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A Comparative Systematic Literature Review of Policies Enhancing Women's Electoral Participation in Indonesia, India, and Canada

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Abstract

This study examines comparative policy approaches to enhancing women's electoral participation in Indonesia, India, and Canada through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). The study addresses a gap in comparative gender policy literature by synthesizing cross-national evidence regarding how institutional design, affirmative action mechanisms, and socio-political contexts shape women's electoral participation across different democratic systems. Unlike prior studies that mainly emphasize single-country analysis, this review develops a comparative framework for evaluating the effectiveness and limitations of women's electoral participation policies. The review employed the PRISMA protocol using articles indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar published between 2014 and 2025. Inclusion criteria covered peer-reviewed English-language studies discussing women's electoral participation, quota policies, political representation, and electoral reform in Indonesia, India, or Canada. Following screening, eligibility assessment, and duplicate removal, 32 articles were selected for analysis. The comparison focused on policy design, institutional implementation, and substantive outcomes of women's participation and representation. The findings reveal substantial differences in policy effectiveness across the three countries. Indonesia's 30% legislative quota policy has increased women's descriptive representation, yet substantive participation remains constrained by patriarchal political culture and weak party support. India's reservation policy at the local governance level has strengthened grassroots political participation, although proxy representation and socio-cultural barriers persist. Canada demonstrates comparatively stronger outcomes through integrated gender-sensitive reforms, leadership development, and institutional support mechanisms. The study concludes that quota policies alone are insufficient without broader institutional support, inclusive political structures, and socio-cultural transformation to achieve substantive gender equality in electoral participation.

KEYWORDS

election; gender policy; indonesia - india- canada; systematic literature review (slr); women's participation.

Introduction

Robert Dahl emphasises that elections constitute a fundamental pillar of democratic governance because democracy requires broad citizen participation and public control over political agendas (Dahl & Levi, 2009). In democratic electoral systems, the principle of "One Person, One Vote, One Value" (OPOVOV) guarantees that each citizen's vote carries equal political value regardless of social, economic, or political background (Kuehn, 2022). This principle strengthens democratic legitimacy by ensuring equal political representation and inclusive participation within electoral

processes (Hajnal et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the normative commitment to democratic equality has not automatically produced equal political participation between men and women. Women's electoral participation and representation continue to face structural inequalities across many democratic systems, indicating a persistent gap between formal democratic rights and substantive political inclusion.

Electoral gender equity theory highlights that women's representation in political institutions contributes to reducing gender bias and improving the inclusiveness of public policy formulation (Kjaer & Krook, 2019; Vujadinović, 2024). Women's participation in electoral politics is therefore not merely a question of numerical representation, but also relates to the quality of democratic responsiveness and social justice. However, empirical realities demonstrate that women continue to encounter significant obstacles in accessing electoral competition and political leadership. In Indonesia, the 2024 election results indicate that male dominance remains strong, as the proportion of women elected to legislative institutions is still relatively limited (Hanifah, 2024). Previous studies show that women candidates frequently face gender stereotypes affecting voter perceptions and media representation (Klofstad, 2016). Women also experience unequal access to financial resources, political networks, and institutional support due to entrenched gender biases (Georgeac et al., 2019). These conditions are further reinforced by patriarchal social structures and traditional gender norms that restrict women's political agency and participation (Adongo et al., 2023).

Although many countries have introduced affirmative policies to increase women's electoral participation, policy effectiveness varies substantially across political and socio-cultural contexts. Existing studies largely focus on single-country experiences or evaluate quota policies in isolation, while limited attention has been given to comparative analyses examining how institutional design, implementation mechanisms, and socio-political environments interact in shaping policy outcomes across different democratic settings. This gap is particularly important because similar quota mechanisms may produce different outcomes depending on party structures, institutional commitment, leadership development systems, and socio-cultural conditions. Consequently, a comparative perspective is necessary to explain why some countries achieve more substantive forms of women's political participation while others remain limited to descriptive representation.

