WOMEN'S CANDIDACY IN INDIAN NATIONAL POLITICS

BARRIERS TO WOMEN IN POLITICS:
CANDIDATE SELECTION AND INFORMAL PARTY POLITICS IN INDIA

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A Dissertation Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Political Science

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (2024), Department of Political Science, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

TITLE: Barriers to Women in Politics: Candidate Selection and Informal Party Politics in India

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Lay Abstract

This dissertation investigates the inner workings of the two major political parties in India, i.e. the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) that contribute to the lack of women in Indian national politics. Drawing on mixed-methods research involving empirical data analysis of original candidate data and semi-structured elite interviews, I examine candidate selection within the two major Indian parties for national elections held between 2004 and 2019. I find that both the parties' centralized, and male-dominated selection processes marginalize the subsidiary women's organizations within them, limiting women's influence on nominations during national elections. For general seats, both the parties tend to prefer women candidates with wealth, dynastic ties, criminal cases, and higher-education. In the reserved seats, the INC tend to favor wealthy, dynastic, and highly-educated women candidates, while the BJP tend to prefer women with wealth, criminal cases, and higher-education. The INC's inclusive ideology led to more women candidates in the less politically competitive reserved seats in the national elections of 2004 and 2019, unlike the BJP's traditionalist approach. Overall, my findings reveal that both candidate selection methods and informal practices within parties result in creating barriers for women's electoral candidacy in Indian national politics.

Abstract

This dissertation examines the internal party dynamics of two major parties in India that contribute to the persistent underrepresentation of women in Indian national politics. I compare and investigate the processes and informal practices of candidate selection in two major parties: Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). Based on original candidate data and semi-structured elite interviews, I examine the factors that constrained women's nominations in the national elections held in India between 2004 and 2019. Drawing on mixed-methods research, I find that centralized formal selectorates and selection methods limit opportunities for women, alongside the marginalization of subsidiary women's organizations by both parties, thereby constraining women's candidacy. Despite ideological differences, both the parties reinforce underlying patriarchal norms by limiting the role of subsidiary women's organizations from the candidate selection processes. The underrepresentation of women in the formal selectorate restricts their ability to shape nominations and curtail opportunities for women candidates for both general and reserved seats in the national elections. My findings show that underlying gender biases among party elites, who prioritize informal traits that reinforce existing power structures in parties and marginalize women who do not fit these criteria. For general seats, both the parties tend to prefer women candidates who have wealth, dynastic connections, criminal cases, and higher education. As for the reserved seats, the INC tend to favor wealthy, dynastic, and highly-educated women candidates, while the BJP tend to prefer women candidates with wealth, criminal cases, and higher-education. This dissertation reveals differing nomination patterns between the INC and BJP and distinct ideological stances in the less politically competitive reserved seats. The INC nominated more women candidates in reserved seats in the 2004 and 2019 elections, aligning with its inclusive ideology. Conversely, the BJP has not with its more traditional right-wing nationalist values. Overall, this dissertation finds that both candidate selection methods and informal party practices perpetuate gender disparities in political representation in India. By examining the opaque candidate selection processes through a gendered lens, this dissertation sheds light on the barriers women face for electoral candidacy in Indian national politics.

Dedicated to Ma, Baba, Piku, and Soham

Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to many individuals who helped me complete this dissertation. First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Netina Tan, who has supported me since my first year of doctoral studies and provided invaluable advice throughout every phase of this journey. I am immensely grateful to her for all the academic support that she has extended to me in the last couple of years. Her consistent feedback, encouragement, and enthusiasm for my work has helped me to navigate this immensely difficult journey called "PhD". Alongside her, my supervisory committee members, Dr. Michelle Dion and Dr. Peter Graefe, provided invaluable guidance, helping me craft an intellectually viable dissertation. Dr. Michelle Dion has guided me with her methodological expertise to ensure that my dissertation is empirically valid. She was always available whenever I needed her advice on the methodological issues relevant to my research. Similarly, Dr. Peter Graefe pushed me to navigate the theoretical underpinnings of my dissertation and gave me valuable editorial advice throughout my writing period. I am extremely fortunate that my dissertation was supervised by professors like Dr. Netina Tan, Dr. Michelle Dion, and Dr. Peter Graefe who are experts in the field of comparative politics. Additionally, I am deeply grateful to Dr. Rashmi Singh from O.P. Jindal Global University, India for her invaluable and objective insights, as well as for her thorough review of my doctoral dissertation as the external examiner.

I am immensely grateful to receive financial support from various sources at the McMaster University for completing my dissertation. My doctoral studies would not have been possible without the financial support from McMaster University's School of Graduate Studies, the Faculty of Social Sciences, and Graduate Student Association. Moreover, I have received financial support from my supervisor as a research assistant during my summer semesters in the last couple of years. Additionally, the Department of Political Science was generous enough to offer me teaching assistantships in various courses which has helped me financially in the past six years.

The global pandemic deterred my field trip to India, but I overcame this difficulty by recruiting my elite interviewees through the social media platform LinkedIn and conducted my elite interviews online. The elite interviews are an important component of my research and the politicians, poll strategists, and scholars based in India had been immensely patient and supportive during my interviews. I am immensely grateful to all my elite interviewees who participated in the semi-structured virtual interviews from India.

At McMaster, I have been blessed with many supportive, intelligent, helpful, and loyal friends who have helped me navigate the ups and downs of my doctoral journey. I am especially grateful for having built beautiful friendships with Swarnali, Mria, Paramita, Lekhani, Swasti, Subham, Trevor, these friends became my only source of support during the troubled times of the pandemic as well. I have also made great friends in the Department of Political Science who have helped me stay focused and allowed me to express my anxieties to them. I am particularly thankful to Cassandra, Helen, Suneth, Roomana, Mehak, Aye Lei, and Joseph. I would also like to thank

Manuela Dozzi in the Department of Political Science for her consistent assistance with all the official paperwork related to the doctoral program.

Last but not least, I am deeply grateful to my family for their unwavering support and patience throughout my doctoral journey. My parents and sister have been my rock, consistently encouraging and believing in my progress. I would also like to thank my partner, Soham, who endured the ups and downs in my absence and remained patient throughout my seemingly endless years in graduate school. Soham has been my pillar of strength, instilling in me the confidence to complete this journey. His love, support, and compassion have been invaluable during my PhD journey and beyond.

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List of Abbreviations

INC	Indian National Congress
BJP	Bhartiya Janata Party
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribe
OBC	Other Backward Class
UT	Union Territory
FPTP	First-past-the-post
PR	Proportional Representation
MP	Member of Parliament
ECI	Election Commission of India
ADR	Association of Democratic Reforms
AICC	All Indian Congress Committee
CWC	Congress Working Committee
PCC	Pradesh Congress Committee
SC	Screening Committee
CEC	Central Election Committee
NSUI	National Students' Union of India
INTUC	Indian National Trade Union Congress
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RSS	Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh

Declaration of Academic Achievement

This dissertation is based on original research that I conducted, encompassing data collection, coding, analysis, and writing. My primary supervisor, Dr. Netina Tan, offered invaluable guidance on existing theories of candidate selection and its impact on women's political representation in electoral democracies. She thoroughly helped me frame my research puzzle and assisted in organizing and editing the completed dissertation. Dr. Michelle Dion, from the Department of Political Science at McMaster University and a member of my supervisory committee, provided comprehensive guidance on the methodological components and valuable editorial advice for the dissertation. Dr. Peter Graefe, also from the Department of Political Science, suggested valuable insights on the theoretical aspects of the dissertation and offered editorial advice. Some chapters of this dissertation have been presented at international conferences in the recent past.

