



# 30 Years After Beijing

Mapping the Progress of Women in  
Political Leadership Across South Asia

March 2025

# Introduction

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), adopted in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women, remains the most comprehensive global framework for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls[1]. It identified 12 critical areas of concern, ranging from women's participation in decision-making to economic empowerment, health, education, and ending gender-based violence.

South Asian countries have been actively engaged in advancing gender equality within the framework of the Beijing Platform for Action. Efforts in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh have focused on strengthening women's legal rights, economic empowerment, and political participation. Additionally, ongoing conflicts in Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, and parts of India and Pakistan have shaped regional discussions on gender-sensitive approaches to peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Moreover, initiatives in India and Bangladesh have aimed at establishing gender-responsive institutions to support the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Platform.

Over the past three decades, governments, civil society organizations, and international institutions have worked to implement its commitments, leading to periodic reviews to assess progress, gaps, and emerging challenges. The Beijing+30 review (2025) marks a significant milestone, offering a crucial opportunity to reflect on three decades of progress, setbacks, and the evolving global context impacting gender equality. As part of this process, countries and regions have conducted national and regional reviews, analyzing advancements in legal reforms, policy implementation, and the integration of gender equality into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality)[2].

## Background

There have been **five major reviews** of the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action** since its adoption in 1995[3]. These reviews occur every five years to assess progress and challenges in achieving gender equality globally.

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[1] UN Women. (2024, January 29). *The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at 30, and why that matters for gender equality*. United Nations.

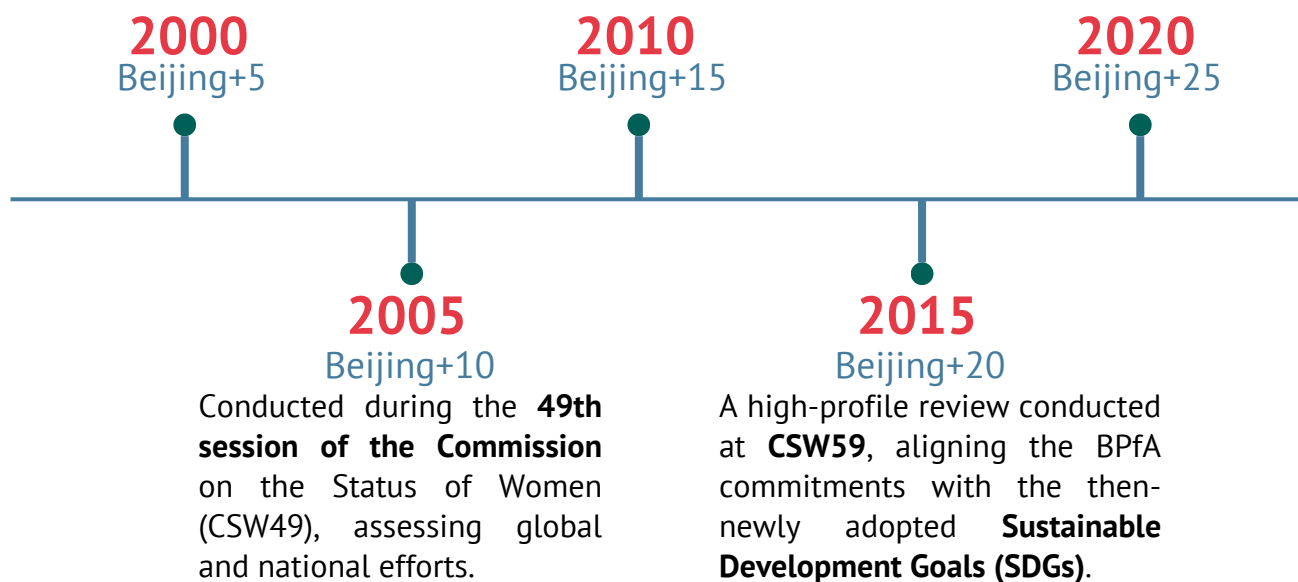
[2] UN Women. (2024). *Preparations for the 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69)*. United Nations.

