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Carole Spary

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Women candidates, women voters, and the gender politics of India's 2019 parliamentary election

Carole Spary

School of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK

ABSTRACT

Gender quota campaigns to increase women's parliamentary presence in India have been ongoing for more than twenty years. Meanwhile, each general election results in the slow growth of women MPs, partly due to political parties nominating few women. The 2019 election was no different in this respect –women still make up fewer than 15% of lower house MPs. Incidents of gendered violence against women candidates also contributed to a characterisation of 2019 as a 'toxic' election, and will likely further discourage women's entry into politics. One positive development, however, was two regional parties' implementation of voluntary party gender quotas in their parliamentary candidate nominations. This article focuses on women's political participation as candidates and voters in the 2019 parliamentary election. Parties are scrutinised as key gatekeepers for women's political recruitment. The article also discusses the new narrative of the growing power of women voters in India, exemplified by closing gender gaps in voter turnout, and representing another aspect of women's political engagement, potentially influencing parties' responsiveness to women voters. The article concludes by discussing the broader implications and significance of the 2019 election, areas for further research, and prospects for women's participation and representation in the new parliament.

1. Introduction

India's 2019 parliamentary election failed to make significant progress in increasing women's presence among election candidates and newly elected Members of Parliament, largely as a result of major parties' limited efforts to increase women's nomination as candidates. Women MPs still make up only 14.4% of MPs in India's lower house, the Lok Sabha. Prior to the 2019 election, we estimated that it would take another 40 years to reach 33% women in the Lok Sabha, based on historical election trends and assuming no gender quota is introduced (Rai and Spary 2019). Successive national governments since the 1990s have failed to produce a legislative consensus to pass the long-debated Women's Reservation Bill, a constitutional amendment seeking to legislate for gender quotas to reserve a third of seats in the national parliament and state assemblies which would effectively fast-track increases in women's descriptive representation. The BJP government in its first term under Prime Minister Narendra Modi similarly failed to pass the Women's Reservation Bill. Perhaps evoking a sense of frustration with lack of progress, two regional parties in Odisha and West Bengal decided to implement voluntary party candidate gender quotas in 2019. Though their initiative led to no major contagion effect on other parties' nomination of women candidates, it was successful in enabling several women from these two parties to enter parliament.

This article focuses on two aspects of gender and political participation in the 17th Lok Sabha elections in India in 2019. First, women's political participation as candidates in the election, particularly in relation to (a) the gate-keeping role of political parties via their nomination practices, and (b) the particularly gendered challenges faced by women candidates when campaigning. These factors offer explanations for women's descriptive under-representation in electoral politics in India. The article identifies interesting spatial dynamics in nominations in India's fragmented multiparty system, and discusses incumbent MPs' re-nominations, and intersectional dynamics, demonstrating gendered nuances and encounters of electoral politics. It also narrates the gendered terrain and experiences of the election campaign through selected cases to better understand, beyond the numbers, the challenges women face in a male-dominated electoral field (Singer 2007).

Secondly, the article briefly discusses narratives of the increasing power of women voters in India in relation to their increasing turnout relative to men (Deshpande 2009, 2014). This development is anticipated to prompt greater responsiveness from political parties to women voters. 2019 also produced a perceptible but intangible change in online media coverage by senior journalists – commentators ensured more coverage of women candidates and voters, and better quality of discussion recognising and debunking stereotypes and myths around women's participation, aided by quality, accessible, and timely data informing media discussions (perhaps a consequence of public debates on the #MeTooIndia movement). Though the gender turnout gap continued to close in 2019, women voters did not feature as prominently as anticipated in the national campaign discourse; national security concerns overrode other campaign themes, with a gendered flexing of the BJP's 'muscular nationalism' (see Banerjee 2005). Early analysis of voter survey data suggests that the BJP is still less favoured among women voters than men, but this gender gap in party support closed slightly in 2019.

Overall, the 2019 election saw no major increase in the proportion of women candidates, but did produce a higher than average increase in the election of women MPs. This indicates the influential role of major parties in determining women's presence in parliament. But slow progress means that since 2014, India has fallen several places in the IPU's global ranking of women's parliamentary presence, from 117th after the 2014 election to 143rd position[1] as of January 2020, also reflecting greater progress made by other countries in the intervening years. Moreover, in the new parliament, dominated by the re-elected BJP, fewer women Ministers were appointed compared to 2014, and the Lok Sabha no longer has a woman Speaker.

The article employs concepts related to the political participation and descriptive representation of women, an under-represented group in formal political institutions and processes around the world, including in India. It focuses on electoral institutional processes and practices of party political recruitment and nomination of candidates (Krook 2010; Kenny and Verge 2016), and examines elections as major performative events. It also amplifies concerns of democratic quality such as inclusion and equality.[2] It illustrates gendered and intersectional norms and dynamics, recognising India's diverse plurality of identity and political geography, and considers the agency of women as political actors in creatively and strategically negotiating party, parliamentary, constituency, and other electoral structures. While the aim is to assess parties' own representative claims to support women's political empowerment using their own nomination practices as a measure of success or failure, the underlying premise of focusing on women's descriptive under-representation is that women's higher presence in parliament is necessary and desirable. This is not necessarily for instrumental reasons in terms of what or who women claim to represent, but because women have a democratic right to participate in the decision-making structures and processes that govern their lives. I also recognise that addressing women's descriptive under-representation is just one small part of a larger challenge of achieving more gender-equitable democratic institutions and processes, in India and elsewhere.

Part I scrutinises political parties' nomination of women candidates. Part II illustrates gendered experiences of the campaign trail. Part III briefly discusses the narrative of the growing power of women voters. Part IV presents analysis of the election results in terms of the outcomes for women candidates and the profile of the new 17th Lok Sabha. The article concludes with a discussion of the broader significance of the 2019 election for efforts to improve women's political participation,

and challenges going forward, particularly in the context of increasingly Hindu majoritarian[3] legislative developments and priorities in the first few months of the new government.

2. Analysing party nominations of women candidates in the 2019 Lok Sabha election

The 2019 election offered little progress in opportunities for women candidates' nomination by political parties. The number of women candidates rose from 668 in 2014 to 714 in 2019, rising by less than 1% of all candidates (8.1% in 2014 to 8.9% in 2019; see Figure 1). As in 2014, women were less likely than men to run as independent candidates, probably due to greater resource disadvantages faced by women. The analysis presented here draws on official results data from the Election Commission of India and documentation relating to model code of conduct violations, additional (including historical) candidate data provided by the Lok Sabha project of the Trivedi Centre for Political Data at Ashoka University (Jensenius and Verniers n.d.), and candidate profile data archived online by Association for Democratic Reforms, parliamentary authorities, news reports, and candidates' public statements published online during the election campaign. Party websites were consulted for information regarding candidate nominations, and party manifestoes and related materials. 2019 nomination patterns are contextualised with reference to analysis of previous elections presented in Rai and Spary (2019) and Spary (2014) and secondary literature.