Chapter 1: Women's political underrepresentation in India

1.1. Introduction

India is the largest constitutional democracy in the world with a population size of nearly 1.36 billion. Even after its economic progress, adoption of universal franchise post independence, and having an eminent woman Prime Minister like Indira Gandhi, women are still underrepresented in national politics. The country has political structures that are modern, competitive, and institutionalized. Yet, its political system remains extremely traditional, consensus-based, and highly personalized. It has been a constitutional democracy and independent for more than seventy years from the British, yet the presence of women in the directly elected lower house (Lok Sabha) of the national parliament still does not reflect the gender demographics of the country (P. Rai 2017, 60). The proportion of women in the national legislature after seventeen elections since independence is only at 14.58 percent (Spary 2020, 225). India is ranked at 142 among 193 countries by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) for the percentage of women in national parliament (Raychaudhury 2023).

To explain the persistent underrepresentation of women in Indian national politics, my dissertation aims to investigate the internal mechanisms of party politics and assess the degree to which candidate selection processes affect the demand of women candidates. What are the key formal and informal factors that affects the nomination of women candidates by the parties? My research posits that the traditional focus on the gender of candidates ignores the informal selection criteria such as wealth, educational qualifications, dynastic ties, criminal records, and their formal party affiliations which affects their nominations to contest national elections in India. Existing literature does not examine adequately why and how informal party practices and selection criteria such as wealth, dynastic ties, educational qualifications, and criminal records affect the demand of women candidates for nominations in "general" and "reserved" seats in national elections. My dissertation investigates the specific mechanisms through which formal candidate selection methods and informal party practices and selection criteria influence the nomination of women candidates by the two major parties of India in national elections.

In the last few directly elected Lok Sabhas, women only formed a small proportion of members of parliament (MPs): 8% in 2004, 11% in 2009, 12% in 2014 and 14.58% in 2019 (Spary 2020, 225). In the sub-national state assemblies, the percentage of women was even lower (Jensenius 2019, 674). While there are no quotas for women in sub-national state assemblies or in the national parliament, a constitutional amendment in 1993 mandated reserved seats for women at the district and village level councils in India (Bhalotra, Clots-Figueras, and Iyer 2013). Despite this, elected women at the local councils did not transition to national political power. This amendment led several sub-national states to increase women's reservation to 50 percent of seats at local councils, resulting in significant changes in over 250,000 local bodies and electoral politics, enhancing descriptive representation of women at the local level over the past two decades (Karekurve-

Ramachandra 2020). However, in national politics, as Table 1-1 shows there are low proportions of women candidates nominated by the parties and directly elected women MPs in the Lok Sabhas.

Table 1-1: Percentage of women candidates nominated and percentage of women MPs

Election year	Total % of women candidates	Total % of women MPs
2004	6.5	8.3
2009	6.9	11
2014	7.4	12
2019	8.9	14.58

Source: Developed based on (P. Rai 2011; Spary 2014; 2020)

Table 1-1 shows the persistent underrepresentation of women in Indian national politics, both in terms of the proportion of women candidates nominated by political parties and the percentage of women MPs elected to the Lok Sabha over several election cycles. Despite a slight increase in the success rate of women candidates over the years, this progress has not improved the overall representation of women in the national parliament. One puzzling aspect highlighted by the data is the stagnant or slow growth in the nominations of women candidates by the political parties. This suggests that while individual women candidates may be gaining traction and winning elections, political parties are still not nominating enough women to contest in the first place.

Additionally, despite the implementation of gender quotas at the local level in India, there has been limited impact on the descriptive representation of women in the national parliament. The substantial number of women entering formal politics at the grassroots level did not translate into commensurate increases in women's representation at the national level, indicating barriers that hinder women's upward mobility within political parties and electoral politics. My research addresses these problems by examining the formal candidate selection methods and informal party practices and selection criteria within the two major parties of India to understand why opportunities for women as electoral candidates in national politics are limited. By examining the processes through which candidates are nominated by political parties, including the role of formal party structures, informal selection criteria, and decision-making mechanisms, my research provides insights into the barriers and biases that hinder women's participation and representation in Indian party politics. By understanding the dynamics of candidate selection within political parties my findings develop evidence-based strategies to promote gender equality and inclusivity in party politics. By highlighting the institutional challenges that limit the opportunities of women candidates, this dissertation aims to show how political parties can play a key role in increasing the descriptive representation of women in the national parliament and advancing gender equality in Indian democracy.

To address the questions on underrepresentation of women in Indian national politics, my study investigates both the formal and informal dimensions of candidate selection within the two major national parties: the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). My

analysis focuses on both "general"[1] and "reserved"[2] seats across national elections conducted between 2004 and 2019. By examining the candidate selection processes of these parties over this period, my research aims to uncover the formal mechanisms and informal factors influencing the nomination of candidates, particularly focusing on the treatment of men and women candidates within the party structures.

For a more detailed explanation of the research design this chapter is structured into four sections. The first section gives an overview of existing literature on women's underrepresentation in global politics and in Indian national politics and highlights the research gaps. The second section presents my key arguments for addressing the research questions. The third section discusses case selection, research methods, and data used in the research. The fourth section concludes this chapter by discussing the implications and organization of my dissertation.

1.2. Existing literature review and gaps

The following section discusses the existing literature on the persistent underrepresentation of women globally and in national politics of India. Despite the notable efforts and achievements in advancing women's rights and participation in Indian politics since independence, significant gaps persist in the representation of women at the national level. The mobilization of women's organizations, the emergence of eminent women in electoral politics, and the introduction of gender quotas at the local level of governance in the early 1990s have not aided in the increase of women's political representation in national politics.

1.2.1. Factors affecting the underrepresentation of women in politics globally

The underrepresentation of women in politics globally is influenced by a variety of socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors. The first and foremost factor which restricts women's entry into politics is the patriarchal values and entrenched gender stereotypes. These norms often dictate that politics is a male domain and women's primary roles are in the private sphere of home and family (Inglehart and Norris 2001; 2003). Such stereotypes discourage women from pursuing political careers and limit public support for women candidates (Norris and Lovenduski 1993). Studies show that women typically bear a disproportionate share of family and household responsibilities, which limits their time and capacity to engage in politics (Evans 2008; Phillips

[1] The general seats in the national parliament are characterized by their competitiveness, as they are open to be contested by any citizen above the age of 25 years, irrespective of their gender, language, creed, educational background, occupation, income, religion, social background, etc. Approximately seventy-six per cent of members in the directly elected Lok Sabha of the national parliament represent from these general seats (412 seats), indicating their significant role in shaping the composition of the legislature (Ambagudia 2019; 2020).

[2] Reserved seats are exclusively contested by members of the reserved communities (namely the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) above the age of 25 years and all residents above the age of 18 years in these seats, irrespective of their gender, language, socio-economic status, or cultural identities, have the right to vote for their preferred candidates. Currently there are 84 reserved seats for the SCs and 47 reserved seats for the STs, constituting approximately twenty-four percent of the seats in the Lok Sabha of the national parliament (Jensenius 2012).

1991). The double burden of work and family duties makes it challenging for women to actively participate in political processes.

Studies also show that socialization processes among women reinforce traditional gender roles associated with household duties from an early age impacting women's self-perception and political ambition in both developed and developing countries (A. Reynolds 1999; I. Reynolds and Hirokawa 2013). Educational disparities also play a critical role in many regions where girls have less access to quality education which further limits their opportunities for political engagement later in life (Yoon 2004; P. Rai 2011; Chhibber 2002). Moreover, studies show that economic inequality is a critical barrier to women's political participation in most countries. These studies show that running for political office often requires substantial financial resources and women generally have less access to these resources compared to men which hampers their ability to campaign effectively (Paxton, Kunovich, and Hughes 2007; Kunovich and Paxton 2005). Thus, economic disparities play a critical role in the underrepresentation of women in politics. Moreover, there is evidence in the literature that women in politics often face gender-based violence and harassment which creates a hostile environment that discourages many women from entering or continuing in political roles (Goetz 2007; Bardall 2011; Krook and Restrepo Sanín 2019). In many countries there are insufficient legal protections against gender-based violence and harassment in electoral politics (Krook and Restrepo Sanín 2019). The lack of enforcement mechanisms further exacerbates the issue of gender-based violence in electoral politics, making it difficult for women politicians to seek recourse and protection.