[3] United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. United Nations.

The first review took place at the **23rd Special Session of the UN General Assembly**, focusing on emerging challenges and reaffirming commitments made in 1995.

The third review was held at the **CSW54**, which highlighted the progress and persisting gaps, particularly in economic and political participation.

Review conducted at **CSW64**, focusing on interlinkages with SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and challenges like climate change & digital gender gaps.



## Scope of this brief



Examine progress across eight South Asian countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.



Analyze trends in women's political participation since 1995.



Identify successful initiatives and persistent challenges.



Provide actionable recommendations for the next decade.

# Research Methodology

This research brief employs a secondary literature review as its primary methodology to assess the progress of women in political leadership across South Asia in the 30 years following the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). The study focuses specifically on **Section G** of the Beijing Declaration, which addresses **women in power and decision making**. It synthesizes insights from over 50 resources published over the last 30 years. The resources include existing academic research, policy reports, government data, civil society assessments, and international indices to provide a comprehensive overview of regional trends, challenges, and achievements.

The analysis is confined to eight South Asian countries—India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan—selected for their shared geopolitical and socio-economic contexts, offering a lens into the progress and barriers faced by women in political leadership across the Global South. Also, at the Centre for Gender and Politics, we are best equipped to observe, study and analyse South Asian countries through a gender lens with our regional network of researchers.



India



Pakistan



Maldives



Sri Lanka



Nepal



Bangladesh



Bhutan



Afghanistan

To assess this progress, the brief examines key parameters that shape the life cycle of a woman's entry and participation in political leadership, including the right to vote, political participation, political representation, electoral quotas, legislation protecting women in politics, and ministerial bodies dedicated to gender equality. These dimensions provide a holistic understanding of both structural and institutional facilitators and constraints influencing women's political empowerment in the region. The analysis is divided into two sections;

**a) countries overview, where we interpret the status of each South Asian country on gender equality in decision making,**

**b) parameter wise review of each country aligned with Beijing Declaration parameters.**

Following the analysis, there are 5 key recommendations for policy makers, thinkers and researchers and institutional experts in South Asia.

# Country-wise Analysis

## Maldives



Maldives transitioned to a republic in 1968, adopting a Constitution that established executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Amendments to the Constitution were made in 2008, further solidifying democratic institutions. Despite democratic advancements in Maldives, women remain significantly underrepresented in political leadership. Over the past five years, the Maldives has consistently received low scores in political empowerment on the Global Gender Gap Index. In response, the Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP) 2022–2026, a five-year national framework, prioritizes Leadership and Governance as a key policy goal, aiming to enhance women's representation in decision-making roles across government and public service. These efforts are also supported by the Strengthening Gender Inclusive Initiatives project backed by the Asian Development Bank[4].

## Bangladesh



The legislature of Bangladesh is unicameral, with the official name of the legislature being Jatiya Sangsad, and consists of 350 members elected to five-year terms[5]. Of that number, 300 of these are general seats, open to both men and women for contesting. Parliamentarians contesting on these seats are elected in single-member territorial constituencies according to the first-past-the-post electoral system; the other 50 seats are seats reserved specifically for women[6]. These reservations are part of temporary special measures (TSMs) instituted in an effort to encourage women's political representation[7]. The Bangladesh Parliament stands dissolved, as of August 2024 due to large-scale protests that ended the 16-year regime of ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her party Awami League, setting up an interim government headed by Advisor Mohammed Yunus. Elections, which according to the Constitution should have been held within 90 days, are yet to take place[8]. Current news suggests elections are now likely only in late 2025 or early 2026[9].

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[4] Government of Maldives. (2024). *Maldives national review for implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (2024)*. United Nations ESCAP.

[5] Parliament of Bangladesh. *Home*.

[6] Note: This is also in line with Bangladesh's ratification of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), in 1984.