2.1. Assessing party efforts to nominate women candidates

In recent national elections, the two largest national parties – the BJP and the Indian National Congress Party – usually contribute the largest numbers of women candidates and MPs because of their size and electoral prominence. In 2019, these two main national parties did not substantially increase their proportion of women candidates. The BJP fielded women candidates in 13% of party seats contested (55 women, 381 men), whereas the Congress Party fielded 12% women candidates
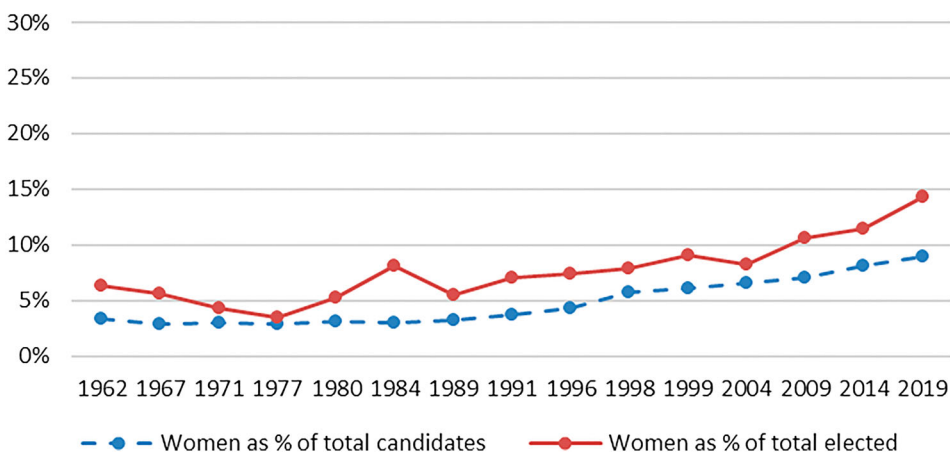
Women in Lok Sabha Elections 1962-2019

Figure 1. Women in Lok Sabha Elections 1962–2019. Source: Data compiled by the author from the statistical reports of the Election Commission of India.

Note: the *Y*-axis maximum value is set at 30% for readability but we note this visually distorts (overrepresents) the quantum and rate of change of women's under-representation, compared with a *Y*-axis maximum value of 50% (gender parity) or the whole field (100%), and renders invisible the over-representation of male candidates and MPs.

(52 women, 369 men). Both parties' performances varied among states. In 2014, the BJP fielded most women candidates in three states – Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh. In 2019, the party fielded most women again in Gujarat (6 women, 23%), UP (10 women, 13%), and, to a lesser extent, Madhya Pradesh (4 women, 14%), but notably also Maharashtra (6 women, 24%). The Congress Party's nominations were more evenly spread, though they fielded very few women in Gujarat – one woman among 26 candidates (4%) – and in Karnataka and Telangana (discussed below).[4]

The 2019 election was notable, however, for two regional parties' efforts to increase opportunities for women candidates to contest. The incumbent BJP had failed to deliver their 2014 manifesto promise to pass the Women's Reservation Bill; it had not even been tabled during their five year term, despite the BJP's majority in the lower House, which could have avoided the coalition constraints faced by previous UPA governments (2004-09, 2009-14). In 2019, both the Congress Party and the BJP once again promised to pass the Women's Reservation Bill if elected, with Congress promising to pass it in the first session (BJP 2019; INC 2019). Following the BJP government's failure to pass the Bill, two state-based parties, the BJD in Odisha and the Trinamul Congress in West Bengal, announced party gender quotas for the parliamentary election. BJD leader Naveen Patnaik passed a resolution in the Odisha state assembly in November 2018, reiterating his support for 33% women's reservation (though this had no legal binding effect). In the medium-sized state of Odisha – 21 of 543 parliamentary seats – the BJD's party gender quota produced a small increase in absolute terms (7 women), but a significant increase in the *proportion* of women fielded, and a rapid upward trajectory in the party's track record (see Figure 2). However, the party gender quota was not applied to the simultaneously occurring state assembly elections.[5] In the larger state of West Bengal – 42 parliamentary seats – Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee nominated 40% women candidates, doubling the party's 2014 offering of 19% women candidates, laying the ground for a potential improvement upon the impressive 32% women MPs from the party elected to the previous 16th Lok Sabha (see Figure 2).

The BJD's gender quota had no major contagion effect on national parties fielding candidates in Odisha – the BJP fielded 3 women (14%) in 2019 compared to one woman (5%) in 2014, whereas the Congress Party fielded 2 women (11%) in 2019, similar to 2014. A greater effect is apparent in West Bengal, particularly for the BJP, who fielded 5 women (12%), an increase from their sole woman candidate (2%) in 2014. The Congress already had a reasonable baseline in 2014 with 8 women candidates (19%) and 9 women in 2019 (23%), representing one of the party's better offerings among major states. Thus, West Bengal's already higher baseline of women's participation in electoral politics was further augmented.[6]

The BSP's nomination of women remains low and confined mostly to the party's base in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh; in 2014 Mayawati's party nominated women in 6% of seats they contested, including 10% in UP. All six Samajwadi Party women candidates contested seats in the party's stronghold, also Uttar Pradesh, though the party fielded men in seven other states. Women made up 14% of candidates in UP and 12% in total. One woman candidate was Dimple Yadav, sitting MP and wife of former UP Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav.

The Left parties' electoral support has continued to decline. Though they remain popular in Kerala, they lost ground since the 2000s to Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress in West Bengal and the BJP has replaced them as main challenger to the Trinamul Congress (Daniyal 2019). Despite strong party-affiliated women's organisations like the All India Democratic Women's Association, the Left parties, counter-intuitively compared to the international literature on gender and politics, have a weaker record of nominating women for parliamentary seats. But in 2019 the CPM fielded 10 women (14% of 69 candidates), mostly in the party's strongholds of West Bengal (6 women; 19%) and Kerala (2 women; 14%). CPM women have a decent presence in West Bengal state assembly elections, less so in Kerala. But the women elected to parliament have worked hard to represent women's interests.