The comparison between Indonesia, India, and Canada provides theoretically meaningful cases because the three countries represent different democratic trajectories, levels of socio-economic development, and policy approaches toward gender inclusion. Indonesia and India, as developing democracies, continue to face strong patriarchal norms and structural barriers despite implementing affirmative action policies. Indonesia has established a 30% legislative quota for women candidates, yet the effectiveness of this policy remains constrained by weak party commitment, limited political education, and persistent patriarchal political culture (Pinilih, 2020; Rahmanto et al., 2021). Similarly, India has implemented reservation policies at the local governance level, which have increased women's descriptive representation, particularly in rural areas, although socio-cultural constraints and proxy representation continue to limit women's substantive political influence (Costa et al., 2017). In contrast, Canada represents a developed democratic context where gender-sensitive reforms, leadership development programs, and institutional support mechanisms have contributed to comparatively stronger levels of women's political participation and representation (Bruce et al., 2015; Radojevic, 2023). Comparing these three countries enables a broader understanding of how different

institutional capacities and socio-political structures shape the success and limitations of women's electoral participation policies.

This study specifically focuses on women's electoral participation in relation to candidate nomination, political representation, and participation in electoral decision-making processes. The comparison examines three main policy dimensions: affirmative action and quota systems, institutional support mechanisms, and socio-cultural barriers influencing women's political participation. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasise country-specific analyses or normative discussions of gender quotas, this research offers an original contribution by developing a comparative policy framework that integrates institutional, political, and socio-cultural dimensions across developed and developing democracies. The novelty of this study therefore lies not only in its cross-national comparison involving Indonesia, India, and Canada, but also in its use of a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to synthesise fragmented findings into a coherent comparative analytical framework.

Using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, this study systematically identifies, evaluates, and synthesises scholarly evidence regarding policy strategies aimed at increasing women's electoral participation. Through this approach, the research seeks to analyse how policy design, implementation mechanisms, and contextual socio-political factors influence women's electoral participation outcomes across the three countries. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to comparative gender and political representation scholarship while also providing practical policy recommendations for strengthening inclusive democratic participation and substantive gender equality in electoral politics.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize empirical and theoretical studies concerning policy strategies aimed at enhancing women's electoral participation in Indonesia, India, and Canada. The SLR approach was selected because it enables transparent and replicable synthesis of fragmented findings across different political and socio-cultural contexts. The review protocol followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework to ensure methodological transparency, consistency, and minimization of selection bias throughout the review process. The study specifically focused on women's electoral participation in relation to candidate nomination, voter participation, and political representation within electoral institutions. Comparative analysis was conducted across three principal policy dimensions: affirmative action policies, institutional support mechanisms, and socio-cultural barriers affecting women's political participation.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

To strengthen comprehensiveness and reduce database bias, this study utilized three major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Scopus and Web of Science were selected because they provide high-quality peer-reviewed international publications, while Google Scholar was included to capture relevant interdisciplinary and regional studies that may not be indexed in the other databases. The literature search covered publications from 2015 to 2025 in order to capture recent policy developments and contemporary debates regarding women's electoral participation. The search process employed structured Boolean operators using the following search string: TITLE-ABS-KEY (((“women participation” OR “women representation” OR “women political

participation”) AND (“election” OR “electoral policy” OR “gender quota” OR “political representation”) AND (Indonesia OR India OR Canada))). Additional manual searches were also conducted through reference tracking to identify potentially relevant studies omitted during the database search process.

Review Questions and Analytical Framework

The review was guided by one primary research question:

How do policy strategies in Indonesia, India, and Canada differ in enhancing women's electoral participation and political representation?

To increase analytical clarity, the main question was further divided into three sub-questions:

1. How do affirmative action and quota policies influence women's candidate nomination and political representation?
2. How do institutional support mechanisms affect women's participation in electoral processes?
3. What socio-cultural barriers continue to constrain women's substantive political participation across the three countries?

This study adopted the PICOY framework (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome, and Year) to structure the review process systematically:

1. Population (P): Women voters, women political candidates, and women representatives in Indonesia, India, and Canada.
2. Intervention (I): Electoral gender policies, quota systems, leadership programs, political education, and institutional support mechanisms.
3. Comparison (C): Comparative policy approaches across developing democracies (Indonesia and India) and a developed democracy (Canada).
4. Outcome (O): Women's candidate nomination, voter participation, and elected political representation.
5. Year (Y): Studies published between 2015 and 2025.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria consisted of:

1. Peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2025.
2. English-language publications.
3. Studies discussing women's electoral participation, political representation, quota systems, or electoral gender policies.
4. Studies specifically focusing on Indonesia, India, or Canada.
5. Empirical or theoretical studies containing relevant comparative or policy-related findings.

The exclusion criteria included:

1. Non-peer-reviewed publications, conference abstracts, editorials, and opinion articles.
2. Studies unrelated to electoral participation or political representation.
3. Articles focusing exclusively on non-electoral gender issues.
4. Duplicate records across databases.
5. Studies lacking sufficient methodological clarity or empirical relevance.