[7] International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). (2020, February). *Women's reserved seat systems in Bangladesh*.

[8] Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). *Bangladesh: Jatiya Sangsad (National Parliament)*.

[9] Bhattacharjee, N. (2025, February 28). *Bangladesh to hold elections in late 2025 or early 2026: Yunus*. *The Hindu*.

## Nepal



Nepal transitioned into a federal democratic republic in 2008, following the abolition of the monarchy. The country's 2015 Constitution established a three-tier governance structure—federal, provincial, and local—aiming to enhance democratic participation and decentralization. Despite legal provisions ensuring gender equality, women in Nepal continue to face significant barriers in political representation. Women hold only about 33% of seats in the federal Parliament, and their presence in executive roles remains limited.

## Bhutan



Bhutan transitioned to a constitutional monarchy in 2008, introducing democratic governance with a parliamentary system. The Constitution of Bhutan enshrines gender equality, yet women remain underrepresented in political leadership. Although Bhutan has made progress in women's participation at the local governance level, their representation in Parliament remains low. Prior to 2008, the country was governed by a king and a 151-member unicameral legislature called the Tshogdu, whose members were chosen by village headmen or the king.

## India



India is the world's largest democracy, with a federal parliamentary democratic republic with a bicameral legislature, comprising the Rajya Sabha (Upper House) and Lok Sabha (Lower House). As of 2024, women hold around 15% of seats in the Lok Sabha (Lower House) and 14% in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House). To address this disparity, India passed the Women's Reservation Bill (2023), which mandates 33% reservation for women in Parliament and state legislatures, though its implementation is pending[10].

## Pakistan



Pakistan operates under a parliamentary democratic system, with a bicameral legislature established by the Constitution of 1973. While legal frameworks uphold gender equality, women remain significantly underrepresented in political leadership. The Election Act (2017) mandates 5% of party tickets for women candidates in general elections, yet women's direct electoral participation remains low.

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[10] UN Women. (2023, October). *India passes law to reserve seats for women legislators.*

## Sri Lanka



The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka is governed by a presidential system instituted in 1978; the president is the head of the state and the head of the government is elected for a total term of 6 years[11]. While the Constitution of 1978 guarantees gender equality, women remain underrepresented in political leadership. As of 2024, women hold only 5.3% of seats in Parliament, one of the lowest rates in the region[12].

## Afghanistan







Afghanistan has experienced significant fluctuations in governance over the last three decades, shaped by conflict, regime changes, and evolving legal frameworks. The Wolesi Jirga (House of the People) and the Meshrano Jirga (House of Elders) were the two houses of the National Assembly (Parliament) before the Taliban's takeover in 2021. Women played an increasingly active role in both houses, particularly after 2001, when efforts were made to promote gender inclusion in Afghan politics.

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[11] Government of Sri Lanka. <https://www.gov.lk/sri-lanka/government>

[12] International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). (2022, April 8). *Women's political representation in Sri Lanka: Electoral system analysis and recommendations*.

# Right to Vote and Political Participation

Country	Right to Vote	Women's Right to Contest Elections	Voter Participation and Other Notes
 <b>Maldives</b> [13]	Yes (1965)	Yes (1965)	High female voter turnout, but low participation in political rallies and party meetings.
 <b>Bhutan</b> [14]	Yes (2008)	Yes (2008)	Women vote at similar rates as men; district-wise data is available but not consolidated nationally.
 <b>India</b> [15]	Yes (1947)	Yes (1947)	Women's voter turnout surpassed men's in 2019 and 2024, but political participation beyond voting remains low.
 <b>Pakistan</b>	Yes (1956)	Yes (1956)	Women's voter participation in Pakistan has seen both progress and persistent challenges over the years. In the general elections held on February 8, 2024, the voter turnout among women was 42.6%, compared to 51.6% among men.[16] An estimated 3.5 million Pakistani women are not registered on voter rolls, often due to social and cultural barriers. [17]

[13] Alam, Z., and Goehring, R. (2023). South and Southeast Asia. Women and politics: Global lives in focus, 189.




