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>> *Strategies for Enhancing Women's Political Participation: Insights from Uttarakhand, India*

DEMOCRACY & PARTIES

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Strategies for Enhancing Women's Political Participation: Insights from Uttarakhand, India

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Abstract

The political landscape of Uttarakhand state in India presents a paradox regarding women's political participation. Despite historical instances of social engagements with political implications, like the Chipko movement, women's representation in the Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly remains low. As of the 2022 elections, the number of women Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) is just 8 and is yet to reach double digits in the 70-member Assembly, underlining a gap between societal mobilization and political representation. This paper proposes a policy framework to enhance women's participation, drawing on a detailed analysis of electoral data and party policies. It highlights the critical underrepresentation of women, aggravated by systemic barriers and cultural norms that curtail women's political agency. To tackle these issues, the paper advocates for policy reform, capacity building, and community engagement, including legislative quotas for women candidates, incentives for political parties to elevate women leaders, and gender-sensitivity training programs. It also emphasizes the significance of grassroots mobilization in altering societal norms regarding women's roles in politics. Offering interventions tailored to Uttarakhand's socio-political context, this paper aims to foster an environment conducive to women leaders. It argues that enhancing women's political participation demands concerted efforts from all stakeholders—political parties, civil society organizations, and the government. Implementing this framework, Uttarakhand can progress toward a more gender-inclusive governance model, reflecting the true essence of democracy and maximizing women's potential for sustainable development and governance.

Introduction

Despite the progressive strides in SDG 5: Gender Equality across various sectors globally, political representation remains a domain where women are considerably underrepresented, especially in the legislative assemblies of many developing nations. This paradox is starkly evident in the state of Uttarakhand, India, where women have historically been at the forefront of socio-political movements yet remains conspicuously absent from the corridors of power.

India being the world's largest democracy with a population of 1.42 billion people[1] consists of 28 states and 8 Union territories[2]. Its Parliament, the apex legislative body, comprises the President, Rajya Sabha (Council of States), and Lok Sabha (House of the People). The Constitution was enacted on January 26, 1950, with the first Parliament session in April 1952 following elections held during 1951-52.[3] The Lok Sabha has 543 elected members. These representatives are elected through general elections held every five years, using a first-past-the-post electoral system. A majority of 272 seats is required to form a government at the central (federal) level. The Rajya Sabha comprises 245 members, of which 233 are elected by the members of the State Legislative Assemblies, and 12 are nominated by the President of India for their contributions in various fields such as arts, science, literature, and social service.[4] From the inception of the first Lok Sabha in 1952 until the fifth in 1971, the Congress Party had predominant presence in the Parliament. A shift occurred with the Janata Party's rise in the sixth Lok Sabha in 1977. Subsequent years saw alternating dominance between Congress and coalitions led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and regional parties, reflecting a trend towards more inclusive governance models starting from the tenth Lok Sabha in 1991. The BJP, beginning in 1998, has led several coalitions and dominated the 16th and 17th Lok Sabha elections in 2014 and 2019 respectively (Bharti, 2022). State governments consist of Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) elected to govern in the State Legislative Assemblies, which function similarly to the Lok Sabha but focus on state-specific legislative matters. As of 2023, women constitute 15% of the members in the Lok Sabha and 13% in the Rajya Sabha. Further, no Indian state's legislative assembly exceeds 20% female representation. Chhattisgarh leads with 18% female MLAs, whereas Himachal Pradesh has only one female MLA.[5] [6] In some states, there are Legislative Councils with Members of the Legislative Council (MLCs), who are elected through a combination of indirect elections by local bodies, state legislative assembly members, and by direct voting from graduates and teachers in certain constituencies.[7] Local governance includes Zila Parishads (District Councils) at the dis-

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1   https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desa-policy-brief-no-153-india-overtakes-china-as-the-worlds-most-populous-country/

2   https://knowindia.india.gov.in/states-ut

3   https://www.india.gov.in/my-government/indian-parliament

4   https://sansad.in/poi

5   https://prsindia.org/parliamenttrack/vital-stats/women-in-parliament-and-state-assemblies

6   https://adrindia.org/sites/default/files/Women_representation_among_all_MPs_and_MLAs_English.pdf

7   https://www.india.gov.in/my-government/whos-who/mlasmlcs

trict level, Panchayat Samitis (Block Councils) at the block level, and Gram Panchayats (Village Councils) at the village level, each responsible for administrative functions within their jurisdictions[8]. This multi-tiered system ensures governance and representation across all levels, establishing India as one of the world's most diverse democracies (Figure A1).

Formed on the 9th of November 2000, as the 27th State of India from northern Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand is located at the foothills of the Himalayan Mountain ranges (Kar, 2007). It is a largely hilly state, rich in natural resources, especially water and forests, with many glaciers, rivers, dense forests, and snow-clad mountain peaks. It shares international boundaries with China (Tibet) in the north and Nepal in the east, and on its north-west lies Himachal Pradesh, while Uttar Pradesh is to the south (Figure A2). Despite its natural wealth, the state's performance in promoting gender equality is lagging, with a score of 46 for SDG 5 according to the NITI Aayog's SDG India Index Dashboard for 2020[9], the lowest among all its goals. Recognizing the need to address this imbalance, the state has recently allocated ₹14,538 crore (~1.75 billion USD) to a gender budget aimed at fostering women's equality and incorporating gender-sensitive planning.[10] Uttarakhand's geographical distribution includes 13 districts, divided into the Kumaon and Garhwal divisions. While four districts—Nainital, Haridwar, Dehradun, and Udham Singh Nagar—feature extensive plains, the other nine are predominantly hilly.[11] The state's total land area of 5.35 million hectares consists of 86% hills and 14% plains.[12] The economy of Uttarakhand is diverse; agriculture, although only contributing about 10% to the state GDP, remains vital, with manufacturing and services sectors contributing 47% and 43% respectively.[13]

According to the latest population census of 2011, the literacy rate in Uttarakhand has seen an upward trend and is 78.80 percent which is higher than the all-India literacy rate of 73 percent. Male literacy stands at 87.40 percent while female literacy is at 70 percent, indicating a persistent gender gap in education.[14] The state had a population of 10,086,000, which is projected to increase to 12,974,000 by 2036[15], demonstrating growth in the state's populace. Despite these advancements and a demographic strength that hints at a vibrant electorate, women's participation in Uttarakhand politics remain low. But the legacy of the Chipko movement in the 1970s, led primarily by women, highlights the critical role women have played in shaping the socio-political fabric of Uttarakhand. The Chipko movement, derived from the Hindi word "Chipko" which means "to embrace," began in the early 1970s as a form of non-violent

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8   https://north24parganas.gov.in/zila_parishad

9   https://sdgindiaindex.niti.gov.in/#/state-compare?goal=AllGoal&area=IND005&timePeriod=2020

10   https://prsindia.org/budgets/states/uttarakhand-budget-analysis-2024-25

11   https://www.nabard.org/auth/writereaddata/careernotices/2410202821MSME.pdf

12   https://shm.uk.gov.in/pages/display/6-state-profile

13   https://prsindia.org/budgets/states/uttarakhand-budget-analysis-2024-25

14   https://mospi.gov.in/sites/default/files/reports_and_publication/statistical_publication/social_statistics/WM16Chapter3.pdf

15   https://main.mohfw.gov.in/sites/default/files/Population%20Projection%20Report%202011-2036%20-%20upload_compressed_0.pdf

protest where local villagers, especially women, hugged trees to prevent them from being cut down by loggers. This grassroots initiative was a response to the government's allocation of forest rights to commercial entities, which excluded the local communities and posed a direct threat to their livelihoods and the ecology. Pioneered by Gaura Devi, the movement used the simple act of embracing trees to make a powerful statement against deforestation and for the conservation of their natural heritage (Kumar, 2017; Kalita, 2015).

However, this active engagement has not translated into proportional representation within the Legislative Assembly. As of the 2022 electoral cycle, despite their numerical strength in the electorate and their higher-than-average literacy rates, women's representation in the Uttarakhand Assembly has not reached the expected milestones. This gap highlights not just electoral anomalies but deeper systemic, cultural, and structural barriers, such as gender biases and lack of political support, that inhibit women's full participation in the political process. Further, similar challenges are faced in other community-based forestry institutions, like Van Panchayats. Despite laws designed to enhance female leadership within these bodies, women's participation remains significantly low. For instance, even with a legal framework mandating 50% reservation for women to become sarpanches in Van Panchayats, only a tiny fraction of these positions is held by women. This highlights persistent structural challenges and a disconnect between policy intent and its implementation, reflecting broader issues of gender equity in governance [16] [17](Prateek, Knopf, & Aggarwal, 2019).