Study Selection Process

The initial database search identified 84 records consisting of 39 articles from Scopus, 21 from Web of Science, and 24 from Google Scholar. After removing 18 duplicate records, 66 articles remained for title and abstract screening. During the screening stage, 21 articles were excluded because they did not directly address women's electoral participation or lacked relevance to the selected countries. The remaining 45 studies underwent full-text

eligibility assessment. Twelve articles were subsequently excluded due to insufficient empirical evidence, unclear methodological procedures, or weak relevance to the comparative policy dimensions examined in this study. Consequently, 33 articles were retained for final synthesis, consisting of 14 studies from Indonesia, 12 from India, and 7 from Canada. Country allocation was determined based on the primary national focus of each study. Comparative studies involving multiple countries were categorized according to their dominant analytical emphasis.

Quality Appraisal and Coding Procedure

To ensure the credibility of the synthesized findings, all selected studies underwent quality appraisal based on four criteria: methodological clarity, relevance to research objectives, analytical depth, and empirical validity. Studies demonstrating clear research design, transparent data analysis, and substantial policy discussion were prioritized during synthesis. Although no numerical scoring system was applied, studies with limited methodological explanation or weak empirical grounding were given lower analytical emphasis in the comparative interpretation process.

Data extraction and coding were conducted systematically using thematic categories derived from the research objectives and analytical framework. The coding process focused on:

1. Type of electoral gender policy.
2. Institutional implementation mechanisms.
3. Socio-cultural barriers affecting participation.
4. Outcomes related to candidate nomination, voter participation, and political representation.
5. Reported strengths and limitations of policy implementation.

Data Synthesis and Bias Minimization

The selected studies were analyzed using qualitative thematic synthesis. Findings were compared across countries to identify similarities, differences, and recurring policy patterns. The synthesis emphasized how institutional arrangements, political party structures, and socio-cultural contexts influenced the effectiveness of women's electoral participation policies. Several measures were implemented to minimize bias during the review process. First, the use of multiple databases reduced publication selection bias. Second, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria ensured consistency during screening and eligibility assessment. Third, thematic coding procedures were conducted systematically to maintain analytical transparency and comparability across studies. Through these procedures, the study aimed to produce a rigorous and reproducible comparative synthesis regarding policy strategies for enhancing women's electoral participation.

Result and Discussion

Comparative Framework of Women's Electoral Participation Policies

The reviewed studies indicate that women's electoral participation in Indonesia, India, and Canada is shaped by the interaction between policy design, institutional implementation, socio-cultural context, and political support systems. Rather than functioning as isolated interventions, gender-related electoral policies operate within broader institutional environments that determine whether women's participation develops only descriptively or also substantively. To strengthen the comparative analysis, the findings are organized using four analytical dimensions: quota design, institutional support mechanisms, voter education and empowerment, and persistent structural barriers. The comparative dimensions synthesized from the reviewed literature are presented in Table 1.

The literature suggests that Indonesia and India rely more

Table 1. Comparative Policy Dimensions of Women's Electoral Participation in Indonesia, India, and Canada

Dimensions	Indonesia	India	Canada
Quota Design	30% legislative candidate quota since 2003	33% reservation quota at village-level governance (Panchayat)	No formal national quota system
Implementation Mechanism	Party-based nomination quota with inconsistent enforcement	Constitutionally mandated local reservation system	Voluntary party initiatives and institutional incentives
Institutional Support	Limited political training and weak party commitment	Grassroots mobilization through local governance and SHGs	Leadership programs, campaign financing support, gender-sensitive reforms
Voter Education	Family-based voter education and women-focused political training	SHGs and NRLM political awareness programs	Comprehensive civic and voter education programs
Main Structural Barriers	Patriarchal political culture, financial constraints, weak party support	Patriarchal norms, early marriage, proxy representation	Work-life balance pressures, underrepresentation in senior offices, intersectional inequality
Observable Outcomes	Increased descriptive representation but inconsistent substantive participation	Stronger grassroots participation but uneven higher-level representation	Comparatively stronger representation and institutional inclusion

heavily on formal affirmative-action mechanisms, particularly quota systems, while Canada adopts a more institutionalized support-based approach emphasizing leadership development, financial assistance, and inclusive political culture. However, the reviewed studies also demonstrate that stronger institutional environments do not eliminate gender inequalities entirely, since structural and intersectional barriers remain visible even within developed democratic systems.