[14] Election Commission of Bhutan. (2024). Declaration of results of the 4th National Assembly elections, 2023-2024 (General Election).

[15] Jaffrelot, C., and Kumar, S. (2024, January 8). What lies behind India's rising female voter turnout. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

[16] Khan, S. (2024, June 17). Understanding the gender gap among Pakistan's voters. International Growth Centre.

[17] Shaikh, H. (2024, April 15). Where are the women voters? Insights from Pakistan's 2024 elections. International Growth Centre (IGC).



Country	Right to Vote	Women's Right to Contest Elections	Voter Participation and Other Notes
 <b>Bangladesh</b> [18]	Yes (1972)	Yes (1972)	As of 2024, women are 49.23% of registered voters and voter participation is consistently high.[19]
 <b>Afghanistan</b> [20]	No (since 2021)	No (since 2021)	Women lost voting and candidacy rights under Taliban. Previously had 27% quota in Parliament (2004–2021).
 <b>Sri Lanka</b> [21]	Yes (1931)	Yes (1948)	Women make up 56% of registered voters, exceeding their share of the population (52%). [22]

[18] Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh. (2023). Gender budget report 2023-24. Government of Bangladesh.



[19] European Union Election Expert Mission (2024). Bangladesh Parliamentary Election Final Report.

[20] UN Women. (2024, June). Gender country profile: Afghanistan (Executive summary).

[21] Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). Historical data on women in Sri Lanka's Parliament.

[22] Commonwealth Observer Group. (2024, September 21). Sri Lanka Presidential Election.




# Electoral Quotas and Political Representation

Country	Quotas (at all levels)	Representation in Politics	Female Heads of State/Government
 <p><b>Maldives</b> [23]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No legislated national quota</li> <li>• 33% quota in local councils (since 2020)</li> <li>• Voluntary party quotas exist but are not legally enforced. For instance, the Maldivian Democratic Party has a 33% quota for women in primaries.</li> </ul>	<p>Maldives has seen a gradual increase in women's representation in the national legislature, with 5.9% of seats held by women in the 2014 elections, 4.6% in 2019, and 6.4% in 2024.</p>	<p>Dr. Azmiralda Zahir and Aisha Shujune Mohamed became the first female Supreme Court judges appointed in 2019.</p>
 <p><b>Bangladesh</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 33% quota mandated for women in political parties by 2020</li> <li>• 50 reserved seats in parliament</li> <li>• 33% seats reserved in regional elections</li> <li>• 25% seats reserved in the Union, Municipality, and City Corporation councils</li> </ul>	<p>Most parties have failed to achieve the 33% target, and shortfalls persist. As of 2021, in the case of Bangladesh National Party (BNP), women constitute 11% of the party's 73-member advisory body, with only eight women.[24] For the same time period, among other parties, Jatiya Party (Manju) has 16 women in its core committee of 101 members (15.8%) and around 11% of the Workers Party of Bangladesh's central committee constitute women.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sheikh Hasina (PM, 1996-2001, 2009-2024)</li> <li>• Khaleda Zia (PM, 1991-1996, 2001-2006)</li> <li>• Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury became the first speaker of Parliament who is a woman in 2013.</li> </ul>

[23] International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). (2014). Women's empowerment in the political process in Maldives.

[24] UN Women. (2021, December). Advocacy brief: Bangladesh.