The Aam Aadmi Party's 2019 ambitions were much reduced from 2014, nominating far fewer candidates, but a similar proportion of women (59 women, 12% in 2014; four women, 11% in
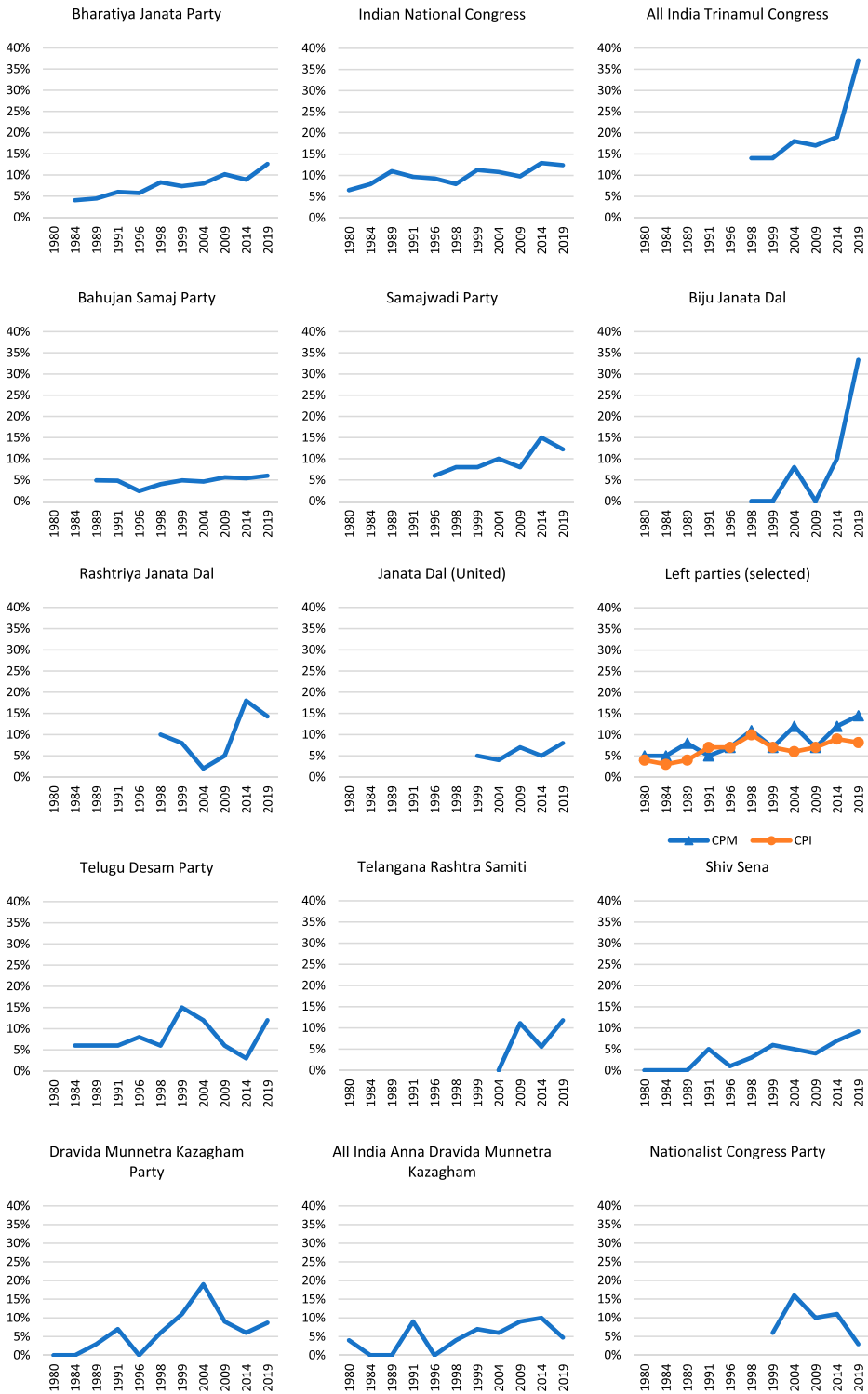
Figure 2. Party-wise trends in nominating women candidates in Lok Sabha elections (women as a percentage of party candidates, selected parties, 1980–2019). Source: updated from Rai and Spary (2019) using data from Election Commission of India (ECI 2019c) and TCPD (Jensenius and Verniers n.d.).

2019, confined to Delhi, Punjab, and UP). AAP candidate Atishi Marlena made national headlines for her excellent contribution to Delhi government school reforms, but re-emerged in the headlines as a victim of misogynistic and casteist abuse during the campaign (discussed below). AAP also fielded a transgender candidate, social activist Bhawani Ma, in Allahabad/Prayagraj (Dixit 2019; The Hindu 2019).

Bihar's Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's past appeals to women voters through public provisioning and 50% local government gender quotas, have not extended to opportunities for women to contest parliamentary elections. His party, the JD(U), has a poor track record in fielding women candidates (See Figure 2), and fielded only one woman among 16 men (6%) in Bihar in 2019. Also in Bihar, the RJD led by former Chief Minister Lalu Yadav did better fielding three women in Bihar (16%); one was Rajya Sabha MP Misa Bharti, Lalu's daughter, and another was Hena Shahab, wife of a jailed politician (thus debarred from contesting). Shahab contested against two-term MLA Kavita Singh of Nitish Kumar's JD(U), whose politician husband had criminal charges listed against him (Jha 2019).

The Shiv Sena nominated 9 women (9%) but only one in the party's stronghold state of Maharashtra, amid 22 male candidates (4%), again signalling the importance of political geography in understanding whether nominations are meaningful.

2.2. From regional parties to regional patterns

As in previous elections, women's opportunities for nomination and election are spatially concentrated, leaving areas with sparse opportunities. In south India, the North East, and in many of the smaller states, parties continue to nominate women in small numbers. The two dominant parties in Tamil Nadu, the AIADMK and the DMK, fielded only one woman (5%) and two women (9%) respectively. One of the DMK women was Kanimozhi, a Rajya Sabha MP and the late DMK leader Karunanidhi's daughter. Smaller parties in the state – the PMK, DMDK, and VCK – fielded very few women, except Tamil nationalist party, Naam Tamil Katchi, with almost 50% women candidates. In Andhra Pradesh, the Telugu Desam Party's nomination of women improved upon 2014 and 2009 (3 women, 12%), and included a former Union Minister and Congress Party MP, Panabaka Lakshmi, who had switched to the TDP during the election. Another was a sitting TDP MLA offered the Lok Sabha nomination instead of a nomination for the simultaneous State Assembly elections. Jaganmohan Reddy's YSR Congress party did relatively well to field 4 women (16%). The Telangana Rashtra Samiti in Telangana also managed 2 women candidates (12%), one of whom was sitting MP Kavita Kalvakuntala, daughter of party leader KCR. But in the state's recent assembly election in December 2018, the number of women elected as MLAs declined after the TRS nominated a paltry 3% women candidates (calculated from Jensenius and Verniers n.d.). Thus, the new state has not yet offered greater opportunities for women in politics.

Women's nomination in Karnataka remained remarkably low, comprising only 5% of candidates (no increase from 2014), including only 4% of BJP candidates and 5% of Congress candidates (no major change from 2014). Independent woman candidate, Sumalatha, contested against the rival JD(S) candidate, HD Deve Gowda's grandson, Nikhil Kumaraswamy, receiving outside support from the BJP. In Kerala, women's presence among candidates declined slightly from 11% in 2014 to 9% in 2019. Among major parties, Congress fielded 13% women candidates (similar to 2014) and the CPM 14% (a decrease from 20% in 2014). Sitting MP PK Sreemathi Teacher and sitting MLA and former journalist Veena George contested for the CPM, whereas Ramya Haridas, a Kerala Students Union and Youth Congress entrant into politics, and Advocate Shanimol Usman, contested for the Congress Party.

Women candidates continue to be under-represented in smaller states and Union Territories. Major national parties must accommodate local elite male leaders and several state parties have a male-dominated leadership and few seats available. No women candidates contested in the small states of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, or the Union Territories of Dadra and Nagar

Haveli, Daman and Diu, Lakshadweep. Both the BJP and Congress Party fielded no women candidates in Goa (2 seats), Himachal Pradesh (4 seats), Jammu & Kashmir (6 seats), Meghalaya (2 seats), and Sikkim (1 seat). The BJP also fielded no women in Punjab, though their ally, the SAD, did. Understanding these spatially uneven opportunities isimportant for developing effective strategies to address women's descriptive under-representation, and gauging where more initiatives could have greater impact in encouraging both aspiring women candidates and party political recruitment efforts.

