

Gender and Democracy: Analyzing Women's Electoral Participation in Assam Legislative Assembly Election 2026

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Abstract

Women's participation in electoral politics is an important indicator of democratic development and political inclusion. In recent decades, women voters in Assam have emerged as a significant electoral force, influencing political outcomes and policy priorities. This study examines women's participation in the Assam Legislative Assembly Election 2026. This study based entirely on secondary data are collected from Election Commission of India and also from census data, journal and articles etc. This study adopts a descriptive analytical method. The study analyses trends in women's voter turnout, factors influencing participation, challenges faced by women in politics and the implications of increased female electoral engagement for democratic governance. The findings suggest that education, political awareness, welfare schemes, media exposure and electoral reforms have contributed significantly to the growing participation of women voters in Assam.

Keywords: Women voters, Electoral participation, Assam Assembly Election 2026, Gender and Politics, Political Participation, Democracy

1. Introduction:

Democracy is founded on the principle of citizen participation. Elections provide citizens with an opportunity to influence political decision making and choose their representatives. Electoral participation strengthens democratic governance and promotes political equality among citizens (Almond & Verba, 1963). Women's participation in elections is particularly significant because it reflects the degree of political inclusion and gender equality within a society. Historically, women in many parts of the world faced restrictions on political participation due to social, cultural and economic barriers. In India, however, women have enjoyed universal adult franchise since independence, enabling them to participate in electoral politics on an equal basis with men. Political participation includes activities through which citizens seek to influence political decisions and public policy. Voting is one of its most important forms but political participation also includes campaign activities, political communication, membership in political organizations and involvement in public affairs (Verba et al., 1995).

Assam has witnessed remarkable changes in its political landscape over the years. Women have increasingly become active participants in elections, not only as voters but also as political factors

influencing electoral outcomes. The 2026 Assam Assembly Election is significant as it is the first state election after the enactment of the Women's Researvation Act, 2023 (Ministry of Law and Justice, 2026). The Assam Assembly Election 2026 highlights the growing significance of women voters and provides an important context for examining their role in the democratic process. Assam has 126 Legislative Assembly constituencies. Historically, the state has witnessed high electoral turnout, often exceeding the national average (Hussain, 2016).

The relationship between gender and democracy is particularly important in Assam because the state's political environment encompasses diverse social, economic and community contexts, Women's political experiences may differ according to educational opportunities, economic circumstances etc. The 2026 Assam Legislative Assembly election provides a contemporary context for examining women's electoral participation. According to the Election Commission of India (2026), female turnout reached 85.96% compared with male voter turnout of 84.80%.

2. Statement of the Problem:

While voter turnout among women has increased significantly, challenges related to political representation, gender inequality, and access to political opportunities continue to exist. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the trends and determinants of women's electoral participation in Assam and assess their contribution to democratic governance.

Objectives of the Study:

- (1) To examine the trends and patterns of women's electoral participation in the Assam Assembly Election 2026.
- (2) To analyse the major factors contributing to women's electoral participation.
- (3) To identify major challenges affecting women's meaningful participation in electoral politics.

Research Questions:

- (1) What are the major trends and patterns of women's electoral participation in the Assam Assembly Election 2026?
- (2) What factors contribute to women's electoral participation?
- (3) What challenges continue to affect women's political engagement?

3. Theoretical Framework:

Resource model of political Participation: The resource model developed by Brady et al. (1995) explains political participation through the availability of time, money and civic skills. According to this approach, participation is influenced not only by individual interest but also by access to resource that make political engagement possible. In the context of Assam, this framework provides a basis for examining how educational opportunities, economic circumstances, political networks may affect women's participation.

Political Representation and the politics of Presence: Phillips (1995) emphasis the importance of the presence of underrepresented groups within democratic institutions. Applied to Assam, this framework supports an examination of the relationship between women's participation as voters and their representation among candidates and elected representatives (Phillips, 1995).

Together, these theoretical perspectives allow the study to examine women's electoral participation in relation to political resources and institutional representation.

4. Methodology of the Study:

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design and it based entirely on secondary data. The required information was collected from various sources, including reports of election commission of India, census reports, articles, online academic database etc. The collected data were analysed using descriptive, comparative and content analysis methods to identify trends, patterns, and factors influencing women's participation in the electoral process.

5. Review of Related Literature:

Almond and Verba (1963) in their work "The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations" argued that political participation is closely associated with political culture and civic awareness. According to them, democratic stability depends upon active citizen participation.

Praveen Ray (2017) in his study "Women's Participation in electoral Politics in India: Silent Feminisation" examined the changing patterns of women's participation in Indian electoral politics. The study found that women's voter turnout has increased significantly since the 1990s and reached unprecedented levels in national election.

Jayashree Sarma (2021) conducted a study on "Women's Political Participation in the Rangia Legislative Assembly Constituency of Assam." Using secondary data from 1951 to 2016, the study found that women actively participated as voters but remained underrepresented as candidates and elected representatives.