The ongoing general elections in India till June 2024 present a timely backdrop to explore these challenges and the interventions needed to dismantle these barriers. The elections not only offer an opportunity to assess the status of women's political representation but also serve as a critical juncture for proposing actionable interventions, such as legislative quotas and capacity-building programs for women candidates, aimed at correcting these disparities.

This paper meticulously examines the persistent underrepresentation of women in Uttarakhand's political landscape, contrasting the state's rich history of women-led socio-political movements, such as the Chipko movement, with the starkly low numbers of women in the Legislative Assembly. Despite proactive legislative measures like the recent Women's Reservation Bill 2023, which mandates a one-third reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies, including those seats reserved for SCs and STs[18] [19] [20], Uttarakhand continues to grapple with systemic, cultural, and structural barriers that inhibit the actualization of these legal frameworks.

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16   https://www.indiaspend.com/governance/how-van-panchayats-meant-to-protect-uttarakhands-forests-are-losing-their-relevance-830561

17   https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/dehradun/system-of-van-panchayat-only-prevailing-in-uttarakhand-rendered-ineffective/articleshow/61741948.cms

18   https://egazette.gov.in/WriteReadData/2023/249053.pdf

19   https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/lok-sabha-passes-womens-reservation-bill/article67327458.ece

20   https://prsindia.org/billtrack/the-constitution-one-hundred-twenty-eighth-amendment-bill-2023

The global context reveals significant variances in female political representation: countries such as Rwanda, Cuba, and Nicaragua boast over 50% representation[21], starkly contrasting with India's progress. This disparity highlights the need for an approach in Uttarakhand that extends beyond statutory mandates to address the root causes of gender disparity.

The paper advocates for a policy framework that not only reinforces legislative quotas but also includes incentives for political parties to elevate women leaders, gender-sensitivity training programs, and impactful community engagement initiatives. These recommendations are designed to transform societal norms and create an environment where women can excel as political leaders. By utilising detailed electoral data, comparative analyses, and insights from grassroots movements, this study aims to contribute to the discussion on democratization and gender equality, proposing actionable strategies that could be instrumental in bridging the gap between theoretical commitments to gender inclusivity and their practical implementation. As Uttarakhand moves towards a more equitable governance model, it is essential that all stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organizations, and the government, unite to harness the full potential of women for sustainable development and governance.

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21   https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking/?date_month=4&date_year=2024

II Contextual Background

Uttarakhand, a state in northern India, carved out of Uttar Pradesh in November 2000, presents a fascinating study of contrasts within its political and social landscape. Known for its rich cultural heritage and vibrant social movements, Uttarakhand has also been the origin of various women-led initiatives that have left lasting effects on both its history and the broader Indian socio-political discourse.

Historical Context

The political history of Uttarakhand is full of instances of women's active participation in grassroots movements, the most remarkable being the Chipko movement in the 1970s. Women, standing arm-in-arm, formed human chains around trees to prevent their felling, symbolizing the role of women as environmental stewards and community leaders. This movement not only highlighted women's capacity for leadership and collective action but also positioned them as central figures in the struggle for rights and resources. Further, the state has witnessed the essential role of women in the autonomy movement of the 1990s, which was marked by a broadening of issues beyond traditional values and contributed to shaping their identity and resistance geography (Gururani, 2014). Despite these historical precedents of political activism, women's representation in formal political structures, particularly in the Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly, has remained disproportionately low.

Current Political Participation

The representation of women in the Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly has been consistently below national averages. As of the 2022 elections, women constituted a mere fraction of the total elected representatives (8 out of 70 MLAs), highlighting a significant gender disparity in political participation. This underrepresentation is more perplexing given the state's relatively high literacy rates and a high percentage of women in the electorate (Table A1). Electoral data from the past two decades reveals that while women's voter turnout has been comparable to, if not higher than, that of men, this has not translated into an increased presence in the legislature or key political positions. Despite constitutional mandates and efforts for women's political representation, the actual pace of implementation varies due to political considerations, and the effectiveness of initiatives designed to support women in governance remains a concern (Sharma and Sudarshan, 2010).

Societal Norms and Barriers

The discrepancy between women's societal engagement and their political representation can be attributed to a mix of cultural, structural, and systemic barriers. Societal norms in Uttarakhand, as in many parts of India, often delineate the public sphere as a male domain, with politics being perceived as an extension of this sphere. Traditional gender roles and expectations further exacerbate women's marginalization from political participation, relegating their contributions to the social and environmental movements rather than formal political leadership roles.

Gender stereotypes and biases also play a major role in limiting women's political aspirations and opportunities. These stereotypes are perpetuated by media portrayals, societal attitudes, and, critically, by

political parties' candidate selection processes, which often favor male candidates under the assumption of greater electability or political competence. Additionally, the lack of targeted support and resources for women candidates, such as funding, training, and mentoring programs, hinders their ability to compete effectively in elections. The education system and media influence in Garhwal, for example, have shaped women's political awareness and attitudes, despite challenges arising from gender norms and household responsibilities (Negi, 2011).

Efforts Toward Gender-Inclusive Politics

In response to these challenges, various civil society organizations and women's groups in Uttarakhand have initiated efforts to promote women's political participation. These include advocacy for legislative quotas, capacity-building workshops for potential women candidates, and campaigns aimed at changing societal attitudes toward women in politics. Despite these efforts, progress has been incremental, and the goal of achieving gender-balanced representation remains elusive. These endeavors highlight the importance of collective empowerment and engagement with local governance institutions for effective political participation by women, as emphasized in the literature (Sharma and Sudarshan, 2010).

The contextual background of Uttarakhand's political landscape reveals a paradoxical situation where historical instances of women's active societal engagement stand in stark contrast to their current political underrepresentation. This discrepancy highlights the need for comprehensive strategies that address both the systemic barriers to women's political participation and the societal norms that perpetuate gender disparities in the political arena.

III Methodology and Data Sources

This study adopts a mixed-methods research approach to comprehensively analyze the barriers to and opportunities for enhancing women's political participation in the Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly. The mixed-methods approach combines quantitative analysis of electoral data and qualitative examination of party policies, societal norms, and stakeholder perspectives, providing a multi-dimensional understanding of the issue at hand.

Data Sources

1. Electoral Data: Quantitative data on women's participation in Uttarakhand's political landscape will be sourced from official records provided by the Election Commission of India, including statistics on the number of women candidates, their electoral success rates, and their representation in the Legislative Assembly over time. This data will be critical for understanding trends and identifying patterns of women's political representation in Uttarakhand.

2. Party Policies: Latest party manifestos, policies, and regulations pertaining to gender equality and women's representation will be analyzed to assess political parties' commitment to and strategies for

enhancing women's political participation. Information will be gathered from official party websites, published documents, and media reports.

3. Literature Review: Academic journals, books, and conference papers related to political representation, gender equality in politics, and the effects of legislative quotas and policy interventions on women's political participation will be reviewed to build a theoretical framework and contextualize the findings from primary data sources.

Analytical Methods

1. Quantitative Analysis: Statistical methods will be employed to analyze electoral data, identifying trends in women's candidacy and representation in the Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly. Descriptive statistics will be used to summarize the data, while inferential statistics may be utilized to test hypotheses about the factors influencing women's political representation.

2. Qualitative Analysis: Content analysis will be conducted on party policies, manifestos, and interview transcripts, if possible, to identify themes related to barriers and facilitators of women's political participation. Thematic analysis will enable the identification of patterns within the data, providing insights into the political, cultural, and societal factors that influence women's representation in politics.

3. Comparative Analysis: Where relevant, the study will also engage in comparative analysis with other Indian states or countries that have successfully implemented policies to increase women's political representation. This will help in identifying best practices and lessons that can be adapted to the context of Uttarakhand.

The mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative electoral analysis with qualitative insights from party policies, provides a strong framework for understanding the complex challenges to women's political participation in Uttarakhand. This methodology will enable the formulation of evidence-based, context-specific policy recommendations aimed at enhancing gender-inclusive governance in the region.

## IV Analysis of the Current Scenario in Uttarakhand

The current scenario of women's political participation in Uttarakhand reflects broader electoral trends, party nomination practices, and the impact of rooted societal norms. An analysis of these elements provides insight into the challenges and opportunities for enhancing women's representation in the state's political landscape.

IV.I Electoral Trends

A review of electoral trends in Uttarakhand reveals a consistent underrepresentation of women in the Legislative Assembly. As shown in Figure 1, women comprise only 11.43% of the total Members of the

Legislative Assembly (MLAs) in the state. Despite women constituting nearly half of the state's electorate and demonstrating high voter turnout rates, their representation in elected positions remains significantly low (Figure 2). This discrepancy points to systemic barriers within the electoral process and political structures that limit women's access to political power. Additionally, the electoral success of women candidates, when they are nominated, often mirrors broader societal attitudes towards women in leadership roles, indicating both challenges and potential pathways for improvement.