Beyond socio-economic and cultural factors, there are institutional factors that restricts women's involvement in electoral politics. Political parties are crucial gate-keepers in the electoral process and often they are dominated by men who may not prioritize or support women candidates (Caul 1999; Kunovich and Paxton 2005; Basu 2005; Tremblay 2012). This includes biases in candidate selection processes and the absence of internal party policies to promote gender equality (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2019; Cheng and Tavits 2011). Incumbents typically have a higher chance of being re-elected due to their established political networks and resources (Norris, Vallance, and Lovenduski 1992). Since incumbents are predominantly men in the political parties, this creates an institutional barrier for women attempting to enter politics (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Bjarnegård 2013; Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2019). In addition to this, it is evident in the literature that women often lack access to mentorship and support networks that are crucial for political success (Christoff et al. 2017; Md. M. R. Khan and Ara 2023). Male politicians typically have more robust political networks, which help them navigate the political space and secure key positions within the parties (Aragón 2013; Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2019; Bjarnegård and Kenny 2015; Cheng and Tavits 2011). The formal and informal mechanisms of candidate selection processes within parties affect the underrepresentation of women in electoral politics globally.

Furthermore, the type of electoral system can significantly impact women's representation in national parliaments (Tremblay 2012; Bernauer, Giger, and Rosset 2015; Rule 1987; 1981). There is evidence in the existing literature that proportional representation (PR) systems tend to elect

more women candidates compared to majoritarian systems, which often favor established men politicians (Bernauer, Giger, and Rosset 2015; Salmond 2006; Matland and Studlar 1996). Some scholars suggests that legal frameworks like gender quotas can significantly enhance women's representation in elected legislatures (Krook 2010; Dahlerup 2007). Although gender quotas have been effective in increasing the presence of women politicians in some contexts, their implementation and success varies widely (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2010; Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2011).

The underrepresentation of women in politics is a complex issue influenced by an interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors. To address the issue of women's underrepresentation in politics will require a multifaceted approach, including educational reforms, economic empowerment of women, institutional restructuring of parties and electoral systems to make it more women-friendly, and introducing robust legal framework to protect women from violence and discrimination in the political arena. The next sections examines the existing literature which discusses the factors responsible for the underrepresentation of women in Indian national politics.

1.2.2. Socio-economic inequalities

One common explanation for the scarcity of women politicians in India is the impact of human development (Norris 2012). The disparities in life opportunities and chances for girls born in South Asia compared to those in East Asia are stark, particularly concerning health status, educational attainments, and employment opportunities. In South Asia, including countries like India, girls often face significant barriers to accessing quality healthcare, education, and employment opportunities compared to their counterparts in East Asia (Norris 2012). These disparities can have long-lasting effects on their life outcomes and opportunities for political participation. Still, there are reasons to think that economic development alone may not necessarily lead to gender parity in political representation and participation. Notably, despite substantial growth in per capita GDP in some countries, such as Japan, equivalent gains for women's empowerment in decision-making positions have not been observed (Norris 2012).

Contrary to this, in India, there is evidence in existing literature to suggest that literacy and income levels are correlated with the voting gender gap (Gleason 2001; P. Rai 2017). This implies that voting behavior is closely associated with the empowerment process, with education and economic opportunities playing pivotal roles. However, while literacy and income may influence political participation, disparities in access to these resources persist, particularly among women and minorities in India. Existing literature also points out that women and minorities in India often have fewer economic resources, lower levels of education, and poorer health conditions, which ultimately limit their opportunities for political participation (Gleason 2001; P. Rai 2011). These systemic inequalities leads to the limited supply of women as potential electoral candidates for contesting national elections in India.

With respect to socio-economic inequalities, women's participation in the formal labour force of India dropped over the past decade, in contrast to other emerging market economies (Sorsa 2014; Mazumdar and Chaudhary 2022; Agrawal 2014). Similarly, other socio-economic factors like age, education, religion, family background, residence etc. conditions political participation among women in India. Educated and employed women and those of a higher social standing in terms of class, and urban women are more likely to be interested as well as more active in Indian politics (Chhibber 2002). Moreover, women from dominant ethnic and religious groups, with political family backgrounds, settled residents, and urban dwellers perform better in Indian politics (Khanna 2009; Clots-Figueras 2006). However, these urban dwellers constitute a small proportion in the population of women in India. Thus, high unemployment, lack of educational qualifications, and less access to urban settlements among women in India creates a critical supply problem to their political representation in the national parliament.

My objective in this dissertation has been to examine the characteristics and backgrounds of the small number of women candidates who access party channels to secure nominations for both "general" and "reserved" seats in Indian national elections. By analyzing the profiles of candidates, I provide concrete empirical evidence of the preferences and choices of party elites which limits the political representation of women in Indian national politics.

1.2.3. Patriarchy and sexism in party politics

The discourse surrounding women's underrepresentation in Indian national politics encompasses a complex interplay of cultural and structural factors (R. Deshpande 2004; Gleason 2001; Chhibber 2002). Indian society is deeply entrenched in patriarchal norms that dictate specific roles for men and women (Patel et al. 2023). Scholars have extensively discussed how patriarchal norms and societal expectations hinder women's political participation in India (R. Ghosh, Chakravarti, and Mansi 2015; P. Sharma 2014; K. Sharma 1998). The patriarchal norms often intersect with structural challenges, such as limited access to education and political exposure among women and expect women to be restricted in house-hold duties and low-paying jobs. A significant obstacle for women cited in the literature is the prevalent expectation from them to primarily manage extensive household duties, leaving little room for political engagement in India (Nath 1996; K. Sharma 1998; Kudva and Misra 2008). This societal expectation places additional burdens on women, making it difficult for them to enter and sustain their involvement in politics. This cultural barrier not only limit women's access to political power but also perpetuate gender inequalities in decision-making processes and policy outcomes.

The patriarchal norms are often reflected within major political parties in India, where leadership roles and candidacies are traditionally viewed as male domains (P. Rai 2011). Women are frequently perceived as less capable of handling the demands of political office, leading to their exclusion from candidacy considerations (Chhibber 2002). Some studies indicate that in India, the persistent underrepresentation of women in national politics have little to do with women or their characteristics and qualifications (Childs and Hughes 2018; S. M. Rai and Spary 2019). One main

culprit is the unchallenged political dominance of elite men in national politics of India (Childs and Hughes 2018, 4; S. M. Rai and Spary 2019). The elite men in the parties ensure that women from both types of seats (general and reserved) are not well represented in the national parliament (Childs and Hughes 2018).

Cultural biases favouring men in leadership roles result in the marginalization of women within political parties in India. These biases manifest in party structures, where decision-making bodies are predominantly occupied by males, leading to a male-dominated candidate-selection process (Ruchika Singh 2015; Rashmi Singh 2023). Some studies suggest that the lack of internal democracy within political parties exacerbates the gender biases in candidate selection as decision-making is often centralized and opaque, allowing party elites who are predominantly males, to favor male candidates (Ruchika Singh 2015; Farooqui and Sridharan 2014; Spary 2020). This centralization of candidate selection processes limits opportunities for women to contest and get selected as candidates by party elites.

A study examining nomination patterns in the 2009 national election in India reveals that political parties tend to be risk-averse when fielding women candidates, often opting for experienced women in party strongholds (Spary 2014). Spary (2014) reveals that the major parties in India consider women as risky candidates during national elections and prefer candidates who are perceived to have a higher chance of winning, often leading them to choose male candidates who are seen as more competitive and resourceful to win the election. This perception of women as risky candidates in major parties of India does not incentivize the parties to diversify their candidate lists.

Moreover, a qualitative account support these findings, indicating that women in India are often nominated in seats perceived as "suitable for ladies" (Singer 2007). This means that women are nominated in seats which the party considers as relatively less competitive and where the women candidates have familiarity due to their dynastic connections in politics (Singer 2007). These findings suggest an organizational bias against women in parties, which hinders their access to national politics. This also suggests that women candidates do not have the same opportunities as men, and only those women with certain informal qualities are preferred for party nominations during national elections. My dissertation offers concrete empirical evidence to show how informal selection criteria for women candidates within parties are a critical institutional barrier for women to access electoral opportunities in both general and reserved seats during Indian national elections.

