

STATE ELECTIONS: HOW WOMEN ARE SHAPING INDIA'S DESTINY

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There are many facets of the recent state elections but the most important is the role of women in shaping India's future destiny.

First, the mandate in the state elections has been the decisive mandate across almost all states. For example, for West Bengal, the number of seats where winning margin is between 50,000 to 1 lakh votes has increased 3.5 times between 2016 & 2021. The same has happened in Tamil Nadu also where the number of seats increased 6 times in the aforesaid vote margin category. In Assam also, this ratio increased by 2.5 times during the same period. However, there are no divergent trends in the case of Kerala and seat distribution as per vote margin is almost same in both 2016 and 2021.

Second, rising participation of women in India's political arena is one of the most significant stories of the last decade. Women voters are now playing a significantly bigger role in elections than ever before. In the 2019 General Lok Sabha elections, female voter turnout rates was higher than males, which has been declining from 1971, when the gap was at 12%. The rise in women voter turnout is even more pronounced in State Assembly elections. In the 23 major States, where state assembly elections happened in last 5-years, women's turnout was higher (more than 1%) than that of men in 15 States and marginally higher (0-0.5%) in 3 states. Interestingly, out of these 18 states, same Government was re-elected in 10 states. This represents an inflection point and finally resulting in a qualitative change in the gender underpinning of India's democracy.

In this context, we believe that the Central Government should quickly push through the increase in marriage age for women. On social front, this will lead to lowering MMR as well as improvement of nutrition levels while on financial front opportunities will be opened for women to pursue higher education and careers. We believe increasing the legal age has the potential to reduce India's MMR and will lead to more females doing graduation and hence coming into labour force. Another benefit is legal marriage age will become same for men and women. In a consultation paper of reform in family law in 2018, the Law Commission argued that having different legal standards "contributes to the stereotype that wives must be younger than their husbands".

Interestingly, the mean marriage age in India is already above 21 years (i.e. 22.3 years) and any increase in marriage age will still be notional in nature as long as change of mindset of people does not happen regarding female education and marriage. 35% of females in India are married before the age of 21 years. Let us change our mindset towards a more just society. It should start from working place. **At State Bank of India, women employees today head more than 3500 branches and representation of women in total workforce is 25.3%!**

ROLE OF PUBLICITY/ADVERTISING IN ELECTIONS

- There are plethora of factors that determine which candidate/party will win the elections like total voter turnout, women voter turnout, caste-based turnout, present leadership, incumbency, etc. The list is quite big. However, expenditure on publicity is one of them. Publicity or advertising includes advertising or marketing communications about a political party, representative or candidate, advertising about political issues or issues of public interest, and advertising in relation to Government policies. This type of communication is generally regarded as 'election advertising' where the material is intended or likely to affect voting in an upcoming election.
- We analysed information and publicity expenditure data (culled from State Budget documents) for ten states. We found out that in most of the states, on an average in order to re-elect in the elections incumbent Governments makes huge expenditure in the election year. The growth in information and publicity expenditure pre or post-election year is always less than the election year expenditure. However, in few states, where publicity expenditure was low in election year the incumbent Government mostly lost the election and didn't get re-elected.

Revenue + Capital Expenditure in Information and Publicity (% YoY Growth)				
State	Pre-election Year	Election Year	Post-election Year	Re-elect?
Kerala	-23%	47%	-2%	Yes
West Bengal	-10%	8%	17%	Yes
Bihar	-4%	33%	-3%	Yes
Delhi	-	493%	-17%	Yes
Andhra Pradesh	48%	-1%	-	No
Haryana	0%	66%	6%	Yes
Jharkhand	-12%	18%	-30%	No
Odisha	0%	249%	-67%	Yes
Chhattisgarh	20%	66%	-8%	No
Tamil Nadu	-	2%	-3%	No
Average	2%	98%	-12%	-

Source: State Budget Documents; SBI Research

DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS ACCORDING TO VOTE MARGIN IN RECENT STATE ELECTIONS SHOW THE MANDATE HAS BEEN DECISIVE

◆ Vote margin is the difference between the number of votes cast for the winning candidate and the second-place candidate in an election. The vote margin pattern of recently concluded elections for four major states throw up interesting results. In the case of West Bengal, the number of seats where winning margin is between 50,000 to 1 lakh votes has increased from 12 in 2016 to 41 in 2021. The same has happened in Tamil Nadu also where the number of seats increased from merely 4 to 24 in the aforesaid vote margin category. In Tamil Nadu most of the candidates won with better margins this time. The number of seats in the margin of less than 20,000 declined from 171 in 2016 to 120 in 2021. In Assam also, 30 candidates won with a margin of more than 40,000 votes as compared to merely 12 in 2016. However, there are no divergent trends in the case of Kerala and seat distribution as per vote margin is almost same in both 2016 and 2021.