Figure 1. *Women's representation in Uttarakhand assembly over years (2002-2022)*
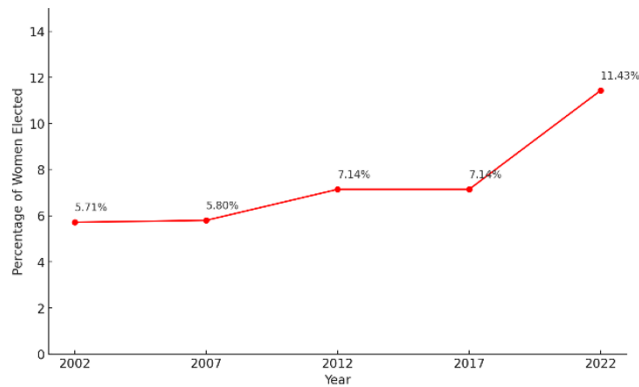
Note. Adapted from " Election Commission of India," accessed from www.eci.gov.in/.

Figure 2. *Electoral Participation of Male and Female Candidates in Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly Elections*
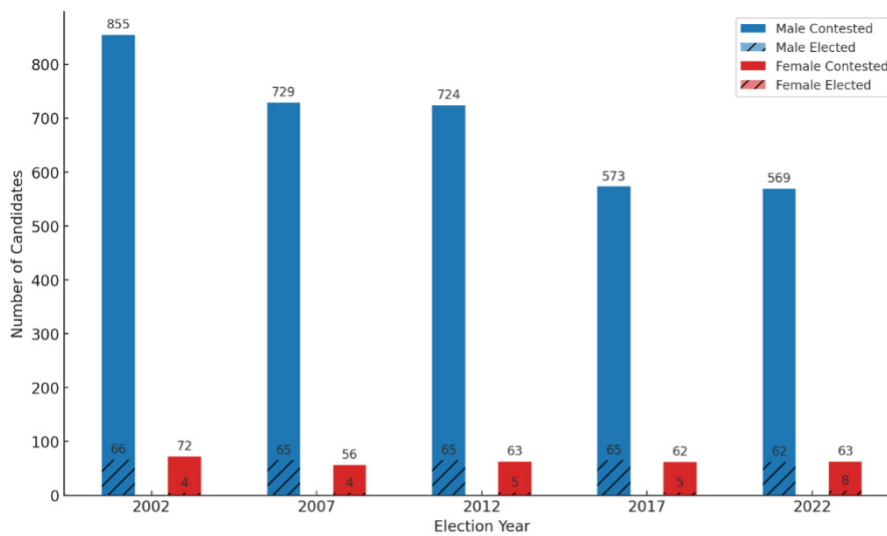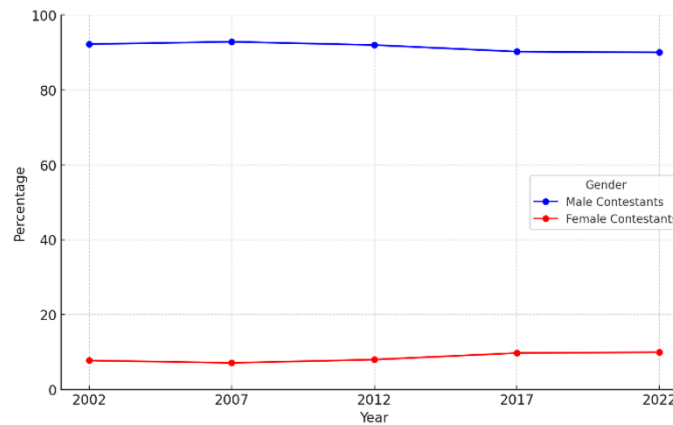

Note. Adapted from " Election Commission of India," accessed from www.eci.gov.in/.

Party Nominations for Women

Party nomination practices play a crucial role in determining women's participation in elections. In Uttarakhand, major political parties have historically allocated a small fraction of their tickets to women candidates (Figure 3). This trend is not unique to the state but reflects a wider issue within Indian politics, where women are often sidelined in favor of male candidates perceived to have better electoral prospects. The lack of women in prominent party positions and decision-making roles further exacerbates this issue, creating a cycle of underrepresentation that is difficult to break without targeted interventions.

Figure 3. *Percentage of Male and female contestants over years (2002-2022)*

Note. Adapted from " Election Commission of India," accessed from www.eci.gov.in/.

Impact of Societal Norms

Societal norms and cultural attitudes towards women's roles significantly impact their candidacy and electoral success. In Uttarakhand, traditional views on gender roles often discourage women from pursuing careers in politics, viewing it as a domain unsuitable for women. These norms not only affect women's aspirations and willingness to enter politics but also influence voters' perceptions and the support women candidates receive during elections. Additionally, the challenges of balancing domestic responsibilities with the demands of a political career further deter women from seeking elected office, highlighting the need for societal and policy changes that address these barriers.

IV.II Party Policies and Manifestos

I have discussed here only two major parties at the national and state levels in India—the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The BJP is currently the ruling party at both the national level and in Uttarakhand, where it won 47 seats and the INC won 19 out of 70 seats in the 2022 elections[22]. In their respective manifestos for the Uttarakhand 2022 assembly elections, both the Congress and the BJP outlined distinct initiatives focused on women's empowerment and welfare.

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22   https://results.eci.gov.in/ResultAcGenMar2022/partywiseresult-S28.htm?st=S28

1. Party Policies

The Congress Party's Commitment to Women's Empowerment[23] [24]**:**

The Congress Party has historically emphasized women's roles in India's socio-political spheres, advocating for empowerment through various means. The party has implemented several key initiatives:

- Historical Milestones: The involvement of women in significant movements such as the Dandi March and Quit India Movement under Congress's banner.

- Legislative Actions: Enactment of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments providing 33% reservation for women in local governance.

- Social Schemes: Introduction of landmark schemes like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (2010), and others aimed at improving women's health, education, and economic independence.

BJP's Strategies for Women's Empowerment: Nari Shakti[25] [26]

The BJP articulates a vision that encompasses both protective measures against discrimination and proactive empowerment strategies. Their approach includes:

- Educational Empowerment: Commitment to providing free education for women up to graduation, including professional courses.

- Political Representation: Advocacy for the passage of a bill reserving 33% of seats in Parliament and state assemblies for women.

- Legal Reforms: Efforts to enact a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) to ensure equal rights for women across different personal laws.

- Economic Initiatives: Promotion of women's entrepreneurship through support in micro-credit and the establishment of a national-level women's development bank.

While both parties have positioned women's empowerment as a core issue, their approaches reflect their ideological foundations. The Congress has traditionally focused on social justice frameworks, integrating women's empowerment into broader welfare policies. In contrast, the BJP has emphasized the creation of structured opportunities for women in education, politics, and the economy, with a strong push towards uniform civil rights through a proposed Uniform Civil Code.

23   https://www.inc.in/in-focus/congress-empowering-women

24   https://inc.in/congress-sandesh/others/congress-and-women-empowerment

25   https://www.bjp.org/chapter-10

26   https://www.bjp.org/pressreleases/report-committee-constituted-provide-33-reservation-womenfolk-bjp-organisational-set

Uttarakhand's recent adoption of the UCC[27], which became law on March 13, 2024[28], demonstrates such reforms by standardizing legal rights regarding marriage, divorce, property, and inheritance for all citizens, irrespective of their religion.[29] The Code especially prohibits practices like polygamy and unilateral talaq (Divorce), aiming to strengthen gender equality and women's legal status. However, the UCC[30] has also attracted criticism for potentially overlooking cultural specificities and imposing a one-size-fits-all legal framework on diverse religious communities. Critics argue that while it aims to unify, it may inadvertently marginalize minority groups and overlook the contextual nuances that personalized laws accommodated.[31]

The policies of the Congress and the BJP illustrate their respective visions for women's roles in India's development. Both parties recognize the importance of women's empowerment but propose different paths to achieve it. As India continues to evolve, the effectiveness of these policies in genuinely empowering women will be a critical measure of their success.

2. Manifestos
2.1 For Uttarakhand Assembly Elections of 2022

The Congress manifesto dedicated a substantial section to enhancing the role of women in the workforce and society.[32] Key promises included reserving 40% of jobs in the Uttarakhand police force specifically for women, aiming to boost female participation in public service roles traditionally dominated by men. This initiative is part of a broader commitment to prioritize women in government employment and support their professional advancement.