2.3. Intersectional inclusion?

Studies have analysed whether intersecting axes of identities among diverse women in politics produce particular exclusions. Jensenius (2016) noted parties fielded women disproportionately in constituencies reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. She offers multiple explanations, one of which is to enable parties to keep general seats available for elite partymen. In 2019, similar patterns are observed among major parties with important differences. The BJP nominated women candidates disproportionately more in ST-reserved seats, and disproportionately less in SC-reserved seats, whereas the Congress Party nominated women candidates disproportionately more in SC-reserved seats. The Trinamul Congress tended to field women candidates more in SC-reserved seats, whereas the BSP's distribution of women candidates was roughly proportional in SC-reserved seats, but slightly higher in ST-reserved seats. Six out of the seven BJD women candidates in Odisha were fielded in reserved seats. Thus, the BJD's party gender quota overlapped with pre-existing legislated quotas for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe candidates, meaning most of the BJD's party quota women were not fielded in general seats, which is consistent with trends observed by Jensenius (2016) discussed above.

In contrast, Muslims, particularly Muslim women, are descriptively underrepresented in parliament (Karlekar 2005). In 2019, this was also the case among candidates. The Congress fielded two Muslim women in Kerala and UP, whereas the BJP fielded only one, in West Bengal, a former CPM MLA who switched parties in 2017. The Trinamul Congress did better fielding four Muslim women candidates in West Bengal and the CPM fielded one in West Bengal. Two Muslim women candidates contested in Uttar Pradesh for the SP and BSP, and one in Bihar for the RJD (mentioned above).

Intersectional analysis of nomination patterns highlights the important role parties attach to symbolic representation, identity and inclusion of diverse candidates, how intersecting identities present political capital for parties in their nomination practices, and how this influences the final composition of parliament (see later discussion of class (wealth)). This is not to suggest these candidates do not exercise agency in everyday negotiations over their nomination and performances of these identity categories. It is important to look beyond the numbers to avoid reading off assumptions about individual candidates' identity. Kapadia (2017) reminds us the category 'Dalit women' encompasses a large and diverse group with multiple positionalities vis-à-vis formal electoral politics and everyday politics in relation to family, household, state, and community, with both empowering and constraining relationships with Dalit communities and movements. Moreover, identities employed as representative symbols are highly contested by opponents, as seen in the case of Aparupa Poddar's SC/religious status in 2014 and Jyoti Dhurve's ST status in 2019, based on gendered assumptions that women change their caste and religious status around marriage (Poddar) or the prioritising of patrilineal over matrilineal heritage in determining eligibility for reserved status (Dhurve). Muslim women candidates are also hyperscrutinised by voters and opponents for their 'authentic' performances as symbolic embodiments of a religious community (as happened to the Trinamul Congress' Nusrat Jahan in 2019).

2.4. Incumbent women MPs and re-nomination

Incumbency and re-nomination are important elements of party organisational norms and processes of political recruitment (Farooqui and Sridharan 2014). Incumbents must first be re-nominated before they can be re-elected, involving decisions by both candidate and party. Re-nomination rules, norms, and practices signal information about sustainability of political careers, legislator autonomy and

turnover, party centralisation, and leadership authority. Analysing re-nomination of women incumbents enables scrutiny of parties' claims that qualified women candidates are in short supply, identification of structural barriers to women's continuity in politics, and analysis of potential positive symbolic effects on parties, voters, and aspiring women candidates as a result of re-nomination and re-election of incumbent women (Shair-Rosenfield and Hinojosa 2014; Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras, and Iyer 2017).

In 2019, parties re-nominated a higher proportion of incumbent men than women (62% and 52% respectively; see Verniers and Ammassari 2019a). Union Minister and seven-term MP Maneka Gandhi was re-nominated but the party swapped the constituency she had served for six terms with her son Varun Gandhi, another incumbent BJP MP in Uttar Pradesh (she had swapped successfully once before in 2009). In 2019, the party reportedly thought Varun Gandhi might lose, suspecting a rival two-party alliance in the state would consolidate their votes. Contrary to common narrative of women as primarily beneficiaries of political dynasty, this example reminds us that more experienced women also pass the mantle to male family members in politics (more on Maneka Gandhi's election below).

Some prominent women returners for the Congress Party included former MPs voted out in 2014: former Lok Sabha Speaker Meira Kumar and former Minister Renuka Chowdhury, both nominated in their previous constituencies. Former MP and three-term Delhi Chief Minister, Sheila Dikshit, was nominated in Delhi.[7] Some senior women MPs were not re-nominated. Sushma Swaraj had already announced stepping down on health grounds.[8] Her party delayed announcing the re-nomination of sitting Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan MP, so Mahajan publicly announced she too would step down. Mahajan may have been deselected due to the party's candidate age criteria (upper limit of 75); the same rule may have led to sitting BJP MP from Assam Bijoya Chakravarty's de-selection, but the party replaced her with another woman candidate. The BJD party's gender quota nominations simultaneously entailed the de-selection of their three sitting women MPs, causing one to switch parties.

Women MPs, like their male counterparts, demonstrate political agency by making strategic decisions about party affiliation come election time.[9] Incumbent Congress MP from West Bengal, Mausam Noor, switched to the Trinamul Congress, after her party refused her suggestion to ally with the Trinamul Congress in the state to fight the aggressively expanding BJP. In Tamil Nadu, a sitting AIADMK woman MP was not re-nominated because her seat was allocated to an alliance partner. Though few seats are affected this way, seat-sharing alliances may impact on the already small pool of women candidates (see Rai and Spary 2019). Two sitting women MPs from the BSP in UP switched to the BJP (and won). In UP, sitting BJP MLA and State Tourism Minister Dr. Rita Bahuguna Joshi, had switched from the Congress to BJP in 2016 and was elected to the Lok Sabha after having contested and lost in 2014. Now a first-time Lok Sabha MP, she already has considerable political experience, having been elected at local and state level and serving party organisational positions. Thus, first-time women MPs are not always newcomers to politics. Other sitting women MPs were less successful in securing another opportunity through a different party and some missed out altogether. But diverse and nuanced individual stories illustrate the exercise of party authority and constrained agency of politicians, and how women must strategically traverse this difficult terrain to sustain a career in politics.

3. Gendered electoral spaces: 'toxic misogyny'[10] and controversy on the campaign trail

Women in politics the world over are no strangers to misogynistic abuse and character assassination, both forms of violence against women in politics (Bardall 2011; UN Women 2018). Previous Indian elections saw women candidates face judgments about their character and moral probity (Banerjee 2007; Bhandare 2014, 2019; CSR and UN Women 2014; Rai and Spary 2019). The 2019 election featured more of the same, leading several commentators to brand 2019 a 'toxic' election. Former MP Jaya Prada, a BJP candidate in 2019, was again subjected to misogynistic slurs by her Samajwadi

Party opponent Azam Khan, who had targeted her in previous elections (Rai and Spary 2019, 118). Referencing her recent switch to the BJP and the uniforms of the BJP-linked RSS social organisation, he implied she wore 'khaki' underwear. The Election Commission censured his statement as 'indecent' and 'derogatory', and banned him from campaigning for 72 h (ECI 2019a). Aam Aadmi Party candidate in Delhi, Atishi Marlena, was also subjected to misogynist and casteist abuse in an anonymous leaflet. Ramya Haridas, a Congress Party candidate from Kerala, was reportedly subjected to innuendo by a Left alliance leader for just meeting with her own alliance partner leaders. In West Bengal, Muslim woman Trinamul Congress candidate and famous actress, Nusrat Jahan, was reportedly criticised for 'not being Muslim enough'. After winning her election, she received online abuse about her appearance, along with another woman MP. Priyanka Chaturvedi, a former Congress Party spokesperson, complained of her party's inability to punish party workers' violent and threatening behaviour at a party event in September 2018 in UP. The Congress Party reduced their punishment and reinstated the workers during the election campaign, prompting Chaturvedi to leave the party and join the Shiv Sena in Mumbai (her home city). Critics of her move pointed to her new party's history of violence among party workers (Sen 2008; Bedi 2016), while others suggested her move reflected her disappointment at not being nominated by her party, despite her considerable efforts as Congress Party spokesperson. One advocate for women's political empowerment argued that Chaturvedi 's decisions attracted disproportionate scrutiny because they were an example of a woman in politics exercising political agency (Krishnaswamy 2019).