S. Ahmed and M.K Moorthy (2021) in their study "Gender inequality in Assam: Factors affecting women's political participation in electoral politics" identified socio-cultural barriers, economic dependency, and patriarchal attitudes as major obstacles to women's active engagement in electoral politics.

Santana Saikia (2024) in her study "Women representation in the politics of Assam: Assam Legislative Assembly Election 2011-2021" showed that although women have become increasingly active voters, their representation among elected representatives remains relatively low.

Md Abdus Salam (2026) in his study "Women's Status in Assam Legislative Assembly Constituencies: Representation, Electoral Participation and Challenges" examined women's political participation and representation in Assam. The study found that women voters often participate in elections at rates equal to or higher than men, however, their representation in legislative institutions remains disproportionately low.

Women's Electoral Participation in Assam Assembly Election 2026:

The Assam Assembly Election 2026, recorded one of the highest voter turnout rates in the state electoral history. Official election data indicate that women voters participated at a higher rate than male voters, demonstrating growing political awareness and democratic engagement among women in the state (Election Commission of India report, 2026). Political parties increasingly recognize the importance of women voters and formulate election campaigns and welfare policies aimed at addressing issues such as education, healthcare, social security and economic empowerment. The Assam Assembly Election 2026

recorded an overall voter turnout of approximately 85.38%, while female voter turnout reached 85.96 percent, surpassing the male turnout rate of 84.80%. (Report of Election Commission of India, 2026). While women actively participate as voters, their representation in legislative institutions remains comparatively low (Salam, 2026).

6. Scope of the Study:

The present study focuses on women's electoral participation in the Assam Legislative Assembly election of 2026, examining its significance for gender equality, democratic inclusion and political representation. Overall, the scope of the study is to assess women's electoral participation as an important dimension of democratic inclusion in Assam and to examine whether high electoral participation corresponds with opportunities for political representation. It contributes to the broader discussion of gender and democracy by distinguishing women's participation in voting from their wider involvement in electoral politics and representative institutions.

7. Analysis and Findings:

Objectives 1: Trends and Patterns of women's Electoral Participation

The election commission of India reported that female turnout in 2026 Assam Assembly election was 85.96%, compared with male turnout of 84.80%. Overall turnout was 85.38%, and Assam exceeded its previously reported record turnout of 84.67% in the 2016 Assembly election (Election Commission of India, 2026).

The difference between female and male turnout was 1.16 percentage points, indicating that women participated in voting at a higher rate than men. This findings is significant because it challenges the assumption that women necessarily participate in elections less frequently than men.

Objective 2: Factors Contributing to Women's Electoral Participation:

Several factors identified in the existing literature may contribute to women's electoral participation. These includes political awareness, access to electoral information, political mobilization and the availability of accessible electoral institutions etc. These factors suggest that women's electoral participation should be understood as the outcome of interactions between individual resources, political mobilization and institutional opportunities. These factors have also increased political knowledge, confidence, and democratic engagement among women voters, resulting in higher voter turnout and greater participation in the electoral process.

Objective 3: Challenges Affecting Women's Meaningful Electoral Participation:

Higher voter turnout does not necessarily demonstrate equality in every dimension of electoral politics. Rai (2017) highlights the continued underrepresentation of women in legislative institutions and political parties despite their growing participation as voters and campaign participants. The study found that despite the increasing participation of women voters in the Assam Assembly Election 2026, several challenges continue to affect their full and effective involvement in the electoral process. Gender inequality, patriarchal social norms, limited political representation, economic dependency and lack of leadership opportunities remain significant barriers. The study also found that inadequate political education, misinformation reduces opportunities for meaningful political engagement.

The findings demonstrate the importance of distinguishing between women's electoral participation and their broader political empowerment. The official turnout figures show that female participation in the 2026 Assam Assembly election exceeded male participation, indicating substantial involvement by women in the voting process.

Suggestions:

- (1) Strengthen voter education programs for women.
- (2) Encourage greater representation of women in political parties.
- (3) Promote leadership training programs for women.
- (4) Improve awareness regarding constitutional and political rights.
- (5) Encourage political parties to nominate more women candidates.

8. Conclusion:

Women's electoral participation in Assam reflects the growing strength of democratic inclusion and political empowerment. Increased literacy, political awareness, and socio-economic development have contributed to higher voter turnout among women. The Assam Assembly Election 2026 highlights the growing influence of women voters in shaping political outcomes and public policy priorities. Strengthening women's political empowerment and ensuring greater participation in decision-making processes will contribute to a more inclusive and representative democracy in Assam. Ultimately, gender inclusive democracy requires more than formal equality in voting. It requires political institutions that provide women with meaningful opportunities to participate, obtain representation and exercise influence over democratic governance (Brady et al., 1995; Phillips, 1995).

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