Conversely, the BJP manifesto introduced several measures targeting the economic and domestic well-being of women, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.[33] It promised to provide three free Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders annually to poor households and establish a substantial ₹500 crore (60 million USD) fund to support business initiatives by women-led self-help groups. This approach seeks to address both immediate economic relief through utility support and longer-term economic empowerment through entrepreneurial development.

Thus, both parties demonstrated a commitment to enhancing the status and conditions of women in Uttarakhand, although with differing focal points and strategies. The Congress focused on employ-

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27   https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2024-03-21/india-legislative-assembly-of-uttarakhand-enacts-uniform-civ-il-code/

28   https://rashtrapatibhavan.gov.in/uniform-civil-code-uttarakhand-2024-bill

29   https://www.livelaw.in/pdf_upload/civil-code-bill-english0001-520761.pdf

30   https://ucc.uk.gov.in/

31   https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/president-approves-uttarakhands-ucc-bill/article67947099.ece

32   https://www.hindustantimes.com/elections/uttarakhand-assembly-election/congress-manifesto-promises-40-women-quo-ta-in-uttarakhand-police-force-101643826307567.html

33   https://www.bjp.org/files/election-manifesto-documents/Manifesto%20English%20UK_2.pdf

ment and representation in governance, whereas the BJP emphasized economic support and entrepreneurial opportunities.

2.2 For General Elections of 2024

In their 2024 general elections manifestos, both the Indian National Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party have proposed targeted strategies for women's welfare:

Congress Manifesto[34]: Legislative and Social Empowerment Initiatives

The Congress manifesto for the 2024 general elections includes several initiatives that, while not explicitly focused on women's political participation, can indirectly contribute to this goal:

- **Legislative Reservations:** It pledges the immediate implementation of one-third reservation for women in legislative bodies, which could significantly increase women's representation in politics directly. This initiative will be realized starting with State Assembly elections in 2025 and extending to Lok Sabha elections in 2029.

- **Empowerment through Employment:** The manifesto proposes reserving 50 percent of all central government jobs for women by 2025, aiming to enhance their economic independence and engagement in governance. Further enhancing financial conditions, the Mahalakshmi scheme promises to provide ₹1 lakh per year (~1,200 USD) to every poor Indian family as an unconditional cash transfer.

- **Enhanced Protection and Rights:** Commitments are made to enforce laws protecting women from domestic violence and sexual harassment more rigorously, aiming to create a safer environment for women to participate in public and political life. Additional commitments include ensuring safe workplaces, childcare services, and extending maternity benefits.

BJP Manifesto[35]: Educational and Economic Foundations

The BJP's manifesto also presents several policies that can influence women's political participation:

- **Educational Empowerment:** Proposes free education for women up to graduation in all fields, including professional studies, aiming to elevate their overall societal status and enable more informed political involvement.

- **Economic Independence:** Focuses on entrepreneurship initiatives specifically for women, potentially increasing their political leverage by boosting their economic autonomy. This includes expanding the Lakhpati Didi scheme to enable women to earn an annual income of ₹1 lakh (~1,200 USD).

- **Health and Hygiene Initiatives:** The BJP promises to expand existing health services focused on anemia, breast cancer, cervical cancer, and osteoporosis. It also commits to increasing the number of safe and hygienic public toilets for women in towns and cities.

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34 https://manifesto.inc.in/

35 https://www.bjp.org/bjp-manifesto-2024

- **Uniform Civil Code:** Advocates for a national rollout of the Uniform Civil Code, standardizing legal rights for women across India, which is seen as a step toward eliminating legal discrepancies that hinder women's full participation in society and politics.

The recent implementation of the Uniform Civil Code in Uttarakhand offers a unique setting for evaluating the manifesto promises of the 2024 general elections. This move by Uttarakhand to standardize personal laws—potentially a precursor to the BJP's national agenda as stated in their manifesto to implement the UCC across India—has sparked debates about its impact on the diverse cultural fabric of the nation. Critics argue that while the UCC seeks to streamline legal processes and enhance women's legal agency, it may also oversimplify the complexities of various community-specific practices, potentially undermining cultural identities and personal freedoms. This context is essential for assessing how the direct approach of the Congress in advocating for legislative quotas and the BJP's broader socio-economic empowerment strategies aim to enhance women's roles in political processes. Both parties propose comprehensive strategies for women's welfare (Figure A3), yet the broader implications of a nationwide UCC necessitate careful consideration of how these policies will interact with the diverse legal and cultural landscapes across India.

IV.III Government Policies for Women at National and State Level

The evolution of government policies for women in India has been mainly shaped by both national imperatives and regional initiatives, such as the recent expert consultation on the Uttarakhand Women Policy.

National Framework

The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001)[36] set a broad framework for women's advancement, emphasizing equality and empowerment through legislative, occupational, and social measures. Key initiatives included ensuring equal access to education, health care, and participation in political and economic life, with specific measures for the empowerment of vulnerable groups.

The policy recognized the persistent gaps between constitutional promises and the actual social status of women, necessitating robust mechanisms for change. It also acknowledged the need for societal transformation to eliminate deep-rooted gender biases and to mainstream gender considerations in all developmental processes.

Recent Developments

Moving forward, the Draft National Policy for Women (2016)[37] aims to address new challenges and opportunities presented by global and technological advancements affecting women's roles and rights. The

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36   https://wcd.nic.in/womendevelopment/national-policy-women-empowerment

37   https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/draft%20national%20policy%20for%20women%202016_0.pdf

draft policy proposes a visionary framework for women's empowerment based on rights and entitlements, ensuring their participation in all spheres as equal partners.

This policy draft emphasises a multi-dimensional approach to empowerment, extending beyond traditional areas to address emerging issues such as cyber security, digital literacy, and the impacts of climate change on women.

State-Level Initiatives: Uttarakhand Draft Women Policy

At the state level, the Draft Uttarakhand Women Policy 2023[38] discussed during the Expert Consultation organized by the Center for Public Policy and Good Governance is a model of regional adaptation of national goals. This policy focuses on the unique socio-economic and environmental context of the Himalayan states, aiming to integrate women's needs and rights into broader developmental strategies.

The consultation brought together stakeholders from various sectors to craft a policy tailored to the region's challenges and opportunities. It emphasized collaborative efforts and partnership between government bodies, NGOs, academic institutions, and international organizations like UNDP, ensuring a participatory approach in policy formulation.

Both the national and state policies represent a commitment to not only addressing the current status of women but also preparing for future challenges. By integrating and reinforcing women's roles in society, these policies aim to create an inclusive and equitable environment that supports women's rights and acknowledges their contributions to national and regional development.

These initiatives are crucial in guiding the transformative shifts required to realize gender equality, reflecting a maturation in policy approaches from welfare-oriented to rights-based frameworks that actively engage women in the developmental narrative of India.

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38   https://cppgg.uk.gov.in/?p=3138

IV.IV Comparative Analysis and Case Studies

Overview of Global and Regional Trends

The Inter-Parliamentary Union's April 2024 data[39] offers an understanding of women's representation in national parliaments globally, which can be instrumental in framing the context for Uttarakhand:

Global Averages: Women make up 27.0% of parliamentarians across all chambers globally.[40] This sets a benchmark for assessing India's and Uttarakhand's performance in enhancing women's political representation.

Regional Insights:

- Americas: Display strong representation, especially in the Caribbean and North America, highlighting the effectiveness of gender-positive policies.

- Europe: Shows strong performance in the Nordic countries and Western Europe, highlighting the impact of cultural support and progressive legislation.

- Asia: Generally lower levels of representation, with South Asia, including India, at only 17.1% across all chambers, indicating significant room for improvement.

- Middle East and North Africa: The lowest levels of representation, reflecting deep-rooted societal and political challenges.

Detailed Analysis of India's Position

From the table A3, India's representation of women in parliament stands at 14.7% in the lower house and 13.5% in the upper chamber as of the latest elections. This is significantly lower than the global average and suggests that despite India's democratic structure, there are substantial barriers to women's full participation in politics.

Comparative Analysis

- Comparison with Global Leaders: Rwanda's exceptional representation (61.3% in the lower house) could serve as an inspiration. This success is largely attributed to mandatory gender quotas, which India could consider adapting.

- Regional Neighbors: Comparisons with China (26.5%) and Pakistan (16.2%) also provide valuable lessons. Despite cultural and political differences, these nations show varying degrees of success in integrating women into political roles, from which targeted strategies can be developed for India and specifically Uttarakhand. A recent article by UN Women highlighted that despite slow global progress towards gender equality in political representation, major advancements in regions like sub-Saharan Africa demonstrate the transformative potential of targeted reforms.[41]

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39   https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking/?date_month=4&date_year=2024

40   https://data.ipu.org/women-averages/?date_year=2024&date_month=04

41   https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/march-2024/women-parliament-slow-progress-towards-equal-representation

Implications and Strategies for Uttarakhand

1. Legislative Reform: Inspired by global examples, introducing or enhancing gender quotas[42] in Uttarakhand could be a strategic move to ensure more women enter politics.