Comparative Policy Matrix

Quota Policies and Institutional Effectiveness

The reviewed literature suggests that quota policies produce different outcomes depending on institutional capacity and socio-political context. In Indonesia, the 30% quota for female legislative candidates increased women's descriptive representation in parliament, rising from approximately 9% to nearly 18–21% across several election cycles (Prihatini, 2018; Purwanti et al., 2018). Nevertheless, several studies indicate that quota implementation remains highly dependent on party commitment, candidate recruitment patterns, and access to political resources (Rahmanto et al., 2021; Yusartika et al., 2023). The literature further indicates that quota policies become less effective when political parties treat quotas merely as administrative requirements rather than mechanisms for substantive empowerment. Consequently, women may formally appear on candidate lists without receiving meaningful electoral support, campaign financing, or leadership opportunities.

In India, the literature demonstrates that the 73rd Constitutional Amendment introducing a 33% quota at the village governance level significantly expanded women's participation in local politics (Mukerji, 2021). Several reviewed studies suggest that local reservation policies contributed to increased political visibility for women and encouraged broader participation among rural communities (Kalaramadam, 2018; Sharma & Behera, 2023). However, the literature also highlights persistent concerns regarding proxy representation, where women elected under quota systems remain politically dependent on male family members or local elites (Rai, 2025). This suggests that quota policies alone cannot automatically transform gendered power relations when patriarchal authority structures remain institutionally embedded.

Canada presents a contrasting policy model because women's political participation is supported primarily through institutional incentives rather than legally mandated quotas. The reviewed studies indicate that political parties, civic organizations, and public institutions provide leadership

development programs, campaign financing assistance, and work-family support mechanisms to female candidates (Carson et al., 2024; Varghese, 2019). These institutional arrangements appear to contribute to comparatively higher levels of women's political representation. Nevertheless, the literature also emphasizes that Canada continues to experience important limitations, particularly regarding intersectional inequality and underrepresentation of women in senior executive political positions such as mayoral offices (Artiles et al., 2024). Therefore, Canadian progress should not be interpreted as evidence that gender inequality has been fully resolved, but rather as an example of stronger institutional adaptation to gender inclusion.

Voter Education and Political Empowerment

The reviewed studies indicate that voter education and political empowerment mechanisms constitute important supporting factors for women's electoral participation. In Indonesia, family-based voter education and women-centered political training programs are described as strategies for improving political awareness and reducing negative perceptions of politics among women voters and candidates (Kadir et al., 2024). Women's NGOs also play an important role by providing leadership training, campaign assistance, and political networking opportunities (Amalia, 2021; Perdana & Hillman, 2020). However, the literature suggests that these initiatives often remain fragmented and insufficiently institutionalized, limiting their long-term impact on representation outcomes.

In India, grassroots empowerment programs such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs) operating under the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) are frequently associated with increased political awareness and community participation among women, particularly within marginalized rural communities (Mahato & Jha, 2025). The reviewed studies suggest that these programs contribute indirectly to electoral participation by strengthening women's organizational experience, public confidence, and collective political engagement. Nevertheless, the literature also indicates that socio-cultural restrictions continue to constrain women's autonomous participation despite these empowerment mechanisms.

Compared with Indonesia and India, Canada demonstrates more institutionalized voter education and political inclusion systems. The reviewed studies describe how civic education programs, leadership initiatives, and public discourse promoting gender equality contribute to a more supportive environment for women's political participation (Bruce et al., 2015). However, Canadian progress also remains uneven

because racialized women, Indigenous women, and minority groups continue to face structural disadvantages in accessing political leadership opportunities (Varghese, 2019). This indicates that institutional inclusion does not necessarily guarantee equal participation across all social categories.

Structural Barriers and Contextual Differences

The comparative findings suggest that barriers to women's electoral participation can be categorized into three interconnected dimensions: structural-cultural barriers, institutional barriers, and resource-based barriers. In Indonesia and India, patriarchal culture remains the most consistently identified obstacle across the reviewed studies (Hillman, 2017; Jamil, 2020). Patriarchal norms shape public perceptions regarding women's political leadership, reduce women's access to political networks, and reinforce unequal divisions of domestic labor.