1.2.4. Lack of formal institutional support for women

The reservation of seats for women in the local government of India was mandated through the 73rd and 74th amendment of the Indian Constitution in the early 1990s (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004; Kalaramadam 2018). However, there are no mandated gender quotas at the national and sub-national state legislative assemblies in India. This is one of the major institutional challenges for women in Indian national politics. In India, seats are reserved for historically disadvantaged groups (Scheduled Castes or SC and Scheduled Tribes or ST) in national and sub-national state legislative

assemblies and for both historically disadvantaged groups and women at all levels of the local Panchayat system, the system of decentralized decision-making at the local level in the sub-national units (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004; R. Ghosh, Chakravarti, and Mansi 2015). The absence of affirmative policies mandating 33 per cent reserved seats for women in sub-national state legislatures and the national parliament in India has a detrimental effect on their descriptive representation.

In the year 1996, the "Women's Reservation Bill" was introduced as the 81st Constitutional Amendment Bill at the national parliament, which proposed that a third of all seats in India's national parliament and sub-national state legislatures will be reserved for women (Menon 2000; Randall 2006). This bill was passed in the upper house (Rajya Sabha) in 2010 but lapsed since it was not passed in the lower house (Lok Sabha) of the national parliament. The principal argument against the bill was that it would result in only upper-class women and women belonging to the "Scheduled Caste" and tribe being elected, and that it would need to include sub-quotas for non-elite groups- the so-called Other Backward Classes (OBCs) (Jensenius 2019, 681).

The bill was also criticized for proposing that "reserved" seats for women be rotated[3], as this would have undermined their ability to build a strong support base in their respective reserved seats (Menon 2000; Randall 2006; Nanivadekar 2006). Some scholars also argue that the opposition to the "Women's Reservation Bill" at the national level cannot be simply categorized as patriarchal, as it came from a particular caste location, class, and political party affiliations and the concern that it would simply replace "lower caste" men with "upper caste" women (Nanivadekar 2006; Menon 2009; 2015). Nevertheless, the failed attempt to pass the "Women Reservation Bill" in the past two decades have had a detrimental effect in the descriptive representation of women in Indian national politics.

Moreover, the electoral system in India which is based on the "First-Past-the-Post" (FPTP) system tends to disadvantage women as this system often favours larger established parties and candidates who have significant financial and social capital (A. Reynolds 1999). As a result, women who generally have fewer resources and less political clout, find it harder to compete and win elections under this system in India. In contrast, proportional representation (PR) systems are known to facilitate the election of women candidates in legislatures (Matland and Studlar 1996; Matland 1998). PR systems allocate seats based on the percentage of votes that each party receives, which encourages parties to present balanced candidate lists, often including more women candidates to appeal to the electorate (Matland 1998). There are existing studies that have shown that countries

[3] The rotation of seats was designed to ensure that the reservation would not be permanent in any single seat. According to the provisions of the Bill, the reserved seats for women would rotate after each national election, so that every seat in the Lok Sabha would be reserved once in three consecutive national elections (Menon 2000; Nanivadekar 2006). This approach aimed to provide a fair opportunity for all seats to participate in the reservation system for women, preventing any long-term political disadvantage or advantage for any specific region/seat due to the reservation policy.

with PR systems have higher proportions of women in their legislatures (Salmond 2006; Bernauer, Giger, and Rosset 2015; Matland and Studlar 1996).

Under the FPTP system, major political parties in India have less incentives to nominate women candidates and parties often prioritize "winnable" candidates, who are typically men since they are perceived to have better chances of winning an election due their established political networks and resources (Spary 2014; 2020). This eventually results in fewer women being nominated and elected in national elections, usually only in party strongholds (Spary 2014; 2020). Thus, the absence of proportional representation in India significantly impacts the underrepresentation of women in national politics. The FPTP system, combined with socio-cultural barriers and lack of formal institutional support like gender quotas at the national level creates substantial obstacles for women aspiring to join electoral politics in India.

1.2.5. Electability of candidates in Indian national elections

The electability of candidates in Indian national politics is influenced by informal factors of wealth, dynastic ties, criminality and higher-education (Sircar 2018b; Chandra 2016; Vaishnav 2011b; Sircar 2018a). Wealth plays a crucial role in the electability of candidates in Indian elections due to the high costs associated with election campaigns (Vaishnav 2011b; Sircar 2018b). Candidates with substantial financial resources are better positioned to fund extensive campaign activities, including rallies, advertisements, and voter outreach programs (Sircar 2018b; Tiwari 2014). The ability to mobilize financial resources can significantly enhance a candidate's visibility and appeal among the voters. Existing studies indicate a positive correlation between a candidate's wealth and their electoral success in national elections (Sircar 2018b; Tiwari 2014).

Along with wealth, candidates with dynastic ties i.e. politicians who are preceded by their family members in electoral politics benefit from established political networks, name recognition, and loyal voter base that trusts the family brand in India (Chandra 2016; 2014). These advantages provide dynastic candidates with significant edge over non-dynastic candidates in national elections. Voters in many regions view dynastic candidates as more experienced and capable of delivering results due to their political lineage. This perception enhances their electability, as they are often seen as better equipped to navigate the political system and secure resources for their constituents (Chandra 2014; 2016).

Furthermore, the presence of candidates with criminal backgrounds is a notable phenomenon in Indian politics. Criminality can paradoxically increase a candidate's electability, particularly in areas where law enforcement is weak and political violence is common (Vaishnav 2011b). Criminal candidates are perceived as strongmen who can protect their constituents and assert their influence in electoral politics of India (Vaishnav 2011b). Voters may support candidates with criminal records due to fear, coercion, or the belief that these candidates can effectively deliver public goods and services by circumventing bureaucratic hurdles (Vaishnav 2011b; Duraisamy 2014). This dynamic contributes to the persistence of criminal elements in politics, despite the potential for corruption and abuse of power.

In addition to wealth, dynastic ties, criminality, higher-education is increasingly becoming a valued attribute for electability among candidates in Indian elections (Sircar 2018a). Educated candidates are perceived as more competent, knowledgeable, and capable of addressing complex governance issues (Besley 2005; Sircar 2018a). This perception can enhance their appeal to voters who prioritize development and good governance. Thus, the informal factors of wealth, dynastic ties, criminality, and higher education affect the electability of candidates in Indian elections and these factors may significantly influence the selection of candidates by party elites in India. However, none of the existing work examine the gendered implications of these informal factors of wealth, dynastic ties, criminality, and higher-education upon the selection of candidates by the party elites in the two major parties during national elections in India.

My dissertation examines the extent to which party elites prioritize wealthy women in the same way they do wealthy men, or do they perceive wealthy women differently. The existing literature lacks a nuanced understanding of how criminal records impact the selection of men versus women candidates (Vaishnav 2011b; Duraisamy 2014). I examine if party elites are more likely to overlook criminal backgrounds in men than in women. Moreover, while dynastic ties are crucial in determining the electability and selection of candidates by party elites during Indian national elections, there is a gap in understanding how these dynastic ties influence the selection of women candidates differently from men candidates (Chandra 2014; 2016). I examine if women candidates from political families are seen as legitimate successors or do they face additional scrutiny and barriers from party elites in the two major parties in India. Furthermore, the existing research does not adequately address how higher-education impacts the selection of women candidates by party elites compared to the men candidates (Sircar 2018a). I examine if educational qualifications are valued equally for both the genders and do party elites have different expectations from women candidates for nominations during national elections in India.