2. Educational and Awareness Campaigns: Learning from the successes in the Americas and Europe, increasing education and awareness about women's roles in politics could change public perception and boost participation.

3. Support and Networking: Establishing support networks and mentorship programs, similar to those in successful regions, could help women gain the confidence and skills needed to participate in politics.

Case studies

To understand the potential impact of targeted interventions on enhancing women's political participation, examining case studies from regions or countries that have implemented successful strategies is important. These examples offer insights into effective practices and lessons that can be adapted to the context of Uttarakhand, considering its unique socio-political dynamics.

Rwanda

Rwanda is recognized for achieving the highest percentage of female parliamentary representation globally, with 61.3% in the Chamber of Deputies and 37.4% in the Senate, marking it as a major case of gender parity in government.[43] This shift began post-genocide, propelled by the constitutional mandate introduced in 2003 that required a minimum of 30% of decision-making positions be held by women. The combination of legislative quotas and strong political commitment supported by civil society advocacy effectively increased women's participation and influence in governance.[44]

Lessons Learned from Rwanda

1. Legal Frameworks and Quotas: Rwanda's implementation of a 30% legislative quota for women in decision-making roles has proven essential for securing female representation and can serve as a model for other regions aiming for similar outcomes.

2. Political Commitment: The sustained commitment of Rwanda's political leaders to uphold and support gender equality initiatives has been crucial for the successful integration of women into political roles (Burnet, 2019).

3. Civil Society Advocacy: Active involvement and advocacy by women's rights organizations have been key in maintaining gender equality as a governmental priority, influencing policy, and ensuring the implementation of supportive measures (Haguruka, 2022).

While Rwanda's increased representation of women in parliament symbolizes significant progress, Carey

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42   https://www.povertyactionlab.org/policy-insight/improving-womens-representation-politics-through-gender-quotas

43   https://www.parliament.gov.rw/women-representation

44   https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-global/women-parliament-representation-rwanda-8947305/

Leigh Hogg critiques that this progress may superficially mask ongoing political repression, suggesting that the rise in female political participation is capitalised by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) to enhance its international image rather than to genuinely foster democratic governance (Hogg, 2009).

Applicability to Uttarakhand

Drawing from Rwanda's experience, Uttarakhand could consider:

1. Implementing Legislative Quotas: Instituting a similar quota system might provide a foundational step for enhancing female representation in the state assembly.

2. Promoting Political Will: Building and sustaining political will among local leaders and political parties to commit to gender equality could replicate Rwanda's success in policy impact.

3. Strengthening Civil Society: Enhancing the role of local NGOs and women's advocacy groups in pushing for gender-inclusive policies could facilitate societal changes in perceptions of women's roles in politics.

These tailored strategies, modelled on Rwanda's approach and considering local socio-political nuances, could improve women's participation in governance in Uttarakhand.

V Theoretical Framework

The scholarly basis of this paper is anchored in important concepts and theories relevant to political representation, gender equality, and the efficacy of policy interventions in enhancing women's participation in politics. The core concept of this discussion is descriptive representation, which advocates for the legislature to be a microcosm of the society it represents, including a fair representation of genders. Hanna Pitkin's seminal work articulates this concept, arguing that the makeup of legislative bodies should mirror societal diversity, thus ensuring that all groups, mainly women, have their voices heard within the political process. This is not merely a call for diversity but a foundational element for legitimating the political system and enhancing the quality of democracy (Fain, 1980). Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler further explore the practical implications of electoral systems on achieving such representation, revealing that systems like proportional representation significantly enhance women's presence in politics, thereby enriching policy responsiveness and the overall legitimacy of governance (Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005). Similarly, Garboni's research highlights that increased descriptive representation in the European Parliament leads to more proactive engagement on women's issues, effectively translating increased female presence into substantive legislative action (Garboni, 2015). Andrew Rehfeld's examination adds to this discussion by challenging the traditional notions of descriptive representation, arguing for an in-depth understanding of political representation that moves beyond mere physical resemblance to encompass functional and substantive outcomes, thereby reframing the discourse around what effective representation should achieve (Rehfeld, 2009).

In exploring gender equality in politics, the framework of intersectionality is crucial. Developed by Kimberle Crenshaw, this theory examines how various social and identity categories such as gender, caste, and class intersect to impact individuals' political participation and representation. Intersectionality highlights that the barriers to political participation for women are not uniform but vary significantly across different social strata, necessitating detailed and targeted policy interventions.[45] Crenshaw's work highlights the need to account for these multiple, overlapping barriers, as they affect the political engagement and representation of women, particularly those from marginalized communities (Crenshaw, 1991). This perspective is essential for formulating policies that effectively address the unique challenges faced by diverse groups of women, ensuring equitable political participation.

The theory of critical mass is another key concept that informs this study. It suggests that a certain proportion of women (often cited as around 30%) in legislative bodies is necessary to effect substantive changes in policy outcomes, particularly those affecting women. This theory, however, has been both supported and contested in empirical research, raising questions about the specific threshold needed to influence legislative priorities and the dynamics of how women legislators influence policy irrespective of their numbers. Childs and Krook's research revisits the classical contributions and clarifies misconceptions about the critical mass theory, highlighting the complexity of linking numbers directly with legislative outcomes. They argue that previous studies often misinterpret the implications of achieving critical mass, neglecting the diversity among women and the role of individual "equality champions" who drive change regardless of numbers (Childs & Krook, 2008). Similarly, Paul Chaney's study provides empirical evidence that achieving a critical mass of women does not automatically ensure women-friendly policies but is highly dependent on the characteristics of the women elected and the broader institutional context. This signifies that while numbers are crucial, the impact of these numbers is probabilistic and shaped by the actions of individual legislators who champion equality (Chaney, 2006).

Further, the role of legislative quotas in enhancing women's political participation has become important in feminist political theory. Recognized as a vital mechanism for correcting structural imbalances, quotas ensure more equitable representation within political institutions. However, their effectiveness depends on specific designs and implementation strategies, with distinctions between voluntary party quotas and legally mandated quotas leading to different outcomes. Research by Fernández and Valiente (2021) highlights that legislative quotas not only raise awareness about women's underrepresentation but also enhance public support for gender-inclusive policies. Gorecki and Kukołowicz (2021) emphasize that stringent enforcement of legislated quotas markedly improves women's descriptive representation. Franceschet & Krook (2008) notes the critical role of socio-political contexts in shaping the effectiveness of quotas. Additionally, studies by Rosen (2021) and Górecki & Pierzgalski (2021) indicate that the success of quotas also depends on broader institutional frameworks and prevailing gender norms. Merkle's analysis indicates that women's participation, enhanced by effective quota systems, plays an important role in reducing corruption by breaking up male-dominated networks and bringing transparency to governance (Merkle, 2022). Collectively, these studies affirm that while quotas are a crucial tool for promoting

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45   https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality-more-two-decades-later

gender equity, their success is intricately linked to their contextual application and public reception.

Policy interventions aimed at enhancing women's political participation extend beyond quotas to include capacity building, electoral reform, and initiatives to change societal attitudes towards women in politics. The theory of social capital, which emphasizes the importance of networks, norms, and trust in facilitating political participation, provides a useful lens for understanding how these interventions can be designed to empower women politically. Building women's social capital within political parties and in society at large is crucial for enhancing their political efficacy and participation. According to Savage and Kanazawa (2002), social capital in evolutionary terms can be defined as any feature of a social relationship that yields reproductive benefits, which in the context of political participation could translate into greater influence and recognition within political networks. Further, considering the gender differences in social capital utilization, Gannon and Roberts (2020) suggest that interventions can be tailored to strengthen women's unique networks and cultivate environments that nurture trust and cooperation among women in politics. This approach not only amplifies their presence in political spaces but also equips them with the necessary social resources to navigate and succeed in these areas.

In synthesizing these theoretical perspectives, this paper argues that a comprehensive strategy, which incorporates legislative quotas, capacity building, and societal change, is necessary to address the underrepresentation of women in politics. Such an approach acknowledges the complexity of barriers facing women and the need for interventions that address structural, institutional, and cultural dimensions of gender inequality in political representation.

This theoretical framework builds the basis for analyzing the specific context of Uttarakhand, where societal engagement and political mobilization of women have not translated into adequate political representation. By applying these theories to the Uttarakhand context, this study seeks to identify targeted strategies and policy interventions that can enhance women's political participation and representation in the Legislative Assembly.