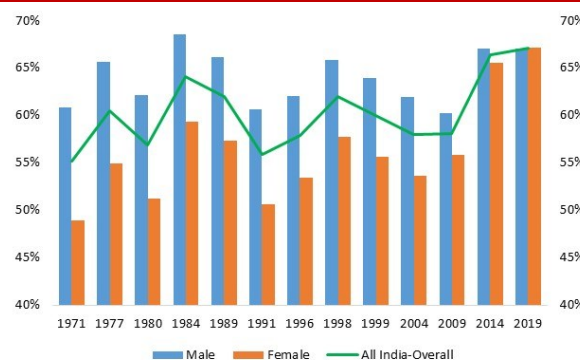
ROLE OF WOMEN VOTERS IN ELECTIONS

- ◆ Rising participation of women in India’s political arena is one of the most significant stories of the last decade. Women voters are now playing a significantly bigger role in elections than ever before. In the 2019 General Lok Sabha elections, female voter turnout rates was higher than males, which has been declining from 1991, when the gap was more than 10%. The gap was stagnant at around 8.4% on an average for 4 elections between 1996 and 2004. Now the question arises, what is it that moves women voters most, and how are they shaping politics, policymaking, and the ideological divide?
- ◆ The rise in women voter turnout is even more pronounced in State Assembly elections. Out of the 23-major States, where state assembly elections happened in last 5-years, indicate that women’s turnout was higher (more than 1%) than that of men in 15 States and marginal higher (0-0.5%) in 3 states. Interestingly, out of these 18 states, same Government was re-elected in 10 states, where women turnout was more than men turnout. This represents an inflection point and finally resulting in a qualitative change in the gender underpinning of India’s democracy. This speaks of social churn and it is not surprising that today political parties focus much more on women’s issues during their campaigns than ever before.
- ◆ Party policies and campaigns are increasingly focusing on winning over women voters as never before. e.g. distribution of “free” gas cylinders in Uttar Pradesh, “free rice, Jewellery and, Cow to the poor” in Tamil Nadu, and “free bicycles, tablets for girls going to school/colleges in West Bengal, “free public transport” to women in many states.

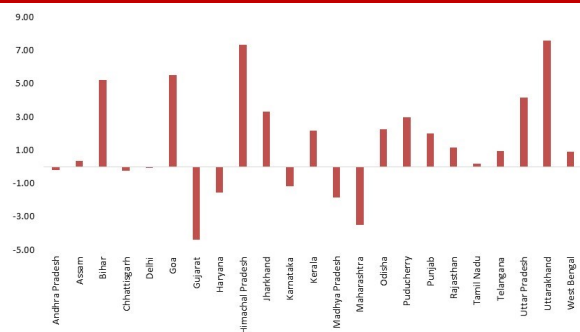
Distribution of Seats as per Vote Margin in recent Assembly Elections								
Margin	West Bengal		Tamil Nadu		Kerala		Assam	
	2021	2016	2021	2016	2021	2016	2021	2016
Less than 100 votes	1	0	0	2	1	2	0	1
100-1000 votes	6	8	8	14	5	5	2	4
1000-2000 votes	5	8	11	6	5	7	3	7
2000-3000 votes	7	5	5	11	7	5	4	7
3000-4000 votes	10	8	7	9	4	4	3	1
4000-5000 votes	7	7	8	11	4	6	3	4
Less than 5000 votes	36	36	39	53	26	29	15	24
5000-10000 votes	33	38	30	44	26	29	12	23
10000-20000 votes	63	87	51	74	42	37	28	29
20000-30000 votes	62	66	52	34	30	23	24	26
30000-40000 votes	39	33	26	17	12	14	17	12
40000-50000 votes	15	18	11	6	2	8	10	5
50000-1 lakh votes	41	12	24	4	2	-	12	6
More than 1 lakh votes	3	2	1	-	-	-	8	1
Total	292	292	234	232	140	140	126	126

Source: Election Commission; SBI Research

Voter Turnout in LS Elections (%)



Female Voter Turnout has Surpassed Males in State Assembly Elections (%)



Source: ECI, SBI Research

Women Turnout vs Change in Government				
Turnout	Margin	Number of States, of which	Re-elect	Change
Women > Men	1%>	15	9	6
	<0.5%	3	1	2
Women < Men	-	5	4	1
Total		23	14	9

Source: SBI Research

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