Public and media discourse in 2019 strongly criticised these attacks. Two major national newspaper editorials condemned such demeaning assaults on women in politics (Hindustan Times 2019; Indian Express 2019). One senior journalist commented during 2019, 'the effect of these personal attacks is not merely to defeat a political opponent, but to diminish the opportunities of independent, capable women and deter them from entering public life' (Bhandare 2019). Yet two relevant but non-election cases of alleged sexual harassment were also in the headlines during the campaign, and served as a reminder of the challenges, risks, and costs of speaking out against sexual harassment and violence against women. Former BJP Union Minister MJ Akbar counter-alleged defamation in response to allegations by female journalists of sexual harassment pertaining to his former career as a senior journalist and editor. The Chief Justice of India was also accused by a former Supreme Court staff member. The CJI case was poorly handled, becoming a textbook example of how *not* to internally investigate sexual harassment (Devika 2019).

In contrast, women candidates also featured in some of the most controversial campaigns in 2019. The first involved terror-accused Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur, nominated by the BJP in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, against a former Congress Party Chief Minister, Digvijaya Singh. Her candidacy symbolised the BJP's shift in narrative from 2014 ('development') to 2019 (Hindutva). Thakur's nomination was controversial because of her long-standing charges of terrorism linked to the 2008 Malegaon bombings (for which she had been granted bail on health grounds). But she generated further controversy by criticising a senior police officer who died in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack, and by calling Gandhi's assassin, Nathuram Godse, a patriot. Maharashtra's (BJP) Chief Minister criticised her remarks about the police officer, while the Prime Minister and senior BJP leaders condemned her remark about Gandhi's assassin, but did not withdraw her nomination.

Another controversial case involved incumbent Women and Child Development Union Minister and BJP candidate Maneka Gandhi and her campaign speech telling Muslims voters that if they did not vote for her, she would not feel inclined to secure employment or help for them (Economic Times 2019). The Election Commission reprimanded her on several counts including appealing to communal feelings to secure votes, and banned her from campaigning for 48 hours (ECI 2019b). Though she won her election, she did so narrowly (see below). She was not re-appointed to a ministerial role, and one explanation linked her demotion to her controversial campaign remarks (India Today 2019b).

4. The growing power of women voters in 2019?

Women's political participation as *voters* rather than candidates also featured prominently in media and election analysts' discourse in the 2019 election. In February 2019, a few weeks before the campaign began, a prominent Indian news magazine cover read 'Her Vote: Will Women Voters Make or Break Parties in 2019' (India Today 2019a).[11] This increased interest in women voters was a result of the closing gender gap in voter turnout after many years of women voters registering lower turnout rates compared to men (Deshpande 2014; Kumar and Gupta 2015; Roy and Sopariwala 2019). In 1962, voter turnout for men was 16 percentage points higher than for women (63% men, 47% women). By 2004 this gap was still 9 points wide, but by 2009 had halved to 4 points, and only 1 point by 2014. In 2014, one analyst observed that the closing gender gap in turnout perhaps 'signalled the arrival of a women's constituency' (Deshpande 2014). Women's increasing turnout has been attributed to efforts by the Election Commission of India, including voter awareness programmes and women-friendly polling stations. Indian psephologists have lauded the rising power of women voters, arguing that women voters are also increasingly being recognised as *independent* voters, not necessarily following household voting preferences (Roy and Sopariwala 2019, 43; cf. Kumar and Gupta 2015). Studies have also explored whether improved education levels, increasing media exposure, and greater participation in political activities have played a part (Kumar and Gupta 2015). But a recent survey of more than 6000 women found that around two thirds of women reported no freedom at all with regards to participating in political activities like attending a political rally, campaign activity, or demonstration (Lokniti-CSDS-KAS 2019, 12). The same survey also showed that women thought parties were unfair to women candidates – almost half (44%) agreed parties would pick male candidates over equally good female candidates (Lokniti-CSD-KAS 2019, 4).

While the gender gap in voter turnout closed substantially in the last three elections prior to 2019, Election Commission data shows some states progressed more than others (cf. Roy and Sopariwala 2019). Larger gains have occurred in Bihar, UP, and Rajasthan. Bihar reduced its gender voting gap from eight to two percentage points from 1999 to 2009, and further in 2014.[12] Similarly Rajasthan's eight-point gap in 1999 reduced to 3.5 points by 2009 and two points in 2014. The gender voter turnout gap has persisted in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, where prior to 2019 women voter turnout remained lower than for men (four and five points lower than *total* turnout, respectively).

However, women are still reportedly under-represented in voter lists, with one estimate of 21 million women in 2019 being denied their right to vote, based on a comparison of voter lists and population estimates (Roy and Sopariwala 2019, 51). Uttar Pradesh has both the largest number (6.8 million) and largest percentage (10.2%) of estimated missing women voters in 2019; Maharashtra features second (2.3 million) and joint second (5.4%) respectively (ibid: 54, 56). The Election Commission has endeavoured to improve voter registration and party workers often assist hoping that voters will vote for them. Other commentators have noted men's plateauing voter turnout and male migration which affects their ability to vote during elections (Rukmini 2019).

Why is women's increasing voter turnout important? On the one hand it suggests an increasing assertion of citizenship rights among women to participate in political institutions and processes which influence how they live their lives. For political parties, the increasing turnout of women voters may also influence parties' programmatic priorities and their responsiveness to women voters' interests, preferences, and concerns, including the attitudes and behaviour of their own candidates, representatives, and party workers towards sexual harassment and gender-based violence. While one 2019 voter survey suggested that women and men largely prioritised the same issues (CSDS-Lokniti 2019), they may differ on which party will be better able to address their issues or which parties appeal to them more (or less). Thus women voters' growing power may affect some parties more than others, national parties' popularity with women voters may differ across states, and state-specific party systems may produce particular dynamics in gender gaps in party support. For example, historically, the BJP has received less voter support from women than men – in 2014 women were 4 points less likely to vote for them than for the Congress. We return to this topic below after discussing the results.