1.2.6. Supply and demand of women candidates

The traditional supply and demand model of candidate selection has been a dominant framework for explaining the underrepresentation of women in politics (Krook 2010, 20). This model suggests that the limited number of women in elected offices is due to both supply-side factors, such as the number of women coming forward as candidates, and demand side factors, including the preferences of party selectors (Evans 2008). The interaction between supply and demand in candidate selection processes is crucial, as the constraints of the supply of women candidates are reinforced by the demands of party selectors and the gendered functioning of political parties (Verge 2015). The qualities sought by party selectors often favor men, leading to gendered lines in the supply of candidates (Kenny and Verge 2016). Moreover, the model has sparked debates on whether women's underrepresentation stems from gender differences in ambition, biases in recruitment practices, or voter prejudices favoring men over women (Krook and Norris 2014). While the demand and supply model has been extensively studied in the context of women's representation globally, there are limited number of studies based on this model of candidate selection in India.

The existing literature shows systematic differences in how potential men and women candidates are treated by the party elites in India (Spary 2014; Basu 2016). Studies show that the women MPs in India are more likely than men to be dynastic politicians – understood as someone preceded by a family member who was and is active in electoral politics (Basu 2016, 137; Thompson 2019). Politicians with dynastic backgrounds refers to relations with a family member who was or still are active in electoral politics (Chandra 2016; Bó, Bó, and Snyder 2009; Folke, Rickne, and Smith 2016). However, the existing studies do not explain why women dynasts are favored by party elites for contesting national elections in India. My research bridges this gap by investigating the reasons behind the preference for women dynasts by the two major political parties in India for nominations in national elections. Additionally, scholars argue that political parties in India often select candidates with serious criminal charges to contest national elections (Vaishnav 2011b; Duraisamy 2014). They also suggest a correlation between the selection of candidates with criminal records and their wealth (Vaishnav 2011b; Duraisamy 2014). However, there is lack of analysis and empirical evidence to show whether women with criminal charges are in fact selected by the two major parties to contest national elections in India. My research aims to uncover the demand for women candidates by examining the influence of dynastic ties, criminality, and wealth on their nominations in India's two major political parties.

My study contextualizes the demand and supply model of candidate selection within the specific dynamics of Indian national politics to investigate the underrepresentation of women. By considering the unique socio-cultural, institutional, and political factors at play in India, my research provides a nuanced understanding of how the demand for women candidates in parties operates within this context. My study aims to identify the factors affecting the demand for women candidates by the two major political parties in India. This involves examining formal party structures, internal decision-making processes, and the role of party elites and gatekeepers in candidate selection. By analyzing these dynamics, my research sheds light on how party preferences and biases influence the nomination of women candidates in Indian national politics. My study investigates the gendered functioning of political parties in India and its impact on the demand for women candidates. This also includes examining the informal qualities and criteria favored by party selectors for women, as well as any double standards in the evaluation of women candidates compared to men. By exploring these gender dynamics, my research uncovers barriers and challenges faced by women aspiring for political leadership positions in India.

1.2.7. Increase in nominations of women candidates in reserved seats

An existing study suggests a proportional increase in the nominations of women candidates in reserved seats compared to general seats by major parties since 1990s in India across all types of elections (Jensenius 2016). The increase in the nominations of SC and ST women after the 1990s in the parties means that there has been little increase in the nominations of other women in India over time, and that the inclusion of more women mainly has taken place at the expense of SC and ST men. This aspect is addressed in my research, which examines the replacement of men with women candidates in nominations to reserved seats across national elections in both the major

Indian parties. The existing study suggests that the pattern of nominating more women in reserved seats stem from parties resisting pressures to include more women by nominating them at the expense of the least powerful reserved men (Jensenius 2016). It is not clear in the existing study whether the reserved seats have created a political space more accessible to women in both the major parties in India across national elections in the past two decades (Jensenius 2016). The existing research also lacks a clear investigation into the preferred informal selection criteria for women candidates nominated to the general and reserved seats by the parties (Spary 2014; 2020; Jensenius 2016). To address this gap, my research examines the preferred informal selection criteria within parties for women candidates in both types of seats, to elucidate how the informal party practices contribute to the persistent underrepresentation of women in Indian national politics.

1.2.8. Summing up

Despite increasing attention to gender representation in Indian national politics, significant research gaps remain in understanding the formal candidate selection methods and informal party practices for selecting women candidates in the two major parties namely the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) during national elections. Existing studies often overlook the intricacies of the candidate selection processes, including the power dynamics, and decision-making mechanisms involved within the parties that affect women's candidacies (Spary 2014; Ruchika Singh 2015; Rashmi Singh 2023). Moreover, there is a lack of detailed analysis on how internal party structures, and informal selection criteria such as wealth, dynastic ties, criminality, and higher-education influence the selection of women candidates in the two major parties during national elections. The interplay between formal selection methods and informal party practices within each party remains understudied, particularly how these formal and informal factors either facilitate or hinder the political participation of women as electoral candidates in national politics.

1.3. Aims and arguments

My research positions political parties as crucial gatekeepers of electoral democracies, emphasizing their central role in determining the descriptive representation of women in Indian national politics. By focusing on internal party dynamics, I aim to highlight how parties serve as important institutions that either facilitate or hinder women's access to political power in India. I argue that parties are gendered organizations characterized by traditional gender norms and power dynamics that often disadvantage women. I examine the role of formal candidate selection methods and informal party practices in determining the nominations of women candidates in Indian national elections.

I argue that the interaction between the formal candidate selection methods and informal party practices influences how men and women candidates are treated differently by the party elites, thereby shaping women's access to political candidacy and representation. I examine the gender dynamics within party structures and shed light on how institutional barriers within parties

contribute to the underrepresentation of women in Indian national politics. My study aims to provide insights into the broader patterns of candidate selection in the two major parties of India and its implications for women's representation in national politics. By identifying barriers and disparities in candidate selection within the two major parties in India, I will contribute to the ongoing discourse on how to address gender inequality and promote greater gender diversity in political decision-making processes.

I aim to reinforce the established argument in the existing literature that political parties are crucial gatekeepers in electoral democracies, particularly in shaping the descriptive representation of women in politics (Caul 1999; Aragón 2013; Kunovich and Paxton 2005; Tremblay 2012). By focusing on the Indian National Congress (INC) and Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), the two major parties in India my research will emphasize the significance of internal party structures and practices in determining women's access to political power in a non-Western context. I will build on the existing understanding that internal party dynamics, including both formal and informal practices play a vital role in candidate selection processes and affect women's descriptive representation in politics (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2019; Bjarnegård 2013; Bjarnegård and Kenny 2015). My study highlights the importance of these dynamics in Indian national politics, providing specific examples from the INC and the BJP to illustrate these processes in action.

While the literature often treats formal and informal practices separately, my research aims to contest this separation by examining how these two elements interact to influence candidate selection and affects women's representation in politics (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2019; Cheng and Tavits 2011). I argue that the interplay between formal candidate selection methods and informal party practices creates a complex environment that differentially impacts men and women candidates, offering a more integrated perspective. Some existing studies have downplayed the significance of informal party practices in contributing to the underrepresentation of women in politics in non-Western contexts (Christoff et al. 2017; Md. M. R. Khan and Ara 2023; Hillman 2018; Perdana and Hillman 2020). Moreover, apart from Singh's (2023) existing work on candidate selection within the BJP during local elections in India which examines the nature of informal politics and institutions that complicate and overshadow the candidate selection process (Rashmi Singh 2023), no other work focuses on the informal aspect of candidate selection within parties in India which can deter women from participating in electoral politics. By emphasizing the role of informal party practices within the two major Indian political parties during national elections, my research highlights how these practices are crucial barriers to women's political participation as electoral candidates.

1.4. Case selection: Why India and why the INC and BJP?

The study of India provides ample opportunities to challenge, refine, reframe, and strengthen some of the prevailing assumptions in the study of candidate selection, political parties, and representational politics (Auerbach et al. 2021). Both the INC and the BJP have been the dominant political parties in Indian national politics for decades (Chhibber and Verma 2018). They have consistently secured a significant share of seats in the national parliament over the past few

decades, making them influential actors in shaping India's national political landscape. Both the parties have led major coalition alliances (UPA and NDA, respectively) since 1998 in national politics (Ziegfeld 2020). Almost all state-based parties associated with the UPA and NDA – apart from the INC and BJP are small regional parties whose support bases and nominations are limited and restricted to one or two sub-national states during national elections in India (Ziegfeld 2018).