<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEAsia/Docs/Publications/2021/12/bd-Advocacy-Brief-s.pdf>

Country	Quotas (at all levels)	Representation in Politics	Female Heads of State/Government
 <b>Bangladesh</b>		19 out of the ruling Awami League's 74-member central committee members are women (26%) - seven posts are also empty as of now. Even for major political parties like the Communist Party of Bangladesh, the current rate of women's participation stands at 27.91%.[25]	
 <b>Nepal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 33% of parliamentary seats reserved for women (110/334 seats)</li> <li>• Political parties must ensure at least 33% women candidates [26]</li> </ul>	In 2017, women made up 40.95% of those elected to local offices. This figure saw a slight increase in 2022, rising to 41.21% of all elected officials.[27] By 2024, women's representation in the national parliament, provincial parliament, and local government bodies reached 33.6, 34.5, and 40.9% respectively. [28]	Bidya Devi Bhandari (President, 2015-2023)
 <b>Bhutan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No quotas at national or local levels</li> </ul>	Women have had the right to stand for elections since 1953 but the first woman in the Tshogdu was elected in 1980. [29] Women's representation in the national assembly has fluctuated over the years, ranging from no women to nearly 15 % women elected.[30] During the 2024 national elections, only 2 women were elected to the parliament. No woman has ever been chosen as the speaker of the parliament. In 2024, 10 % of ministers were women and 13 % of elected local politicians were women. [31]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>

[25] *The Daily Star*. (2021, March 8). 33% positions for women: Major parties not there yet.

[26] *Constitution of Nepal*. Asian Development Bank (ADB).



[27] Kumari, S., and Pokharel, S. (2024). *An analysis of women representation in 2022 Nepal local election*.

[28] *Nepal SDG Forum*.

[29] *Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)*. *Data on women in Bhutan*.

[30] Dema, K. (2024, February 5). *Bhutan chooses experienced hand at critical time: Analysis of Bhutan's election dynamics*. *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*.

[31] *UN Women*. *Country: Bhutan*.

Country	Quotas (at all levels)	Representation in Politics	Female Heads of State/Government
 <b>India</b>	<p>33% reservation in national and state assemblies (to be implemented post-Census) 33-50% reservation in local bodies since 1993</p>	<p>Representation in state and national legislatures lingers at 10% and 15% [32] respectively. Women's candidacy too has remained around 10 % of total candidates in national elections, with a high proportion of women contesting elections as independents and not as nominees of a political party. [33,34] Several Indian women have held prominent positions of political power - one Prime Minister, two Presidents, and 17 Chief Ministers (heads of states) have been women. The representation of women in Union ministries has not exceeded 11 %, with the latest Cabinet comprising 9.7 % women ministers.[35] Women's representation in the Indian bureaucracy has been steadily increasing over the years, reaching 34.3 % in 2022.[36]</p>	<p>Indira Gandhi (PM, 1966-1977, 1980-1984) Pratibha Patil (President, 2007-2012) Droupadi Murmu (President, 2022-present)</p>
 <b>Pakistan</b> [37]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 60/342 National Assembly seats reserved (17%);</li> <li>• 33% local council seats reserved;</li> <li>• 5% of general election candidates must be women</li> </ul>	<p>Women politicians in Pakistan have played a crucial role at national, regional, and local levels. At the national level, 72 women currently serve in the National Assembly, with 12 elected on general seats and 60 on reserved seats, making up about 21% of the assembly. The Senate has 17 reserved seats for women, ensuring their participation.</p>	<p>Benazir Bhutto (PM, 1988-1990, 1993-1996)</p>

[32] International Journal of Natural Resources Development. (2024). Women's representation in Indian parliament and state legislatures (current statistics and challenges). <https://www.ijnrd.org/papers/IJNRD2412297.pdf>



[33] Benu, P. (2024, May 30). India general elections women candidates 2024. *The Hindu Business Line*.

[34] Dang, G., and Sharma, P. (2019, May 9). Why women candidates are more likely to run as independents. *The Brookings Institution*.

[35] Francis, N., Radhakrishnan, V., Ragamathullah, U. M., and Ahmed, A. A. (2024, July 8). Women ministers increase their presence in the houses but remain stagnant in Union Ministry: Data. *The Hindu*. <https://www.thehindu.com/data/women-ministers-increase-their-presence-in-the-houses-but-remain-stagnant-in-union-ministry-data/article68352893.ece>

[36] *The Print*. (2023, May 31). Women breaking barriers to enter bureaucracy but UPSC numbers don't tell the whole truth.