5. Election results: slow, contingent progress

The 2019 election saw women's presence in parliament rise from 11.6% in 2014 to 14.4%, from 62[13] to 78 women MPs, and a slightly faster increase than the historical average 10% per election. Women candidates again enjoyed a higher success rate overall than their male counterparts, dispelling myths of women's lack of winnability which deter parties from fielding more women. This is not to suggest women are innately better, but parties mostly take chances on only the strongest women candidates. Among *winning* candidates, there were no significant gender differences overall between men and women candidates' vote share or their average margin of victory, or the turnout they inspired among voters.[14] However, among newly elected MPs, 2019 was more likely to have been the first or second Lok Sabha election for women (82%) compared to men (67%)[15], though this does not capture prior experience of contesting Rajya Sabha, Vidhan Sabha, or local government elections. Another significant gender difference was among *all* women and men candidates, winners and losers, in terms of vote share (women's slightly higher average)[16] and whether candidates forfeited their security deposit[17] as a result of failing to secure at least one sixth of votes cast. In 2019, men were more likely to lose their security deposit (21% of women candidates and 13% of men candidates held on to their deposit).[18] One explanation is the higher proportion of male candidates contesting as Independents or for minor parties thus attracting a lower vote share overall. That said, in 2019, two Independent women and two Independent men were elected, which is unusual especially for women.[19]

Prominent individual victories included the former BJP Minister Smriti Irani's defeat of Congress Party President Rahul Gandhi in his home constituency of Amethi, UP, though he was successful in his other contest in Kerala. Irani fought and lost this battle in 2014 but, as a sitting Rajya Sabha member, was rewarded with a ministerial post. In Tamil Nadu, Congress Party candidate Jothimani, defeated veteran AIADMK leader and MP Thambidurai with 63% of the votes cast to become a first time MP. Also from the Congress Party, Ramya Haridas became the second Dalit woman ever to be elected to the Lok Sabha from Kerala and the first since 1971. But reflecting the Congress Party's defeat, several former Congress Party women MPs lost, such as the former Speaker Meira Kumar, former Union Ministers Renuka Chowdhury and Selja Kumari, and former Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit. Senior Congress Party leader and sitting MP Susmita Dev also lost in Assam.

Supriya Sule, a senior NCP parliamentarian, was re-elected from her constituency in Maharashtra. Some former women MPs like Agatha Sangma were also re-elected. Independent candidate Sumalatha from Karnataka defeated HD Deve Gowda's grandson Nikhil Kumaraswamy and became another rare example of a successful Independent candidate. Former BJP Union Minister Maneka Gandhi (discussed above) won but with a narrow margin of 1.4% of votes, the second lowest margin of victory among women candidates, despite her party's success. Controversial candidate Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur won easily with a vote share of 61% and a large victory margin, whereas AAP's Atishi Marlena lost (though she was elected the following year in the Delhi Assembly elections). Atishi and Pragya Singh Thakur's respective defeat and victory were widely commented upon as encapsulating what some found frustrating or worrying about voting trends: a rejection of candidates with track record in development and governance, and a reaffirmation of the Hindutva agenda.

Among other prominent losing candidates, TRS senior leader and sitting MP Kavita Kalvakuntla's defeat in Telangana stood out, her candidacy a casualty of targeted farmer protests with 185 candidates opposing her. Former Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minister and J&K People's Party leader Mehbooba Mufti not only lost but came third, paying for her earlier alliance with the BJP central government, which resulted in President's Rule in the state. Sitting MP and wife of Samajwadi Party leader, Dimple Yadav, was not re-elected, though her husband and father-in-law, both former Chief Ministers of Uttar Pradesh, were elected. Dynasty[20] also did not help Lalu Yadav's daughter Misa Bharti. Despite the BJP's overall victory, Jaya Prada (discussed earlier) lost. Pre-poll strategic choices or compulsions over party affiliation worked for some but not for others. Dr Bharati Pawar's shift from the NCP to the BJP in Maharashtra paid off; Mausam Noor's move to the Trinamul Congress did not, despite her party's win in West Bengal.

5.1. A profile of the new Lok Sabha

Reflecting the BJP's considerable victory, more than half of all women MPs in the new Lok Sabha are from the ruling party. Women MPs from the Trinamul Congress and BJD make up 40% of their parties' MPs, whereas major parties like the DMK, the JD(U), and the Shiv Sena have less than 10% women MPs, and several major parties have no women (see Table 1). More than half of women MPs come from just five states – Gujarat, Odisha, Maharashtra, UP, and West Bengal – whereas several major states have only one woman MP – Assam, Haryana, Kerala, and Telangana – and many smaller states have no women MPs. Thus, the party-wise and regional concentration of women MPs carry implications for the gender diversity and inclusiveness of parliamentary representation.

Women's participation and leadership in government decision-making has been further constrained despite their growing numbers in parliament. In the new Council of Ministers, three women Ministers were appointed to the Cabinet out of 24 Ministers, and another three women MPs were appointed as junior Ministers[21], a decline from six women Cabinet Ministers in the previous parliament. Of the three Cabinet positions, former junior Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, a Rajya Sabha MP, was appointed as the first full-time woman Finance Minister (Indira Gandhi held this portfolio when she was Prime Minister). Former Textiles Minister Smriti Irani was appointed

Table 1. Elected MPs in 17th Lok Sabha by Party (by numerical strength of women MPs).

Party	Women	Men	Total	Women MPs as % of party MPs
BJP	41	262	303	13.5
AITC	9	13	22	40.9
INC	6	46	52	11.5
BJD	5	7	12	41.7
YSRCP	4	18	22	18.2
DMK	2	21	23	8.7
Independent	2	2	4	50.0
ADS	1	1	2	50.0
BSP	1	9	10	10.0
JD(U)	1	15	16	6.3
LJP	1	5	6	16.7
NCP	1	4	5	20.0
NPP	1	1	2	50.0
SAD	1	1	2	50.0
SHS	1	17	18	5.6
TRS	1	8	9	11.1
AAP	-	1	1	0.0
ADMK	-	1	1	0.0
AIMIM	-	2	2	0.0
AIUDF	-	1	1	0.0
AJSU Party	-	1	1	0.0
CPI	-	2	2	0.0
CPM	-	3	3	0.0
IUML	-	3	3	0.0
JD(S)	-	1	1	0.0
JKN	-	3	3	0.0
JMM	-	1	1	0.0
KEC(M)	-	1	1	0.0
MNF	-	1	1	0.0
NDPP	-	1	1	0.0
RLP	-	1	1	0.0
RSP	-	1	1	0.0
SKM	-	1	1	0.0
SP	-	5	5	0.0
TDP	-	3	3	0.0
VCK	-	1	1	0.0
Total	**78**	**464**	**542**[a]	**14.4**

Source: TCPD and ECI data in Jensenius and Verniers (n.d.); ECI (2019c)
Note: [a] Polling in one constituency was cancelled and rescheduled by the ECI. This was held in August and a man elected; total number of women MPs and percentage (to one decimal point) remain unchanged.

Minister for Women and Child Development. Harsimrat Kaur Badal was re-appointed Minister for Food Processing. As noted above, former Union Minister Maneka Gandhi, the joint-most-experienced Lok Sabha MP in number of terms, was not given a ministerial post.