My comparative analysis focuses on two major national parties, the INC (the leading party of the UPA), and the BJP (the leading party of the NDA). There is advantage in comparing these two major national parties because they nominate candidates who contest national elections in a larger range of both general and reserved seats across all sub-national states and union territories in India. Moreover, the other significant advantage of comparing the candidate selection processes of these two major national parties is that by far these two parties have had the largest share of seats in the national parliament in the past two decades (Vaishnav 2019). Given their significant presence in the Indian national parliament, the nominations of women candidates made by both the INC and the BJP to the general and reserved seats have a substantial effect on the underrepresentation of women in the national parliament over the past two decades.

Furthermore, by comparing individual candidates nominated by the two major parties in the national elections within a common federal system like India, a degree of control is exerted over the structure of political institutions (Tillin 2013). Moreover, in the Indian context, the nature of politics, governance, and the quality of democracy varies dramatically across space. There is good reason, therefore, to "scale down" in order to better investigate variation in selection processes within the parties based on the gender of the candidates, and improve the examination of complex processes such as candidate selection in them (Snyder 2001).

Additionally, the INC is known for its secular and inclusive ideology, and it can promote diversity, including gender diversity in its candidate selection processes (Guha 2010). On the contrary, while the BJP has promoted prominent women leaders like Sushma Swaraj and Smriti Irani, its overall approach to gender inclusivity can be seen as conservative (Banerjee 2005). The BJP's ideology is rooted in Hindu nationalism and tends to promote traditional values which favours men in electoral politics (Chhibber and Verma 2019a). Given the ideological differences between the two major parties in India, one might expect differences in their candidate selection processes. It will be a surprising finding if these two parties are fundamentally similar in their candidate selection methods and outcomes for women candidates during national elections in the past two decades. However, there are several factors that can lead to similarities in patterns for the selection of women candidates within both the parties during national elections. Electoral pragmatism can lead both parties to prioritize electability of women candidates over strict adherence to ideological ideals in candidate selection processes. Furthermore, the use of informal criteria by both the parties for selection of candidates can lead to similar outcomes in their nomination patterns of women in both general and reserved seats during national elections. This convergence in candidate selection strategies can indicate a potential shift towards a more pragmatic approach in Indian politics, where the focus is on winning seats rather than adhering strictly to party ideologies.

1.4.1. Electoral system and levels of political governance in India

The electoral system can influence how parties select and nominate candidates. In first-past-the-post (FPTP) systems like the one followed by India, parties often prioritize nominating candidates who are perceived as most likely to win in individual seats. This can disadvantage women candidates if parties are more inclined to nominate men due to perceived electability or societal biases (Bernauer, Giger, and Rosset 2015). India is a parliamentary electoral democracy with a bicameral legislature at the national level, with the lower house (also known as the Lok Sabha) having members directly elected by the population, and the upper house (also known as the Rajya Sabha) having members indirectly elected by an electoral college (Ziegfeld 2018; Ambagudia 2020).

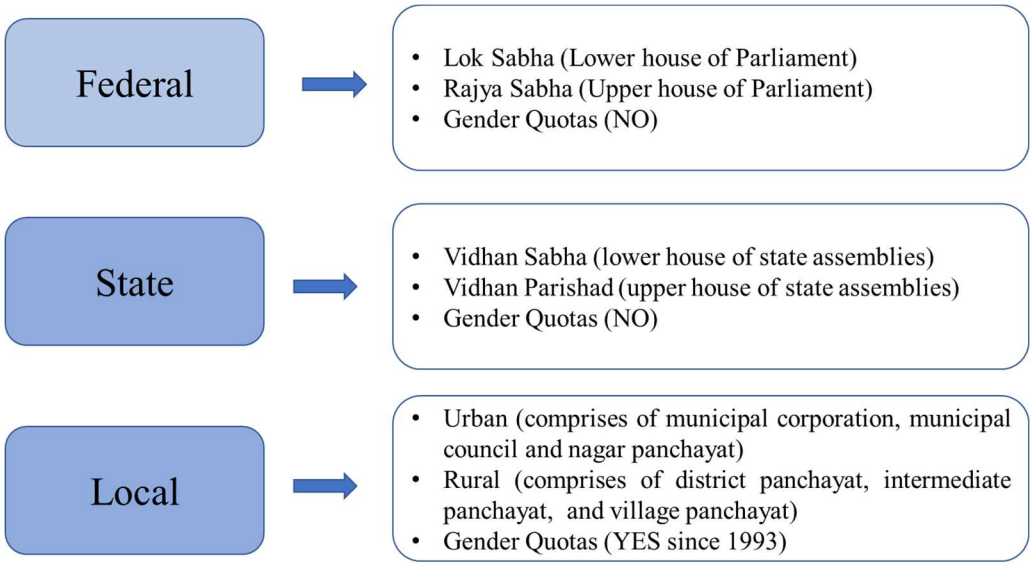
Post independence, it adopted a federal system of governance with legislative powers divided between the national and sub-national state legislatures, with a strong centralizing bias, and an independent judiciary with the power of judicial review (Jaffrelot 2010; Naik and Kumar 2016). An independent non-partisan body, the Election Commission of India (ECI), oversees and conducts the national elections to elect the members to the lower house (Lok Sabha) of the national parliament in every five years.

Indian voters directly elect the 543 members of the lower house (Lok Sabha) of the national parliament, from single-seat constituencies using the first-past-the-post (FPTP) rules (Ziegfeld 2018; Verniers and Jaffrelot 2020). On average, an Indian parliamentarian today represents a constituency/seat with more than 1.5 million or 15 lakh eligible voters, or close to 2.5 million or 25 lakh citizens (Chhibber, Jensenius, and Shah 2019). This is more than the population of over 50 countries across the world and almost four times the number of citizens an MP represented in the first Indian national election held in 1952 (Chhibber, Jensenius, and Shah 2019). Thus, the size of these electoral districts can significantly increase the importance of wealth for candidates, given the high cost of campaigning to effectively reach and engage with such a large electorate. In FPTP systems, each seat elects only one representative, which can lead to intense competition. In such contexts, informal party practices play a significant role in candidate selection and understanding these dynamics helps to identify challenges specific to women candidates vying for party nominations.

The focus of my dissertation is on the national elections and why are women underrepresented in the directly elected lower house (Lok Sabha) of the national parliament in India. It is important to focus on national level elections since it directly impacts policy-making, symbolizes gender dynamics in politics, and reflects broader electoral trends and practices. As of 2023, India is a federal union of twenty-eight sub-national states and eight union territories (UT). But as of 2017, India was a federal union of twenty-nine sub-national states and seven union territories (UT) (Ziegfeld 2018; S. M. Rai and Spary 2019). The UTs have far less autonomy than the sub-national states, as they depend on the national government for a greater share of their financial resources, and tend to be relatively small, in terms of both population and geographical area. Each sub-

national state, as well as two UTs (Delhi and Puducherry), have their own sub-national state legislature. The members of the sub-national state legislatures are also directly elected using the FPTP rules in India (Ziegfeld 2015; 2018). In addition to this, there are currently no gender quotas in the national parliament and the sub-national state legislatures in India. The sub-national states in India were reorganized on linguistic lines after 1956 (except for Jammu and Kashmir and six northeastern border states). Figure 1-1 summarizes the various levels of formal law-making institutions and mentions which levels have gender quotas in India since the year 1993.

Figure 2-1: Levels of Political Governance in India



Source: Developed based on (M. P. Singh 2001; Naik and Kumar 2016; Sridharan 2018)

1.4.2. Types of seats in the Lok Sabha

In India, candidates contesting national elections and securing direct election to the lower house (Lok Sabha) of the national parliament are elected from two types of seats: general and reserved, constituting a total of 543 directly elected seats in the Lok Sabha. The difference in formal eligibility criteria for contesting national elections between general and reserved seats, have a profound impact on the pool of potential women candidates in Indian national politics (Ambagudia 2020; Jensenius 2016).