[37] Government of Pakistan. (2024). Report of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action +30. UN Women.

Country	Quotas (at all levels)	Representation in Politics	Female Heads of State/Government
 <b>Pakistan</b>		<p>Maryam Nawaz Sharif became Punjab's first female Chief Minister, a landmark moment for women in provincial leadership.[38] At the local level, 33% of seats in local government bodies are reserved for women. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a record 3,900 women contested local elections in 2021, breaking barriers in conservative areas.[39] While progress is evident, women still face challenges despite legislative protections like the Elections Act of 2017.</p>	
 <b>Sri Lanka</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political parties must have at least one female office bearer[40]</li> <li>• SAARC Social Charter aimed for 30% representation but target remains unmet[41]</li> </ul>	<p>With a 50.7% proportion share in population, women political participation was estimated at 48%[42] In the Sri Lankan Parliament, 22 out of 225 (9.8%) members are women. [43]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sirima Bandaranaike (PM, 1960-1965, 1970-1977)</li> <li>• Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga (President, 1994-2005)</li> <li>• Harini Amarasuriya (PM, 2024)</li> </ul>

[38] *The Hindu*. (2024, February 26). *Maryam Nawaz becomes first-ever woman chief minister of a province in Pakistan*.


[39] *Report of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action +30*

[40] *Women's political representation in Sri Lanka: Electoral system analysis and recommendations*.

[41] *Government of Sri Lanka*. (2008). *Sri Lanka Action Plan: SAARC Social Charter*. Retrieved from \_




[42] Rathnayake, P. (2017, December). *Women's political representation in Sri Lanka: Leading towards prosperity or peril?*

[43] *Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). Data on women in parliament: Sri Lanka*. \_

 <p><b>Afghanistan</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Previously 68/250 seats in the Lower House were reserved for women (27% representation at peak)[44]Quotas dismantled post-2021</li> </ul>	<p>Women removed from government roles post-Taliban takeover (2021)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None</li> </ul>
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[44] Bjelica, J. and Soroush, R. 'Afghanistan Elections Conundrum (20): Women Candidates Going against the Grain', *Afghan Analyst Network* (2018): 1.

# Institutional and Legal Frameworks for Women's Political Participation

Country	Women's Ministerial Bodies and Ministries for Women	Legislations Protecting Women in Politics
 <b>Maldives</b> [45]	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ministry of Social and Family Development</li> <li>2. Human Rights and Gender Committee</li> <li>3. Social Affairs Committee (reviews Bills from a gender perspective)</li> </ol>	<p>Domestic Violence Prevention Act (2012) and Sexual Offences Act (2014) criminalize gender-based violence, but no specific protections exist for women politicians.</p>
 <b>Bangladesh</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ministry of Women and Children Affairs works towards the institutionalization of gender budgeting since 2009, and encouraging gender-sensitive allocations towards women's socio-economic development[46].</li> </ol>	<p>In Bangladesh, sexual harassment is a punishable offence under different laws such as the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000, the Penal Code, the Bangladesh Labour Law, 2006, and Metropolitan Police Ordinances[47].</p>
 <b>Nepal</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens (MoWCSC)</li> <li>2. National Women Commission (NWC)</li> <li>3. Women and Social Affairs Committee (Parliament)</li> <li>4. Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) Committee[48]</li> </ol>	<p>There are no specific laws for violence against women in politics, but lawmakers advocate for stronger protections. The National Women Commission (NWC) and other bodies have been advocating for legal protection and public awareness to ensure women's safety in political spaces[49].</p>

[45] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2020). *Women in governance: Progress and challenges in Maldives*.

[46] Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India.

[47] Sanjana, M. (2018, October 12). #MeToo and laws of workplace harassment: Bangladesh should follow India's example. *National Herald India*.

[48] Government of Nepal. (2024). *Nepal national review for implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (2024)*. Asia-Pacific Gender.