The literature from India additionally identifies early marriage and gender-based dependency structures as important factors limiting women's long-term political engagement (Carpene & Jensenius, 2021). In Indonesia, weak party institutionalization and limited financial support for women candidates further reduce women's ability to compete effectively in elections. These findings suggest that institutional weakness can reduce the effectiveness of formal affirmative policies because quotas alone cannot overcome unequal access to political capital.

Although Canada demonstrates comparatively stronger institutional support, the reviewed studies suggest that structural barriers remain visible in different forms. Women continue to encounter work-life balance pressures, unequal access to senior leadership positions, and intersectional disadvantages related to race and ethnicity (Artiles et al., 2024). Consequently, the comparative findings indicate that barriers to women's participation differ not only in intensity but also in institutional form across developed and developing democracies.

Toward a Comparative Typology of Policy Effectiveness

Based on the reviewed studies, this research proposes a comparative typology of policy effectiveness consisting of three categories: formal-institutional inclusion, participatory empowerment, and substantive institutional integration.

1. Formal-Institutional Inclusion refers to systems where women's participation is encouraged primarily through legal quotas or formal regulations without sufficiently strong institutional support mechanisms. Indonesia largely reflects this category because quota policies increase numerical representation but remain constrained by weak party commitment and patriarchal political culture.
2. Participatory Empowerment refers to systems emphasizing grassroots mobilization and local political participation through community-based empowerment mechanisms. India demonstrates this model through reservation policies and SHG-based participation strategies that strengthen women's visibility at the local level while still facing institutional limitations at higher political levels.
3. Substantive Institutional Integration refers to systems where gender inclusion is supported through broader institutional adaptation involving leadership development, financial support, civic education, and gender-sensitive political reforms. Canada most closely reflects this category, although intersectional inequalities continue to limit full inclusiveness.

This typology contributes to comparative policy scholarship by demonstrating that the effectiveness of women's electoral participation policies depends not only on the existence of affirmative regulations but also on the

institutional and socio-cultural conditions supporting policy implementation. The reviewed literature therefore suggests that transferable policy success requires institutional adaptation to local political structures rather than simple replication of quota systems across different democratic contexts.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the effectiveness of policies aimed at enhancing women's electoral participation varies significantly across Indonesia, India, and Canada due to differences in institutional capacity, socio-political context, and forms of policy implementation. The reviewed studies suggest that affirmative mechanisms such as gender quotas may increase women's descriptive representation; however, their effectiveness remains strongly conditioned by broader institutional support, political party commitment, and socio-cultural structures. Consequently, formal quota adoption alone does not automatically produce substantive political participation or equal representation outcomes. The comparative findings indicate that Indonesia and India continue to experience substantial structural barriers, particularly patriarchal political culture, limited institutional support, unequal access to political resources, and gendered social expectations. In Indonesia, quota implementation has expanded women's numerical participation but remains constrained by weak party institutionalization and limited political empowerment mechanisms. In India, reservation policies at the local governance level have strengthened grassroots participation and political visibility for women, although proxy representation and socio-cultural dependency structures continue to limit autonomous political influence. In contrast, the reviewed literature suggests that Canada has achieved comparatively stronger outcomes through integrated institutional support systems, including leadership development, civic education, and financial assistance for female candidates. Nevertheless, Canadian progress also remains incomplete because intersectional inequalities and underrepresentation in senior political positions persist.

The main comparative insight of this study is that policy effectiveness depends not only on the existence of affirmative regulations but also on the interaction between institutional design, implementation capacity, and socio-cultural context. This finding contributes to comparative gender policy scholarship by proposing a typology of policy effectiveness across different democratic settings, distinguishing between formal-institutional inclusion, participatory empowerment, and substantive institutional integration. Through this framework, the study demonstrates that successful policy transfer cannot rely on direct replication of quota systems alone, since institutional and cultural conditions significantly influence implementation outcomes. The strongest policy implication emerging from this review is that governments and political institutions should complement quota-based policies with sustained political education, leadership training, financial support mechanisms, and gender-sensitive institutional reforms. Collaboration between governments, political parties, civil society organizations, and women's advocacy groups is therefore essential to strengthen substantive democratic inclusion. At the same time, the study also highlights that policy models from developed democracies such as Canada cannot be transferred mechanically to developing contexts without adaptation to local institutional capacities and socio-cultural realities.

Finally, this study is limited by its reliance on secondary

literature and the uneven distribution of available studies across the three countries. Future research may therefore expand the comparative scope by incorporating additional

countries, longitudinal electoral data, or mixed-method approaches to examine more directly how institutional reforms influence women's political participation over time.

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