V.I Overcoming Barriers to Women's Political Participation

To increase women's political participation and representation in Uttarakhand, a comprehensive strategy is required. This includes:

- **Legislative Quotas and Party Reforms:** Implementing legislative quotas for women and encouraging political parties to adopt voluntary gender quotas for candidate selection could significantly increase the number of women in politics. Party reforms that promote women to leadership positions and decision-making roles are also critical for changing nomination practices.

- **Capacity Building and Support**: Providing training, resources, and support for potential women candidates can help overcome the skills gap and build confidence. Mentorship programs that connect aspiring women politicians with experienced mentors can also play a crucial role in encouraging more women to enter politics.

- **Changing Societal Attitudes:** Campaigns and initiatives aimed at changing societal perceptions of women in leadership can contribute to a more supportive environment for women candidates. These efforts should focus on highlighting the positive impact of women's representation in politics and challenging stereotypes that limit women's political aspirations.

- **Addressing Practical Barriers:** Policies that address the practical barriers women face, such as the lack of childcare support or the challenges of balancing domestic responsibilities with political careers, are essential for enabling more women to participate in politics actively.

- **Role of Digital Media:** Digital media has been instrumental in transforming women's political participation in India, providing platforms that enable broader engagement and advocacy. Through social media and other online tools, women can mobilize support, build communities, and elevate their political agendas. Initiatives like the #MeToo movement illustrate the power of digital platforms to challenge societal norms and promote feminist dialogues (Raj, 2023). Looking ahead, there is potential to further strengthen these digital avenues by enhancing cybersecurity measures to protect women from online harassment and by increasing digital literacy programs. Such efforts can expand safe spaces for women to engage in political dialogue and action, thereby ensuring their participation is both impactful and sustainable.

The analysis of the current scenario in Uttarakhand highlights the need for comprehensive strategies that address both the structural barriers within political systems and the societal norms that inhibit women's political participation. By tackling these issues, Uttarakhand can move towards a more inclusive and representative political landscape.

V.II Proposed Policy Framework for Enhancing Women's Political Participation in Uttarakhand

To address the underrepresentation of women in the Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly and promote a more inclusive political landscape, this paper proposes a multi-dimensional policy framework. This framework encompasses legislative interventions, party-level reforms, and societal initiatives designed to tackle the barriers to women's political participation from multiple angles. The strategies are tailored to the specific context of Uttarakhand, considering its unique political, social, and cultural dynamics.

Figure 4. Proposed Policy Framework for Enhancing Women's Political Participation
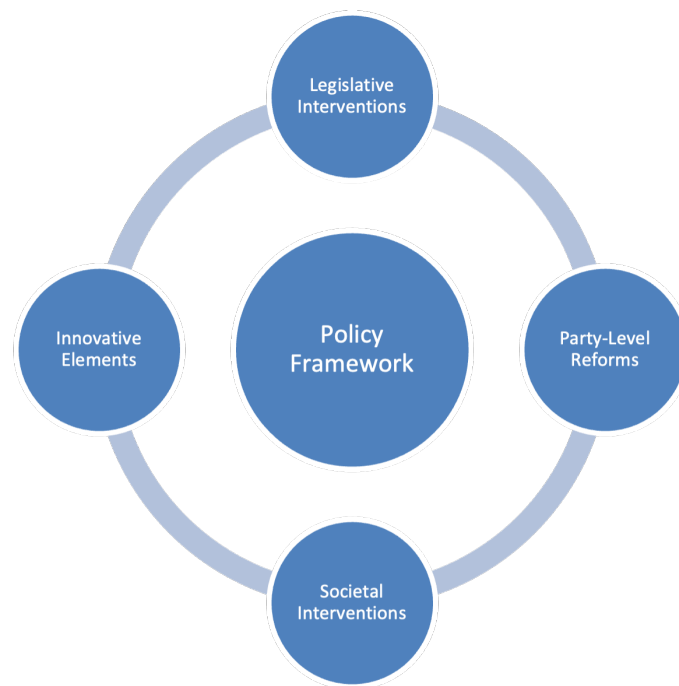
Note. By Author

Legislative Interventions

- **Timely Implementation of Legislative Quotas:** Ensure the timely implementation of the 2023 Women's Reservation Bill[46] in the Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly, which guarantees a one-third reservation for women candidates across the Lok Sabha (Lower House) and state assemblies. This could be further structured, following the initial implementation, to mirror the successful reservation system that provides a 50 percent reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in India[47], adapted to the state's legislative context.

- **Legal Support for Women Candidates:** Enact laws that provide financial and logistical support to women candidates, reducing the economic barriers to running for office. This could include state-funded campaign support for women candidates to level the playing field.

Party-Level Reforms

- **Voluntary Party Quotas:** Encourage political parties to adopt voluntary gender quotas for candidate selection at all levels, not just for the assembly elections but also within party structures, ensuring women are represented in party leadership and decision-making bodies.

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46   https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2023/10/india-passes-law-to-reserve-seats-for-women-legislators

47   https://www.outlookindia.com/national/women-in-panchayati-raj-institutions-successful-for-some-barrier-for-many-news-319213

- **Training and Mentorship Programs:** Develop party-sponsored training and mentorship programs for women members, focusing on skill development, leadership, campaign management, and policy formulation. These programs should aim to prepare women for electoral success and effective governance.

- **Promotion of Women Leaders:** Create clear pathways for women within party hierarchies, ensuring that women who show leadership potential are given opportunities to advance and take on major roles within the party.

Societal Interventions

Public Awareness Campaigns: Launch state-wide campaigns to challenge societal norms and stereotypes that hinder women's political participation. These campaigns could highlight the contributions of women leaders, both historically and in contemporary settings, to change public perceptions about women in politics.

Education and Engagement Initiatives: Implement programs in schools and universities that educate young people about gender equality and the importance of women's political participation. These programs can also serve as platforms for young women to engage with politics early, fostering a new generation of women leaders.

Community Support Networks: Establish community support networks for women candidates and politicians, providing a platform for sharing experiences, challenges, and strategies. These networks can also mobilize community support for women candidates during elections.

Innovative Elements and Tailored Approaches for Uttarakhand

- **Mobile Training Units:** Given Uttarakhand's challenging geography, mobile training units could bring political training and awareness campaigns directly to remote areas, ensuring that women across the state have access to political education and resources.

- **Digital Platforms for Women's Leadership:** Leverage digital technology to create online platforms that offer training, resources, and networking opportunities for women interested in politics. This could include webinars, online mentorship programs, and forums for discussion and support.

- **Incentives for Political Parties:** Introduce incentives for political parties that successfully increase the representation of women within their ranks and in elected positions. These incentives could be financial, such as additional campaign funding, or recognition-based, such as awards for gender equality leadership.
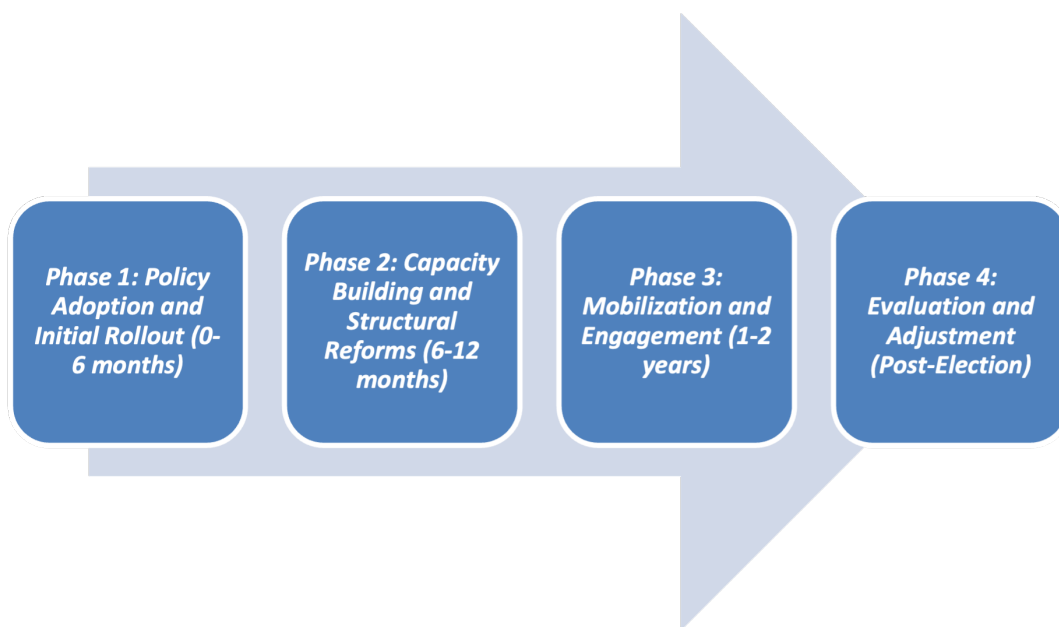
Implementing this multi-dimensional policy framework requires a collaborative effort from the government, political parties, civil society organizations, and the wider community. By addressing the barriers to women's political participation at multiple levels, Uttarakhand can pave the way for a more inclusive, democratic, and effective political system that fully leverages the talents and perspectives of its women

population. In addition, following the 'Renewal of Representation: Proposed Global Agenda,'[48] a comprehensive strategy to support women's involvement must include enhancing civic education to foster a well-informed electorate and increasing digital media literacy, particularly among women. This approach aligns with the need for more transparent and participatory governance structures, such as citizen assemblies and direct consultation processes, that actively involve women in policy-making. Furthermore, addressing financial and administrative barriers that hinder women's participation and ensuring that political institutions are inclusive, and representative of all demographics are crucial for making democracy more effective and resilient in Uttarakhand.