In socio-economic terms, candidate affidavit data archived by the Association for Democratic Reforms[22] shows that women MPs feature disproportionately among the 'poorest' 17th Lok Sabha MPs by declared assets, with six women among the ten poorest MPs, including three women elected from reserved seats. This seems to re-confirm narratives of gendered resource disadvantages in politics in India (and internationally). Hema Malini is also the only woman MP to feature among the top ten richest MPs in the 17th Lok Sabha. But money isn't everything – only three among the ten richest women *candidates* won; another six came second, four of whom were from the Congress Party (wealthy male candidates for the Congress Party fared slightly better). Winning candidate Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur's presence among the ten least wealthy MPs also suggests women politicians may draw upon political capital and networks as a substitute for personal wealth. While candidate affidavit data also shows women MPs were less likely than their male counterparts to have criminal cases against them, some women MPs did have serious charges. However, men and women *MPs* in the 17th Lok Sabha were both *more* likely to have self-declared criminal cases than men and women *candidates*. ADR data indicates 15% of women candidates and 31% of women MPs have criminal cases, compared to 19% of all candidates and 44% of all MPs. This affirms studies noting the increasing connections between criminality and electoral politics (Vaishnav 2017).[23]

Several women MPs in the new Lok Sabha have experience at the panchayat level. However, this is not a straightforward pipeline analysis. Women's reservation in local government can provide a training ground for aspiring state assembly and parliamentary candidates for parties to select, and the sheer numbers of women available due to gender quotas can effectively debunk political parties' claims that there are not enough qualified or experienced women candidates to increase their nomination of women. But not all panchayat women will aspire to parliamentary election, and women entering politics laterally may also have transferable skills to substitute for local government experience in their legislative and constituency duties. Moreover, local government provides different experiences and opportunities for different women. Thus, we need a more interconnected and embedded analysis with close attention to individual women's experiences.

5.2. How women voted

As anticipated, the gender voting turnout gap closed in 2019, with approximately 67% turnout among women voters and voters overall (ECI 2019c). Official ECI data confirmed Bihar's higher voter turnout for women than men, progress in closing the gap in Madhya Pradesh, and a persistent gender gap in turnout in Gujarat (idid). There was also a considerable increase in turnout among women and men, particularly women in Kerala (Bansal 2019).

In terms of voting and party support, Lokniti-CSDS National Election Study data suggested the BJP managed to marginally reduce their gender disadvantage among women voters but still retain a three-point gap (Attri and Jain 2019; Deshpande 2019). Chhibber and Verma (2019) instead suggest this gap has mostly closed, whereas I would tentatively suggest that more state-specific dis-aggregations may show more variation and provide more insight into women's voting preferences. State-wise, the BJP's disadvantage among women voters was even larger in Madhya Pradesh (−7 points) and Rajasthan (−5 points). Conversely, women voters were *more* likely than men to support the BJP in Chhattisgarh, with a huge gender gap of 9 percentage points, a stark contrast from 2009 when women voters were 9 percentage points *less* likely to support the BJP (Saxena and Rai 2014). This question requires further research to explore possible explanations. The same data also showed socio-economic variations, with the BJP enjoying more support among younger, higher caste, more educated, and wealthier women. Overall, men were more likely than women to

support Narendra Modi for Prime Minister, though support was high among both (49% and 44% respectively).

No survey data is publicly available yet to answer the question of whether the BJP's growth in West Bengal was driven by increased support from women voters. For years, the Left enjoyed more support from women voters, but the Trinamul Congress' victory in the 2011 state elections saw a swing of women voters away from the Left and a new gender gap in party support in the 2014 Lok Sabha election. The Left lost 12 points among women voters to the Trinamul Congress in 2014 (Chatterjee and Basu 2017). The Trinamul Congress enjoyed a five-point gender advantage among women voters, though the Left retained a three-point advantage among women voters. The BJP's advantage among male versus female voters was even larger (nine points). Thus, in 2019, did the BJP's increasing support in West Bengal in 2019 come from swinging women voters, or did women voters remain loyal to Mamata Banerjee's party? Early analysis[24] suggests the BJP still has a gender disadvantage among West Bengal women voters, but that this is smaller than in 2014, suggesting they did manage to attract women voters away. But further analysis is needed to examine the extent to which swinging women voters influenced outcomes in West Bengal.

Lokniti-CSDS voter survey data from Odisha indicated that Naveen Patnaik's BJD maintained its gender advantage among women voters albeit slightly reduced, and the BJP made gains among both men and women voters, but particularly among women. In 2014, while both men and women favoured BJD over the BJP and Congress, the party enjoyed more support among women voters (47%) than men (41%) (Ray and Mohanty 2017). In 2019, first party preference remained the same but the gender gap in support narrowed to three points. Moreover, women voters swung from less likely than men to more likely than men to support the BJP in 2019 (women 39.3%, men 37.7%). The Congress Party's gender *disadvantage* among Odisha's women voters remained and overall support declined.[25]

Voting data from Andhra Pradesh suggested that women voters' appreciation of an incumbent government's performance on women's issues was not enough to convince women voters to re-elect them. Lokniti-CSDS data showed that around two thirds of women voters said the TDP government had somewhat or fully succeeded in addressing 'women's issues' but that the YSR Congress enjoyed a three point gender voting advantage among women voters in 2019 (Venkatesu 2019). Either the YSRCP convinced women their party could improve on the TDP's performance, or anti-incumbency outweighed the TDP's performance, or women voters prioritised other issues (and it is not uncommon for the government to change hands in Andhra Pradesh). Multiple contending priorities and identities driving individual voting behaviour can make it difficult to interpret voter preferences in survey data.

In Kerala, the Sabarimala temple access issue was described by one analyst as 'the most important election issue' in the state (Ibrahim 2019). Despite the strong support manifested in the Women's Wall demonstration, Lokniti-CSDS National Election Study data showed that Hindu women voters in Kerala were opposed to the Supreme Court verdict opening up the Sabarimala temple to women, with only 21% of Hindu women somewhat or fully in favour of the verdict and 69% somewhat or fully opposed (and 31% in favour, 66% against, among Hindu men; cited in Ibrahim 2019).[26] Two thirds of Hindu women voters were somewhat or fully dissatisfied with the LDF state government's handling of the issue compared to around half of Hindu men voters (cited in Ibrahim 2019). But the BJP failed to convert this sentiment, increasing their vote share by only a few percentage points from 2014, with voters preferring to replace the LDF with the Congress-led coalition.

6. Conclusion

This article scrutinised the gate-keeping role of parties' in determining opportunities for women's political participation, identifying nuances across parties, regions, identity categories, and experience. It narrated the gendered experiences of women candidates on the campaign trail, including the very real challenges of gender-based violence, and the increasing power of women voters and parties'

growing awareness of this. India's 2019 election showed how progress in women's descriptive representation is possible when major parties exercise political will to make women's inclusion in legislatures a reality (see Tan 2015), with two regional parties implementing voluntary party quotas in the absence of progress on reserved seats gender quota legislation.

The 2019 election also reminded us how parties shape formal and informal norms and practices of election campaigning, for better or worse. Violence against women in politics discourages aspiring women politicians where the risks and costs of participation are not only already too high but continue to rise, and where parties refuse to discourage such behaviour or actively encourage it. But evidence of a closing gender gap in voter turnout is encouraging, and appears to be influencing parties to appeal more to women. Taken together, these timely developments carry added significance. Increasing misogynistic attacks and hostility towards women in political life are occurring simultaneous to women's increasing voter power, suggesting now maybe a challenging but potentially crucial transformative moment to call out damaging behaviours and attitudes which prevent women from exercising their right to participate in the democratic process as both representative and represented.