Eligibility criteria for candidates in general seats

The candidate pool eligible to contest national elections from the general seats is typically larger compared to the pool for the reserved seats. The general seats in the national parliament are characterized by their competitiveness, as they are open to be contested by any citizen above the age of 25 years, irrespective of their gender, language, creed, educational background, occupation, income, religion, social background, etc. This inclusivity ensures a diverse pool of potential

candidates for these seats. Moreover, approximately seventy-six per cent of members in the directly elected Lok Sabha of the national parliament represent from these general seats (412 seats), indicating their significant role in shaping the composition of the legislature (Ambagudia 2019; 2020). Additionally, all the residents above the age of 18 years in the general seats irrespective of their gender, language, socio-economic status, or cultural identities vote for their preferred candidates by following the "first-past-the-post" (FPTP) system in the seats (Ambagudia 2020). This voting system emphasizes the importance of appealing to a wide range of constituents to secure electoral success in the general seats.

Eligibility criteria for candidates in reserved seats

The politics around reservation matters in India because it restricts competition in the reserved seats by reducing the pool of potential candidates. In the post-independence era, national and sub-national state legislatures guaranteed representation for the two historically marginalized groups, the Scheduled Castes (SCs or Dalits) and Scheduled Tribes (STs or Adivasis) in India (Jensenius 2015; Ambagudia 2019; 2020). The country adopted some institutional mechanisms in the form of quota system for the SCs and STs which ensures them "reserved" seats in politics at every level of governance in proportion to their numerical strength to the total population as per the latest preceding census (Ambagudia 2019, 50). These quotas are effectively implemented ensuring a proportional political presence of the "reserved" groups for more than 70 years since India's independence from the British (Jensenius 2015; Ambagudia 2019). Currently, there are 84 reserved seats for the SCs and 47 reserved seats for the STs, constituting approximately twenty-four percent of the seats in the Lok Sabha of the national parliament (Jensenius 2012).

Reserved seats are exclusively contested by members of the respective reserved communities above the age of 25 years and all residents above the age of 18 years in these seats, irrespective of their gender, language, socio-economic status, or cultural identities, have the right to vote for their preferred candidates (Ambagudia 2020). Only members of the reserved communities are eligible to contest national elections from the reserved seats, but these seats at the national level are highly concentrated with non-reserved populations. Thus, the "reserved" candidates are heavily dependent on voters from the non-reserved category who also vote by following the 'first-past-the-post' (FPTP) system in the seats (Jensenius 2012; 2013a; Ambagudia 2019; 2020). This voting system emphasizes the importance of appealing to a wide range of constituents to secure electoral success in the reserved seats. There are no separate electorates in the reserved seats and for practical reasons the "reserved" candidates are integrated into mainstream party politics and require qualities that the party leaders prefer in the general seats rather than only group-specific attributes (Jensenius 2013a; 2012; Vaishnav 2011a). However, the existing literature also indicates that political competition is less intense in the reserved seats compared to general seats in India as only members of the "reserved" communities are eligible to contest from these seats (Jensenius 2012; Vaishnav 2011a). This suggests that the lower intensity of political competition in reserved seats contribute to differences in the nomination patterns of women candidates between reserved

and general seats, providing a nuanced understanding of their underrepresentation in the Lok Sabha.

1.5. Research methods and data

To explain why candidate selection in parties limits the entry of women in national politics of India, my research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining in-depth descriptive empirical data analysis, with qualitative insights from semi-structured elite interviews with politicians, poll strategists, and scholars based in India (Lieberman 2005). I have built a unique database of electoral affidavits of all candidates who contested the past four national elections held between 2004-2019 from the two major national parties of India i.e., INC and BJP in both general and reserved seats.

My database examines the processes and criteria of candidate selection based on evidence from the data of 3282 electoral candidates. The data on candidates, originally in many local languages, has been translated into English and organized by the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR), a civil society organization based in New Delhi, India. The coding procedure for capturing the informal socio-demographic attributes of all candidates nominated by the two major parties to both general and reserved seats across the past four national elections (2004-2019) in India is outlined in Appendix 1. The coding procedure involves categorizing candidates based on factors such as gender, dynastic connections, criminal records, educational qualifications, and wealth. These factors are chosen because they are predominantly featured in the existing literature on Indian national politics reviewed earlier (Sircar 2018b; Chandra 2016; Vaishnav 2011a; Sircar 2018a).

Chapter 3 uses secondary resources and inputs from semi-structured elite interviews to conduct an inter-party analysis on formal candidate selection methods and the selectorate within the parties. To focus on the investigation of informal selection criteria in political parties and its impact on women's representation in national politics, the emphasis is solely on candidate nomination patterns within parties in both general and reserved seats across national elections, spanning the period from 2004 to 2019. In chapters 4 and 5, the investigation into the informal selection criteria within parties utilizes simple descriptive tools in excel to conduct intra-party analysis of candidates based on their gender normative categories, specifically examining the nomination of women and men to general and reserved seats separately (Salkind and Bruce 2021). The objective is to assess the extent to which informal selection criteria are preferred for women candidates by each of the parties for their nominations.

To compare the wealth of the candidates based on gender, simple descriptive tools are used, and a difference in means t-test is employed to determine the statistical significance of the findings in each national election. Few difference in proportions tests are used to determine the statistically significant difference between the two gender categories regarding the informal selection criteria of dynastic ties and criminality. Additionally, to compare the wealth of dynastic candidates with non-dynastic candidates, simple descriptive tools are used alongside difference in means t-tests to ascertain the statistical significance of the findings in each national election. Moreover, to further investigate the wealth disparities, my research contrasts the wealth of dynastic women candidates

with non-dynasts, again using simple descriptive tools and difference in means t-tests to determine statistical significance. To compare the wealth of criminal women and criminal men with non-criminals, the same methods are used to assess statistical significance. Lastly, to examine the educational qualifications of candidates based on their gender, simple descriptive tools are employed, and difference in proportions tests are used to assess whether the observed distribution of educational qualifications (e.g. university degrees) differs significantly between men and women candidates across national elections. The simple descriptive tools and statistical tests in excel follow the methodological guidance provided by Salkind and Bruce (2021).

To substantiate my findings in chapters 4 and 5, I use examples on candidate selection decisions and valuable information drawn from semi-structured elite interviews with politicians, poll strategists, and scholars based in India. Using qualitative evidence from semi-structured elite interviews adds depth and credibility to the empirical findings by providing insider perspectives and expert opinions (Natow 2020). The interviews provided a deeper, nuanced, and more contextualized understanding of informal candidate selection in parties and its effects on women's underrepresentation in Indian national politics. It was difficult to gain access to the elite networks based in India and conduct meaningful semi-structured elite interviews without a fieldtrip. I overcame this difficulty by using the social media platform named LinkedIn to recruit the elite interviewees via emails and official virtual communication tools like Zoom and MS teams to conduct the semi-structured elite interviews. The questionnaire used for conducting the virtual semi-structured elite interviews was approved by the ethics committee at the McMaster University and is outlined in Appendix 2.

I analyze the data separately for each election year to offer an in-depth explanation on the formal and informal dimensions of candidate selection in parties that deter women candidates from accessing national politics in India. I try to identify plausible relationships between gender, wealth, educational qualifications, dynastic ties, and criminality of the candidates in the parties, based on a contextual reading of the data. Some of the relationships discussed are complex and varies within the two parties, or at least are unnoticed within and between the two parties.

1.6. Research implications

My research findings aim to advance theoretical debates and offer new empirical evidence to the study of political underrepresentation of women in India's national politics. My work shows that political parties are crucial gatekeepers, particularly shaping the descriptive representation of women in politics (Caul 1999; Aragón 2013). The findings show that underlying gender biases are institutionalized in the formal opaque candidate selection methods and informal party practices in the two major parties. This systematic and entrenched practices, norms, and decision-making structures within the parties disproportionately disadvantage women, limiting their participation and representation in national politics. The underlying biases are manifested through both formal processes and informal preferences for candidate traits such as wealth, dynastic ties, criminality, and higher-education.

