



e-Discussions on Women in Politics and the Media [1]

(<https://www.iknowpolitics.org/en/discuss/e-discussions/women-politics-and-media>)

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Note: (a) The views expressed in this contribution are my personal; they do not represent views of the PERC, DLLE, SNDTWU (I was employed with previously). (b) Some portion of the contribution has been taken from other sources, which are quoted under references (at the end of the submission).

Questions

1. **Are women politicians less visible or covered differently than men in political news coverage in your country? Please share data, if available.**

In India (the country I am located presently), the proportion of women politicians were less visible prior to the year 2000. During that time, they were covered differently than men in political news coverage, including on other socio-economic fronts. This trend is indicative of gender equality.

In the new millennium, more girls are going to school; fewer girls are forced into early marriage. More women are serving in parliament and positions of leadership. Laws are being reformed to advance gender equality. In terms of women's representation in politics, there has, thus, been progress over the last decades [1].

It is pertinent to note that significant constitutional, legislative and policy reforms within the last decade (including the 73rd and 74th amendments and the continued administrative decentralization through programs) have demonstrated the Government of India's commitment to increasing the political participation of marginalized groups, especially poor women [2]. Women's increased political participation has yielded positive results:

- a) *First*, issues central to development, including health, nutrition, family income and education, take center stage as women participate in village development boards and other governance structures.
- b) *Secondly*, women have shown that they (1) have critical information about community resources, (2) are adept at managing funds, (3) result in more inclusive governance, and (4) learn quickly about how to lead effective community- centered development [2].

Further, the National Common Minimum Program lays down empowerment of women politically, educationally and legally as one of the six basic principles. In order to provide an impetus to this objective, the Finance Minister in the budget speech for 2004-05 highlighted the perceived need for budget data to be presented in a manner that highlights the gender sensitiveness of the budgetary allocations [2].

Furthermore, the Women's Component Plan (WCP) was the first major initiative taken by the Government of India (GOI) to address women related issues and requirements on a systematic basis, involving the inputs from major Ministries/Departments. The WCP involved efforts to ensure that not less than 30 per cent of funds/benefits were earmarked for women under the various schemes [2].

2. What can lawmakers, governments, and civil society do to ensure media outlets/journalists deliver fair and balanced media coverage of women and men in public life?

Lawmakers, governments, and civil society can make significant contributions to ensure that media outlets/journalists deliver fair and balanced media coverage of women and men in public life. Media today, from traditional legacy media to online media, hugely influence perceptions and ideas about the role of girls and women in society. Media has the potential to perpetuate gender inequality. Research shows that from a young age, children are influenced by the

gendered stereotypes that media present to them. Research data have also found that exposure to stereotypical gender portrayals and clear gender segregation correlates (a) with preferences for “*gender appropriate*” media content, toys, games and activities; (b) to traditional perceptions of gender roles, occupations and personality traits; as well as (c) to attitudes towards expectations and aspirations for future trajectories of life. The media industry needs to be encouraged to produce gender-transformative content and to develop self-regulatory equality policies, including access to decision-making positions. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms need to be set up to assess the progress within the sector, thereby creating gender equality in content, workplace and management [3].

3. With sexist traditional media coverage disseminated on social media, women in politics are exposed to vicious online attacks and abuse by often anonymous perpetrators. What can social media companies, media outlets, governments, lawmakers, and other decision-makers do to put an end to the crisis of online violence against women in politics?

Governments and lawmakers can put an end to the crisis of online violence against women in politics. Online violence against women in politics poses a deepening challenge to democracy, serving as a key tool of illiberalism and democratic backsliding across the globe. Violence against women in politics encompasses all forms of aggression, coercion and intimidation seeking to exclude women from politics simply because they are women. Gendered disinformation is a form of violence that refers to activities that attack or undermine people on the basis of gender, or weaponizes gendered narratives to promote political, social or economic objectives. This online behaviour seeks to achieve political outcomes: targeting individual women to harm them or drive them out of public life, while also sending a message that women in general should not be involved in politics [4].

The impact of this online violence is to have a chilling effect on the political ambitions and engagement of women and girls, decreasing their presence and agency in politics and public life. Increasingly, the online violence is part of intentional, political tactics by illiberal and anti-democratic forces to suppress the numbers of politically-active women and to constrain the diversity of voices and agendas that are heard in public discourse. The need to counter the violence that women in politics face online is not just an important facet of promoting women’s equitable political participation, but is essential to modern democracy and civic engagement. Stopping gender-based attacks online is solvable, and it is the fastest and clearest investment toward building an internet that enables everyone to be politically engaged. Online spaces and the platforms that host them have consistently enabled the misogyny that politically-active women face in person to migrate to the online space. While a tech solution to misogyny does not exist, a tech solution to misogyny online most certainly does. Inaction by

social media companies on gendered disinformation and attacks online is a choice that tips the political scales, and it is long overdue for change [4].

This discriminatory practice (online violence against women in politics) can drive women away from political participation and public life entirely. In order to raise awareness of this issue, social media companies, media outlets, governments, lawmakers, and other involved stakeholders should launch committed and sustainable initiatives. Most importantly, all decision-makers should join hands together in efforts aimed at ending online violence against women in politics.

References:

[1] United Nations (Year of publication not mentioned). *“Sustainable Development Goals, Goal-5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”*. (Accessed on September 17, 2022 from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>).

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[3] International Media Support (IMS) (2022). *“The crucial role of media in achieving gender equality”*. Copenhagen, Denmark: IMS (Accessed on September 17, 2022 from <https://www.mediasupport.org/the-crucial-role-of-media-in-achieving-gender-equality/>).

[4] National Democratic Institute (NDI) (2022). *“ENDING ONLINE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS”*. Washington, DC, USA: NDI (Accessed on September 17, 2022 from <https://www.ndi.org/ending-online-violence-against-women-politics>).

Brief Biography (CV) of the Contributor (Dr. Santosh Kumar Mishra)

I retired on June 30, 2020 from the Population Education Resource Centre (PERC), Department of Lifelong Learning & Extension [DLLE, previously known as Department of Continuing & Adult Education & Extension Work (DCAEEW)], S.N.D.T. Women's University (SNDTWU), Mumbai, India. I underwent training in demography, with award of Government of India Fellowship, during 1986-1987 from the IIPS. Also, I acquired Ph. D. from University of Patna in 1999. My areas of interest are demography, sustainable development, & gender issues. I have authored (some co-authored) (a) **5** booklets (including teaching-learning materials: published by PERC, DLLE, SNDTWU); (b) **4** books; (c) **23** book chapters; (d) **80** journal articles; (e) **2** monographs; (f) **7** research studies (published by the DLLE, SNDTWU); & (g) **52** papers for conferences. I can be reached at (a) email: drskmishrain@yahoo.com, & (b) via tel.: (+91) 9224380445 (Whatsapp).