V.III Implementation Roadmap and Challenges for Enhancing Women's Political Participation in Uttarakhand

The successful implementation of the proposed policy framework to enhance women's political participation in Uttarakhand requires a carefully phased approach. This roadmap takes into consideration the political calendar, election cycles, and potential obstacles, proposing mitigation strategies to overcome them.

Figure 5. *Implementation Roadmap for Enhancing Women's Political Participation*

Phase 1: Policy Adoption and Initial Rollout (0-6 months)

Phase 2: Capacity Building and Structural Reforms (6-12 months)

Phase 3: Mobilization and Engagement (1-2 years)

Phase 4: Evaluation and Adjustment (Post-Election)

Note. By Author

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48 https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/other/The%20Renewal%20of%20Representaion%20V3.pdf

Phased Implementation Plan

Phase 1: Policy Adoption and Initial Rollout (0-6 months)

- Objective: Secure commitment from political stakeholders and begin the groundwork for legislative and party-level reforms.

Actions:

- Engage with political parties, civil society, and government officials to build consensus on the need for enhanced women's representation.

- Introduce legislative proposals for quotas and legal support measures for women candidates.

- Launch initial public awareness campaigns to start shifting societal norms.

- **Challenges:** Resistance from traditional political factions; public skepticism.

- **Mitigation Strategies:** Utilse data and success stories from other regions to build a compelling case; initiate dialogue with resistant groups to find common ground.

Phase 2: Capacity Building and Structural Reforms (6-12 months)

- Objective: Establish the infrastructure for supporting women candidates and reforming party nomination processes.

Actions:

- Begin implementation of training and mentorship programs for women.

- Political parties to start internal reforms for voluntary quotas and promotion of women within party ranks.

- Expand public awareness campaigns and integrate education programs in schools and universities.

- **Challenges:** Limited resources for training programs; inertia within party structures.

- **Mitigation Strategies:** Seek international funding and partnerships for capacity-building programs; create incentives for parties to comply with reforms.

Phase 3: Mobilization and Engagement (1-2 years)

- **Objective:** Mobilize women to participate in political processes and engage the public in supporting women candidates.

Actions:

- Roll out mobile training units and digital platforms for wider access.

- Strengthen community support networks for women in politics.

- Political parties to actively promote and support women candidates in upcoming elections.

- **Challenges:** Cultural resistance to women in leadership; logistical challenges in remote areas.

- **Mitigation Strategies:** Customize outreach and training materials to address cultural sensitivities; leverage local community leaders and groups for mobilization efforts.

Phase 4: Evaluation and Adjustment (Post-Election)

- **Objective:** Assess the impact of the interventions and make necessary adjustments for future election cycles.

Actions:

- Conduct a comprehensive evaluation of women's political participation and representation outcomes.

- Gather feedback from all stakeholders, including women candidates, political parties, and the electorate.

- Adjust policies and programs based on evaluation findings and feedback.

- **Challenges:** Difficulty in measuring short-term impact; potential backlash against rapid changes.

- **Mitigation Strategies:** Set realistic expectations for progress; ensure ongoing dialogue with stakeholders to manage expectations and address concerns.

The implementation of this roadmap requires a collaborative approach, engaging stakeholders across the political spectrum and civil society. By anticipating challenges and planning for gradual implementation, Uttarakhand can make efforts toward a more inclusive and representative political system.

VI CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has outlined a comprehensive policy framework aimed at enhancing women's political participation in the Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly, addressing the underrepresentation of women in the political arena. Through a detailed examination of the current scenario, including electoral trends, party nomination practices, and the impact of societal norms, it has become evident that multiple barriers inhibit women's full participation in politics. These barriers range from structural issues within political parties and legislative processes to deeply ingrained societal norms and cultural attitudes.

The proposed multi-dimensional strategy encompasses legislative interventions, party-level reforms, and societal initiatives designed to tackle these barriers head-on. Legislative quotas, legal support for women candidates, voluntary party quotas, training and mentorship programs, public awareness campaigns, and community support networks form the basis of this strategy. Each element is tailored to address specific challenges, building on lessons learned from successful case studies globally and within India, including innovative approaches that consider Uttarakhand's unique socio-political and cultural context.

Implementing this framework requires a phased approach, with clear objectives and actions designed to gradually build the infrastructure, capacity, and public support necessary for increasing women's political representation. While challenges are anticipated, including resistance from traditional political structures and cultural barriers, the roadmap provides mitigation strategies that emphasize dialogue, engagement, and leveraging support from a broad coalition of stakeholders.

The importance of enhancing women's political participation cannot be overstated. A more inclusive and representative political landscape not only upholds the principles of democracy but also ensures that the policies and decisions made reflect the diverse perspectives and needs of the society. For Uttarakhand, with its rich history of women's active engagement in social movements, achieving gender parity in political representation is both a logical next step and a necessary evolution towards a more equitable and just society.

As Uttarakhand approaches upcoming electoral cycles, including the next Assembly election in 2027 and the general election in 2029, the time is ripe for implementing these reforms. The commitment and collaboration of all stakeholders—government bodies, political parties, civil society organizations, and the electorate—are crucial for turning the vision of a more inclusive political arena into reality. This paper not only contributes to the ongoing dialogue on gender equality and political representation but also offers a practical blueprint for action that, if adopted, could serve as a model for other regions facing similar challenges. Recent data from the Election Commission of India indicates a concerning trend: Uttarakhand's average voter turnout for the Lok Sabha (Lower House) Phase 1 elections held on April 19, 2024, was only 53.64%, ranking it third lowest nationally, behind Bihar and Rajasthan. This drop from the 58.01% turnout observed in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections[49] highlights the urgency of addressing apathy and disengagement among voters. This decline in voter engagement presents an additional challenge for political stakeholders but also emphasizes the critical need for reforms designed to energize and involve the electorate, particularly by empowering women, who have historically been underrepresented.

This study proposes several avenues for future research to enhance women's political representation in Uttarakhand, India. These include the inclusion of qualitative data through interviews with political parties, women representatives, and other stakeholders. Additionally, conducting focus groups and case studies, as well as comparisons with other states in India, will further our understanding of the barriers and enablers within the political landscape.

In conclusion, enhancing women's political participation in Uttarakhand is a critical need that requires collaborative action. The proposed policy framework establishes a foundation for achieving this goal, envisioning a future where the political landscape is as diverse and vibrant as the society it represents.

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49   https://www.thehindu.com/elections/lok-sabha/uttarakhand-records-low-voter-turnout-of-53-in-phase-1-of-ls-polls/article68085171.ece

