader political participation remains limited.

**Other identities**

Women's voting behaviour in India is not driven solely by gender identity but is also deeply shaped by regional, caste, and class dynamics. The NES data highlight that State-specific political and social contexts significantly influence electoral choices, undermining the idea of a unified, pan-Indian women's voting bloc. Instead, women's voting preferences are molded within the broader framework of their community identities.

State-level variations demonstrate this complexity. For instance, in States such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and West Bengal, where electoral politics have historically been shaped by strong regional parties, women's preferences are often aligned with regional political movements rather than national gender-based voting trends. Caste and class divisions further complicate this narrative. The BJP's voter base has traditionally been skewed toward urban, upper-class, and upper-caste groups, while Congress has drawn more support from the urban poor and marginalised communities. However, this alignment is also not absolute – many women, particularly from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, continue to vote based on the interests of their communities rather than on a broader gender-based agenda.

**Women's support for different parties**

NES data indicate that Congress has historically maintained a gender advantage, consistently receiving more female support than male. This trend continued in 2024, except in 2014, when the party suffered a nationwide decline. Left parties also had a gender advantage, but their declining influence has diminished this effect on the national stage. The BJP, in contrast, has faced a gender disadvantage, with fewer women voting for the party compared to men. However, this gap has been narrowing. Previously, the gender gap in BJP support exceeded 20%, whereas in 2024, it reduced to approximately 7%. The BJP's targeted outreach to women has contributed to this shift, though much of its support still comes only from welfare beneficiaries. Even within this group, men support the BJP more than women.

Region-specific variations further complicate women's support for the BJP. In some non-BJP-ruled States, more women than men voted for the party, despite a lack of increased female voter turnout. Conversely, in other States, women showed a stronger preference for opposition parties, creating an uneven gender gap. This suggests that while the BJP has made inroads among female voters, gender alone does not define women's electoral choices – other intersecting identities and political contexts remain crucial.

The data from past elections highlight three key trends in women's political participation in India. First, while women's voter turnout has steadily increased, their overall political engagement beyond voting remains lower than men's. Second, women's voting patterns and political involvement are not just shaped by gender identity; factors such as caste, class, and regional influences also play a significant role. Third, despite targeted outreach, the BJP has historically faced a gender disadvantage, with more men than women supporting the party. These developments indicate that we are still far from the formation of a distinct women's constituency in Indian politics, as their electoral choices remain intertwined with broader socio-political factors.

Rebecca Rose Varghese is a freelance journalist.

### GS Paper 02 Indian Polity

**UPSC Mains Practice Question:** Women's increasing voter turnout in India does not necessarily translate into greater political agency." Discuss the factors influencing women's political participation beyond voting.

### Context :

- ▶ Women's political participation in India has been a subject of extensive discourse, especially given the paradox that, despite the presence of several influential women leaders, overall political engagement among women remains low. While many countries saw a narrowing gender gap in political participation in the 1990s, India witnessed this shift only in the 2010s.
- ▶ The focus on women's participation has primarily been on social and cultural biases that hinder their electoral success, but less attention has been given to how everyday women engage with the electoral process.
- ▶ Rajeshwari Deshpande's study, 'Shaping of the Woman Constituency in Indian Elections: Evidence from the NES Data', provides insights into women's voting patterns, influences on their choices, and their role in shaping election outcomes.

### Key Factors Influencing Women's Political Participation

- ▶ **Voter Turnout and Electoral Participation**
  - Women's voter turnout significantly increased after 2010, prompting political parties to introduce policies targeting them. However, this increased participation has not translated into real political power. Political parties often see women as a homogenous voting bloc rather than recognizing intersections of caste, class, religion, and region in shaping their choices.
- ▶ **The Role of Welfare Schemes**
  - Women have often been framed as passive beneficiaries rather than active decision-makers. Welfare schemes such as:
    - Ujjwala Yojana (LPG connections for women)
    - Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Housing for women beneficiaries)
    - Ladli Behna and Ladli Laxmi Schemes (Financial assistance in Madhya Pradesh)
  - These schemes were instrumental in BJP's electoral success in 2019 and regional elections, reinforcing the idea of political leaders as providers rather than women as independent voters.
- ▶ **Beyond Voting: Low Engagement in Political Activities**
  - Political participation goes beyond voting and includes attending rallies and campaigns, becoming political party members, and advocating for policy changes.

- Women's participation in these areas remains lower than men's. Only 14 percent of women report seeking voting advice from their spouses, indicating some level of autonomy in decision-making, but this is still significantly higher than men.
- **The Self-Empowerment Hypothesis: Myth or Reality?**
  - Some scholars argue that rising literacy rates and employment opportunities have enabled women to vote independently. However, two contradictions challenge this theory:
    - Women's workforce participation remains low, weakening the argument that economic independence is driving higher turnout.
    - The proportion of registered female voters is still lower than male voters, suggesting that many women are still being excluded from the electoral rolls.
- **Impact of Male Migration**
  - Large-scale male migration to urban areas has contributed to higher female voter turnout in socially and economically backward states. Women, left behind in rural areas, have taken a more active role in voting, impacting state-level electoral outcomes.
- **The Role of Caste, Class, and Region in Women's Voting Behavior**
  - Women's voting behavior is not driven solely by gender identity but is deeply influenced by caste and class dynamics, regional political movements, and religious and community affiliations.
- **State-level variations influence women's political preferences:**
  - In Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and West Bengal, women align more with regional parties than national gender-based trends.
  - Upper-caste and urban women are more likely to support the BJP, while marginalized communities lean towards Congress and regional parties.

### Key Trends in Women's Political Participation

- Increased voter turnout has risen steadily since 2010, but broader political participation remains low.
  - Voting patterns are shaped by multiple identities, including caste, class, and regional influences rather than gender alone.
  - BJP has historically faced a gender disadvantage, but targeted welfare policies have improved its standing among women voters.
  - There is no unified women's constituency in Indian politics; electoral choices remain intertwined with socio-political and economic factors.
-