6.1. Going forward

Efforts to improve women's formal political participation face some key challenges. Political will towards passage of the Women's Reservation Bill appears little to non-existent at the moment. Campaigners such as *Political Shakti* strongly advocated tabling the Women's Reservation Bill in the first parliamentary session; their campaign successfully persuaded many MPs to raise it on the floor of the house, but the government was unmoved. Governments' enduring resistance to passing the Women's Reservation Bill while election after election comes and goes, begs the question of whether the Bill's window has passed, and if so, which mechanisms and strategies campaigners should advocate for instead. The government's new think tank on development policy, NITI Aayog, has assigned targets towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals; under goal 5 relating to gender equality, the chosen measure being the proportion of women members of state assemblies. So we may see energies re-directed there in future, with or without quotas, which can potentially benefit a larger number of women but which will require more advocacy co-ordination. Of course, the story does not end with increased descriptive representation of women in legislatures; what also matters to women's political participation are the institutional dynamics of legislatures, the extent to which the legislature and executive prioritise women's substantive representation, and legislators' interactions with and service to their constituents and the wider public. Efforts to address key issues of electoral reforms, such as increasingly criminality and political finance will also likely benefit women's political participation. These issues are beyond the scope of discussion here and present important areas for future research.

India currently faces serious challenges to its democratic institutions. Women's political participation and representation need not be seen as a lower order priority in this struggle. If, as Chhibber and Verma (2019) argue, we are moving into a second dominant party system in India, dominated this time by the BJP rather than the Congress, the role of the opposition, inside and outside of parliament, and the BJP's socially conservative position on gender equality will likely have implications for prospects for women's empowerment and gender equality going forward. The BJP has already demonstrated enthusiasm for using the language of gender justice to 'pink-wash' some of its more problematic policy agenda, such as with the Triple Talaq Bill and the abrogation of Article 370 removing special status in Kashmir.

Two recent female-led opposition responses offer reasons to hope. Inside parliament, first time Trinamul Congress MP, Mahua Moitra's maiden speech in late June was highly critical of what she saw as rising fascism in the country. Outside parliament, since December 2019, the Delhi neighbourhood of Shaheen Bagh has been the site of an outdoor women-led peaceful sit-in protest against an exclusionary legislative and policy agenda relating to citizenship status and subsequent state

violence. Shaheen Bagh has inspired other similar protests and demonstrations of solidarity around the country and across the world. Both serve to remind us that India's opposition, though reduced, does have a voice, to push back against anti-democratic forces, and that that voice can be a woman's.

Notes

1. India ranked ahead of Sri Lanka (182nd, 5%) and Japan (165th, 10%), but behind, for example, Malaysia (142nd, 14%), Brazil (140th, 15%), Pakistan (106th, 20%), Indonesia (104th, 20%), Bangladesh (98th, 21%), Nepal (43rd, 33%), and South Africa (10th, 46%). (As at January 2020, https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=1&year=2020).
2. See Rai and Spary (2019) for a more detailed discussion of this combination of approaches.
3. See Adeney (2015) for an earlier discussion of this shift.
4. See Spary (2014) for a more detailed comparison of BJP and INC nominations of women candidates in the 2009 election.
5. In the previous four assembly elections, BJD women candidates comprised up to 11% of BJD candidates and up to 13% of BJD MLAs; women's representation in Odisha since 2000 has not exceeded 10% of assembly candidates and 9% of MLAs (TCPD data, Jensenius and Verniers, n.d.).
6. Women's presence among candidates and elected representative in the West Bengal state assembly has been higher than average though not nearly 33%. In the last four West Bengal legislative assembly elections, the Trinamul Congress and the CPM nominated the most women candidates. In 2016, women comprised 14% of Trinamul Congress MLAs and 19% of CPM MLAs (the latter contrasting with the low proportion of CPM parliamentary women candidates).
7. Dikshit lost the election and passed away in July 2019 at the age of 81.
8. Swaraj passed away in August 2019 at the age of 67.
9. Though Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras, and Iyer's (2017) study of gender and incumbency effects in India's state assembly elections (1980–2007) suggests 'women incumbents are significantly more likely than male incumbents to re-contest from the same party and significantly less likely to switch parties' (2017, 1845).
10. See the Indian Express' editorial, 11 May 2019. (Indian Express 2019).
11. I am grateful to Andrew Whitehead for drawing my attention to this.
12. Voting gap figures here refer to women voter turnout compared to *total* voter turnout (men, women, and other) based on available Election Commission of India data. Comparing women voter turnout to men voter turnout would likely show larger gender gaps.
13. 66 women MPs in the outgoing Lok Sabha after bye-elections.
14. Winners' vote share: $F_{463,77} = 1.13$, $p > .05$. Winners' margin of victory: $F_{463,77} = 1.06$, $p > .05$. Winners' voter turnout: $F_{463,77} = 1.11$, $p > .05$. Calculated by the author from TCPD data in Jensenius and Verniers (n.d.).
15. Gender difference in number of Lok Sabha elections contested by winners, including 2019, was also statistically significant (X^2 (1, $N = 542$) = 4.29, $p = .04$). Author's calculations using TCPD election data from Jensenius and Verniers (n.d.).
16. All candidates' vote share: $F_{713,7308} = 1.47$, $p < .01$. Author's calculations using TCPD data in Jensenius and Verniers (n.d.).
17. All candidates' forfeit security deposit: X^2 (1, $N = 8023$) = 29.34, $p < .001$. Removing only Independent candidates from the sample still indicates a statistically significant gender effect (X^2 (1, $N = 4584$) = 9.68, $p < .01$), and this may be due to more men contesting for very minor parties. Test results for only BJP and INC candidates combined, or candidates for major parties were insignificant. Author's calculations using TCPD election data from Jensenius and Verniers (n.d.).
18. Author's calculations using TCPD election data from Jensenius and Verniers (n.d.).
19. Prior to 2019, only five women have been elected to the Lok Sabha as Independents: Vijaya Raje and Maitreyee Bose (both 1967), Rajmata Krishna Kumari (1971), Maneka Gandhi (in 1998 and 1999), and Joice George (2014).
20. Verniers and Ammassari (2019b) observed that women were disproportionately highly represented among dynastic candidates, and identified dynastic links among around half of women candidates contesting for both the BJP and INC. Women with political family links were the only women candidates selected by some smaller parties like the SP, NCP, DMK, RJD, and TRS.
21. The three women appointed junior Ministers were Niranjan Jyoti (Rural Development), Renuka Singh (Tribal Affairs), and Debashree Chaudhury (Women and Child Development).
22. Data available on the ADR website at myneta.info. Calculations on women candidates and MPs by the author.
23. See Vaishnav (2017) for a detailed discussion of the link between criminality and the astronomical level of financial resources needed to contest Indian elections, which he argues may crowd out opportunities for others. While Vaishnav does not discuss gender specifically, his vignettes suggest criminality is associated with a certain kind of performative masculinity (*dabbang*). Gender, criminality, and electoral politics in India, I would argue, is a fruitful area for further research.

24. Personal communication with Prof. Rajeshwari Deshpande, June 2019.
25. I am grateful to Dr Pralay Kanungo for sharing this data on Odisha (CERI Sciences Po workshop, Paris, 24–25 June 2019).
26. I am grateful to Christophe Jaffrelot for alerting me to this point.

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Notes on contributor

Dr *Carole Spary* is Associate Professor in the School of Politics and International Relations, and the Deputy Director of the Asia Research Institute, both at the University of Nottingham, UK. She is the co-author of *Performing Representation: Women Members in the Indian Parliament* (OUP 2019, with Shirin M.Rai) and the author of *Gender, Development, and the State in India* (Routledge, 2019).

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