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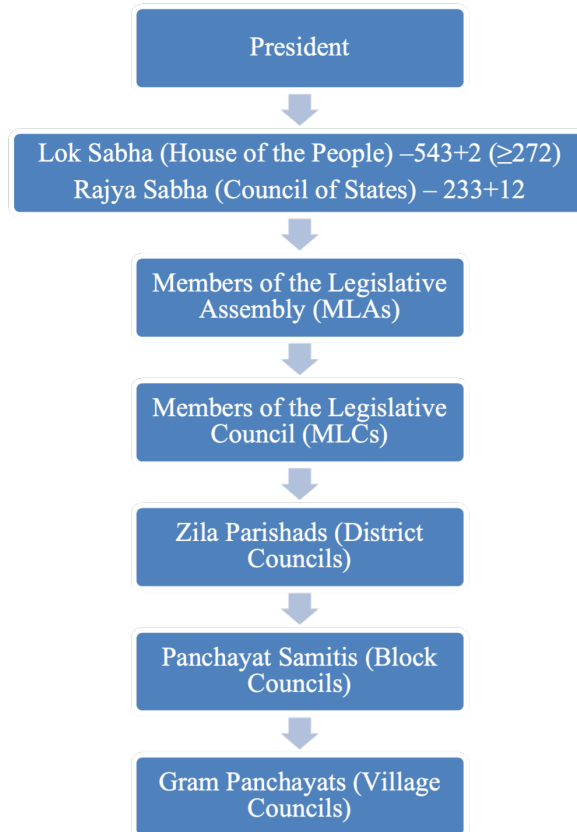
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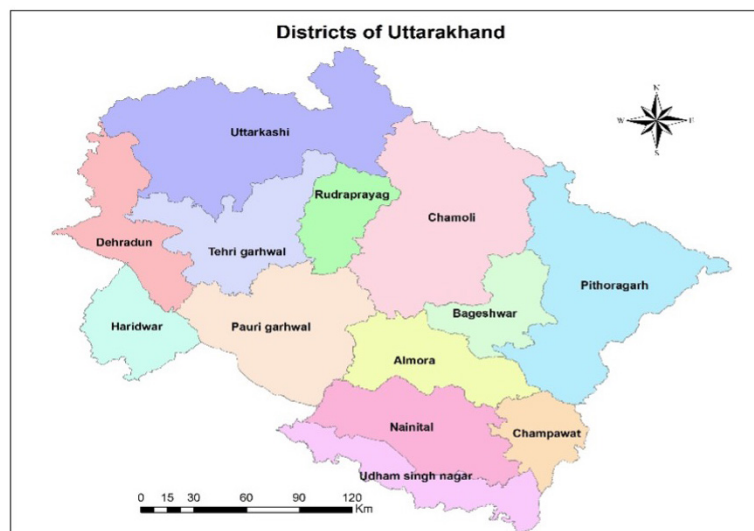
Appendix

Additional Figures and Tables

Figure A1. Indian Parliamentary and Governance System


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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│              President               │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Lok Sabha (House of the People) –543+2 (≥272) │
│ Rajya Sabha (Council of States) – 233+12      │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│   Members of the Legislative         │
│        Assembly (MLAs)               │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│   Members of the Legislative         │
│        Council (MLCs)                │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│   Zila Parishads (District           │
│        Councils)                     │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│   Panchayat Samitis (Block           │
│        Councils)                     │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
                  ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│   Gram Panchayats (Village           │
│        Councils)                     │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
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Note. By Author

Figure A2. Geographical Overview of Uttarakhand (Study Area)

Note. From https://uk.gov.in/

Figure A3. *Manifestos of Congress and BJP for General Elections 2024*

Note. From https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/data-stories/data-focus/bjp-and-congress-manifestos-which-of-them-is-more-women-friendly/article68072108.ece

Figure A4. *Women MLAs in State Assemblies*

Note. From https://prsindia.org/
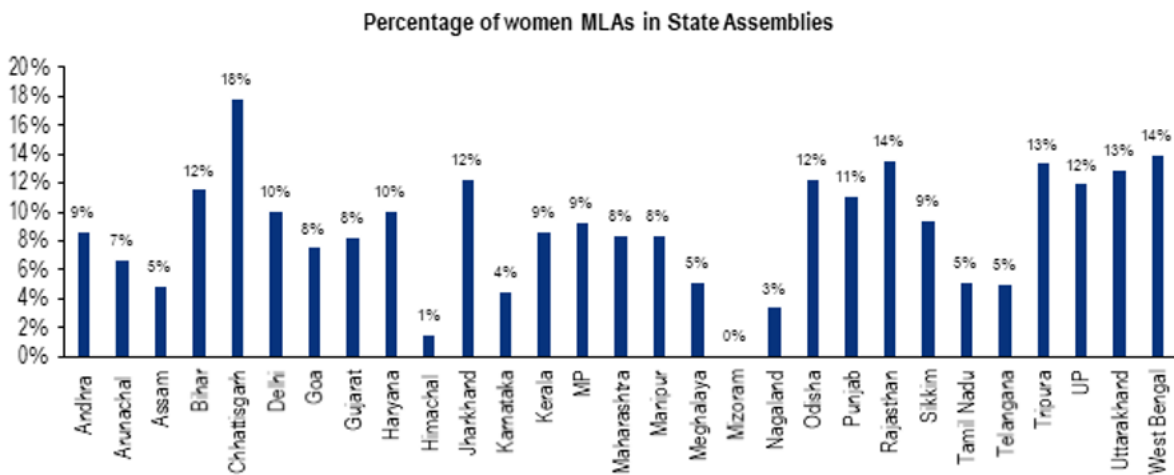
Table A1. *Electoral Participation by Gender in Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly Elections*

Year	Gender	No. of Electors	% of Total Electors	No. of Electors Who Voted	Polling Percentage
2002	Male	2,713,347	51.50%	1,517,984	55.95%
	Female	2,557,028	48.50%	1,345,902	52.64%
	Total	**5,270,375**	**100%**	**2,863,886**	**54.34%**
2007	Male	3,038,991	50.78%	1,791,391	58.95%
	Female	2,946,311	49.22%	1,751,589	59.45%
	Total	**5,985,302**	**100%**	**3,558,043**	**59.45%**
2012	Male	3,352,984	52.59%	2,159,501	64.41%
	Female	3,024,346	47.41%	2,060,193	68.12%
	Total	**6,377,330**	**100%**	**4,219,694**	**66.17%**
2017	Male	3,998,319	51.98%	2,443,367	61.11%
	Female	3,608,228	47.44%	2,479,480	68.72%
	Third Gender	141	0.002%	13	9.22%
	Total	**7,606,688**	**100%**	**4,922,860**	**64.72%**
2022	Male	4,330,824	52.42%	2,653,485	61.27%
	Female	3,935,532	47.58%	2,643,047	67.16%
	Third Gender	288	0.0035%	75	26.04%
	Total	**8,266,644**	**100%**	**5,296,607**	**64.07%**

Note. Data adapted from " Election Commission of India," accessed from www.eci.gov.in/

Table A2. *Gender Participation in Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly Elections*

Year	Total Contestants	Total Elected	Male		Female	
			Contested	Elected	Contested	Elected
2002	927	70	855 (92.2%)	66 (94.3%)	72 (7.8%)	4 (5.7%)
2007	785	69	729 (92.9%)	65 (94.2%)	56 (7.1%)	4 (5.8%)
2012	787	70	724 (92.0%	65 (92.9%)	63 (8.0%)	5 (7.1%)
2017	635	70	573 (90.2%)	65 (92.9%)	62 (9.8%)	5 (7.1%)
2022	632	70	569 (90.0%)	62 (88.6%)	63 (10.0%)	8 (11.4%)

Note. Data adapted from " Election Commission of India," accessed from www.eci.gov.in/

Table A3. *Ranking of women in national parliaments as of April 2024*

Rank	Country	Lower or Single House Election Date	Seats	Wom-en	% Women	Upper Chamber Election Date	Seats	Women	% Women
1	Rwanda	09.2018	80	49	61.3	09.2019	26	9	34.6
142	India	04.2019	523	77	14.7	01.2024	238	32	13.5
137	Pakistan	02.2024	309	50	16.2	03.2021	100	19	19.0
88	China	03.2023	2977	790	26.5	-	-	-	-
71	United States	11.2022	431	126	29.2	11.2022	100	25	25.0
46	United Kingdom	12.2019	650	226	34.8	-	785	228	29.0
45	Germany	09.2021	736	260	35.3	-	69	26	37.7

Note. Data adapted from " Inter-Parliamentary Union," accessed from https://data.ipu.org/

Table A4. *Overview of Elected Parties in General Elections*

No of Elections	Election Years	Formation of Government	Party and Coalition
1st Lok Sabha	1952	Congress Party	Congress domination
2nd Lok Sabha	1957	Congress Party	Congress domination
3rd Lok Sabha	1962	Congress Party	Congress domination
4th Lok Sabha	1967	Congress Party	Congress domination
5th Lok Sabha	1971	Congress Party	Congress domination
6th Lok Sabha	1977	Janta Party	Opponents domination
7th Lok Sabha	1980	Congress Party	Congress domination
8th Lok Sabha	1984	Congress Party	Congress domination
9th Lok Sabha	1989	National Front	State and regional parties' domination
10th Lok Sabha	1991	Congress (Coalition with regional parties)	Congress and regional party
11th Lok Sabha	1996	United Front	State and regional parties' domination
12th Lok Sabha	1998	BJP (Coalition with regional parties)	BJP domination with regional parties
13th Lok Sabha	1999	BJP-Led NDA alliance government	BJP domination with regional parties
14th Lok Sabha	2004	Congress-led UPA government	Congress (INC), Communists, states, and regional party domination
15th Lok Sabha	2009	Congress-led UPA government	Congress (INC), state party domination
16th Lok Sabha	2014	BJP-Led NDA government	BJP Domination
17th Lok Sabha	2019	BJP-Led NDA government	BJP Domination

Note. Taken from Bharti, 2022

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