[49] MyRepublica. (2017, August 28). Effective implementation of laws must to end VAW: Lawmakers. MyRepublica.

Country	Women's Ministerial Bodies and Ministries for Women	Legislations Protecting Women in Politics
 <p><b>Bhutan</b>[50]</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Women, Youth, and Children Committee (Parliament)</li> <li>2. National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) under the Ministry of Education and Skills Development</li> <li>3. Bhutan Women Parliamentary Caucus (BWPC)</li> <li>4. Women and Child Welfare Committee</li> </ol>	<p>Though there are no specific legislations that prevent violence against women in politics, Bhutan's general electoral laws are meant to provide protection to all politicians from violence, attacks, and harassment.</p>
 <p><b>India</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD)</li> <li>2. National Commission for Women (NCW)</li> <li>3. Committee on Empowerment of Women</li> <li>4. Committee on Women, Children, Youth and Sports</li> </ol>	<p>In 2022, a state court ruled that the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Act, 2013, does not apply to political parties, as they lack an employer-employee relationship and are not required to form Internal Committees (ICs)[51]. Beyond workplace protections, election laws and digital regulations also address gender-based violence. The Representation of the People Act, 1951, prohibits gender-based hate speech and penalizes intimidation of women candidates (Sections 123(3), 123(4), 125). The SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, offers additional safeguards for marginalized women politicians. Online, the IT Act, 2000, and IT Rules, 2021, require social media platforms to remove offensive content against women within 24 hours, while Sections 67 and 67A criminalize the circulation of sexually explicit material.</p>

[50] Government of Bhutan. (2024). *Bhutan national review for implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (2024)*. UN Women. Retrieved from

[51] The Indian Express. (2025, March 3). *Could POSH Act apply to political parties?*



Country	Women's Ministerial Bodies and Ministries for Women	Legislations Protecting Women in Politics
 <p data-bbox="199 698 327 734"><b>Pakistan</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="406 295 766 369">1. Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC)</li> <li data-bbox="406 376 790 450">2. Ministry of Human Rights (MoHR)</li> <li data-bbox="406 456 829 530">3. National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW)</li> <li data-bbox="406 537 861 689">4. Women Development Departments (WDDs) in Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan</li> </ol>	<p data-bbox="885 295 1425 1131">Pakistan has implemented several legislative measures to protect and promote women politicians in the political arena. To safeguard women from workplace harassment, which includes political spaces, the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010 provides legal mechanisms for reporting and addressing harassment, offering female politicians a structured means of protection (Government of Pakistan, 2010)[52]. Additionally, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2016 strengthened protections by criminalizing online harassment, a tactic frequently used to target female politicians in an attempt to dissuade them from participating in public life (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2016).</p>
 <p data-bbox="199 1453 327 1489"><b>Sri Lanka</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="406 1169 774 1243">1. National Commission on Women (NCW)</li> <li data-bbox="406 1249 845 1323">2. Women's Charter of Sri Lanka (1993)[53]</li> </ol>	<p data-bbox="885 1169 1425 1765">Article 12 of the Constitution guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination based on sex, laying the foundation for women's political rights. Additionally, Article 12(4) permits special legal provisions to advance disadvantaged groups, including women in politics[54]. The Women Empowerment Act, No. 37 of 2024, established the National Commission on Women (NCW), tasked with safeguarding women's rights and ensuring their participation in decision-making[55].</p>

[52] Government of Pakistan. (2010).

[53] Ratnarajah, N. (2019, December). *Women in Sri Lanka: An analysis of their present status* (SAAPE Working Paper No. 2.5). South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication.

[54] *Women's political representation in Sri Lanka: Electoral system analysis and recommendations*.

[55] Sinnathamby, A. (2024, September 29). *Women's political representation in Sri Lanka: Electoral system analysis and recommendations*. The Morning.

# Recommendations

## 1. Strengthen Electoral Quotas and Women's Political Representation



Electoral quotas have been introduced across South Asia, yet their implementation remains weak. In Bangladesh, the 33% quota for women in political party structures lacks legal enforcement, often reducing women's participation to tokenism. Similarly, in Pakistan, while the Elections Act of 2017 mandates a 5% female candidacy requirement, women are rarely given winnable seats. To ensure meaningful representation, countries must enforce quotas with legal consequences for non-compliance and transition from reserved seats to direct elections, as seen in Nepal's efforts to institutionalize gender-balanced representation.

## 2. Enhance Legal Protections Against Gender-Based Harassment and Violence in Politics

Women politicians across South Asia face rampant gender-based violence, both online and offline. In Sri Lanka, despite constitutional protections, female leaders encounter severe harassment, discouraging political participation. Pakistan and India have seen rising cases of online abuse targeting women in politics, yet laws addressing political gender-based violence remain inadequate. Countries must introduce dedicated legislation criminalizing harassment and enforce internal complaint mechanisms within political parties, similar to India's POSH Act, which should be extended to cover political institutions.



## 3. Increase Women's Leadership and Decision-Making Power

Women in South Asian politics often serve in symbolic roles rather than holding real power. In Bangladesh, MPs occupying reserved seats lack budgetary allocations and influence over policy decisions. In Sri Lanka, despite a 30% target for women in local government, few hold key ministerial positions. Political parties must actively promote women to leadership roles within party structures and government, as Nepal has done by mandating female vice chairs in local governments. Expanding mentorship programs and gender-balanced cabinet appointments will further solidify women's role in governance.

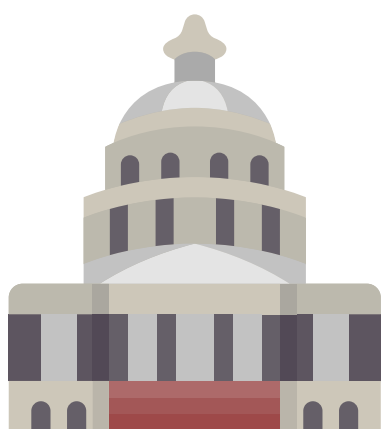


#### 4. Improve Voter Participation and Address Cultural Barriers

In Pakistan, over 3.5 million women remain missing from voter rolls, and restrictive cultural norms prevent women in rural areas from voting. Bhutan and Afghanistan have also struggled with gender bias in electoral participation, where deeply entrenched societal norms discourage women from running for office. Targeted voter registration drives, awareness campaigns, and legal safeguards ensuring women's access to polling stations—such as Nepal's requirement for gender-disaggregated electoral data—are crucial to closing the gender gap in political participation.



#### 5. Strengthen Institutional Mechanisms and Gender-Responsive Governance



Gender-focused institutions across South Asia suffer from limited authority and funding. In Nepal, the Ministry of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens (MoWCSC) lacks the necessary resources to drive gender-responsive policies effectively. Sri Lanka's National Commission on Women requires greater enforcement powers to hold political parties accountable for gender commitments. Expanding Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB), as seen in Bangladesh's efforts to mainstream gender equity in national planning, will ensure sustained investment in women's political empowerment.

## Limitations of the Study

1. There is a noted lack of comprehensive and comparable data across South Asian countries, especially regarding women in leadership roles. For instance, Afghanistan has not submitted a Voluntary National Review, leading to gaps in regional analysis.
2. Temporary special measures, like quotas, are not uniformly applied across all countries, impacting comparative analysis. For instance, in countries like Nepal and India, quota systems have shown some success in increasing women's representation, but their long-term impact on leadership roles beyond politics is still limited.
3. The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected women's economic and social participation, which could skew recent data on leadership trends. Climate change, economic crises, and armed conflicts further exacerbate gender inequalities, complicating efforts to isolate leadership-specific trends.
4. National reviews rely on self-reported government data, which may present a more favorable picture of progress, potentially overlooking persistent challenges.

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C G A P

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