The formal selectorate responsible for candidate selection in the parties are predominantly led by men and are centralized which leads to decision-making processes that overlook or undervalue women candidates. When women are excluded from formal decision-making bodies within the party, they are less likely to have their perspectives and interests considered in the candidate selection process. Moreover, my study also argues that the preferred informal selection criteria for women devised by the two major parties, significantly limit women's political participation as electoral candidates in national elections. The underlying gender bias in informal party practices exhibited by the male party elites suggests that only women who meet specific informal selection criteria like access to financial resources, dynastic ties, or higher education are preferred in limited numbers in both general and reserved seats during national elections. By substantiating these arguments with empirical evidence, my study strengthens the existing literature and provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges women encounter in electoral politics of India (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2019; Cheng and Tavits 2011; Bjarnegård and Kenny 2015).

By illuminating how traditional gender norms of restricting women from public life intersect with power dynamics within parties, my study offers insights into how candidate selection processes perpetuates women's underrepresentation in Indian national politics. The aim of my research is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex mechanisms shaping women's political participation and highlight the crucial role of party dynamics in addressing gender disparities in political representation in Indian national politics. My study, thus, aligns with the existing literature which highlights that internal party dynamics, including both formal and informal practices play a vital role in candidate selection processes and affect women's descriptive representation in politics (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2019; Bjarnegård 2013; Bjarnegård and Kenny 2015).

My study also has policy implications for Indian democracy, particularly concerning the representational framework of the national parliament. It is important to challenge and rectify party bias against women and implement internal quotas to promote gender balance in candidate selection. My study suggests measures to reduce the financial barriers to electoral competition, making political participation more accessible for women in India. These recommendations hope to address the systemic exclusion of women from political leadership roles and enhance the democratic representation of diverse voices within Indian society.

1.7. Organization of the dissertation

My dissertation is divided into six chapters. This introductory chapter presents the research questions and the existing literature on the underrepresentation of women in Indian national politics. It also presents my key aims and arguments, discusses case selection, research methods, implications, and the organization of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 contextualizes the argument and framework proposed in my dissertation within the existing research on candidate selection in parties and gender. It begins by discussing the significance of candidate selection within parties in the global context and then reviews the formal selection methods and informal party practices both globally and how these concepts are relevant

in my dissertation. Finally, the chapter proposes an analytical framework for understanding the persistent underrepresentation of women in Indian national politics. This chapter establishes the theoretical and conceptual groundwork for the subsequent analyses presented in my dissertation, offering a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between party politics, candidate selection, and women's representation in India.

Chapter 3 elucidates how the formal aspects of candidate selection within the two prominent political parties of India, namely the INC and the BJP, constrain women's opportunities in national politics. It examines the role of the formal selectorate as a key determinant for evaluating the structures and procedures involved in candidate selection within both the parties. It examines various facets such as the locus of selection within the party apparatus, the gender composition of the formal selectorate, and its ramifications on the inadequate representation of women in the realm of national politics. This chapter provides a foundational exploration into the formal dimensions of candidate selection within the INC and the BJP, providing insights into how formal structures shape the landscape of women's representation in Indian national politics.

Chapter 4 undertakes a systematic comparison of the informal selection criteria exhibited by the candidates across normative gender categories, specifically focusing on those nominated to the general seats in national elections by the two major parties, namely the INC and the BJP, spanning the period from 2004 to 2019. It investigates the dearth of "general" women candidates and examines the underlying reasons behind it. Through an intra-party analysis of the informal selection criteria of all candidates nominated to these seats, this chapter uncovers the preferred informal selection criteria for women in parties that contribute to limiting their opportunities as electoral candidates in the general seats.

Chapter 5 undertakes a systematic comparison of the informal selection criteria exhibited by candidates across normative gender categories, focusing specifically on those nominated to the reserved seats in national elections by the two major parties, the INC, and the BJP, spanning the period from 2004 to 2019. It investigates the scarcity of "reserved" women candidates and examines the underlying factors contributing to it. Through an intra-party analysis of the informal selection criteria of all candidates nominated to these seats, this chapter discerns the specific informal criteria favoured by the two parties when selecting "reserved" women candidates that constrain their opportunities as electoral candidates. The in-depth analyses in chapters 4 and 5 contribute to a deeper understanding of the informal party practices that constrain the representation of women in Indian national politics and lay the groundwork for informed discussions and policy interventions aimed at addressing gender disparities in political representation.

Chapter 6 is the concluding segment of my dissertation and encapsulates the key findings and their broader implications. It begins by providing a succinct summary of the key findings gleaned from the analyses conducted in the preceding chapters. Through this summary, the chapter reiterates the critical insights garnered regarding the formal and informal dimensions of candidate selection

within the INC and the BJP, shedding light on the institutional barriers and gender biases that hinder women's participation in Indian national politics. Moreover, it also reflects on the generalizability of my findings, considering their relevance beyond the specific context of the INC and the BJP. It examines how the insights gleaned from the study of candidate selection processes in these parties may offer broader lessons for understanding gender dynamics in political parties and electoral systems worldwide. By assessing the transferability of my findings, the chapter contributes to the scholarly discourse on women's political representation across diverse political contexts.

Additionally, chapter 6 presents some recommendations aimed at enhancing the descriptive representation of women in Indian national politics. These recommendations draw upon my dissertation's findings and aims to inform concrete measures that political parties, policy-makers, and civil society actors can undertake to address gender disparities in candidate selection and promote gender inclusivity in electoral processes. Through these recommendations, the chapter seeks to catalyze meaningful action towards advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in the realm of Indian politics.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework on women's candidacy in India

2.1. Introduction

Political parties play a central role in determining the representation of women in elected legislatures, as they control the nomination process and candidate selection mechanisms. Examining how parties make these candidate selection decisions is essential for addressing the underrepresentation of women in politics. This chapter offers a theoretical framework that includes the role of formal organizational structures and the informal party preferences and practices to explain the dynamics of candidate selection processes in Indian parties. The aim is to uncover the complex interplay of factors that influence the parties' decisions regarding women candidates.

My thesis approaches gender and sexism through multifaceted lens, recognizing that gender bias manifests in various forms within the two major Indian political parties. These biases can stem from ostensibly equal formal candidate selection processes that inadvertently perpetuate inequality due to pre-existing disparities between men and women, such as differences in access to financial resources or political experience. For instance, while the formal candidate selection process might appear gender-neutral, it can favour men as leadership positions within the decision-making structures of the parties are dominated by men. The formal centralized decision-making structures within the parties can limit access to diverse voices in the parties. This institutional inequity emphasizes the importance of scrutinizing seemingly gender-neutral candidate selection methods to uncover the underlying biases that disadvantage women.

Furthermore, gender bias also arises from the inegalitarian attitudes and informal preferences for women candidates held by gatekeepers within the political parties. These attitudes are often manifested in informal party practices that are overtly discriminatory, such as the preference for women who have dynastic connections in politics or reluctance to endorse women for leadership positions within the party. It is crucial to distinguish between these two types of biases – those that are formally embedded within the gender-neutral candidate selection methods and those that are overtly shaped by the informal practices and preferences of the party elites. By identifying and treating these instances of gender bias differently, we can better understand the complex dynamics at play which results in gender inequality in Indian national politics.

By exploring the mechanisms through which parties select their candidates, including the extent to which they prioritize women candidates, my analysis aims to highlight the barriers and opportunities for women in Indian electoral politics. This chapter is structured into three sections: the first section begins with the literature review on candidate selection and its implications for women's political representation globally. The second section reviews the formal and informal candidate selection methods in parties. The final section synthesizes the insights from the preceding discussions and presents a theoretical framework tailored to examine the Indian political landscape. The theoretical framework also serves as a roadmap for my study, guiding the analyses and interpretation of my findings.

2.2. Candidate selection and impact on women's political representation

Candidate selection in parties is defined as the "secret garden" of politics-an unknown process, often hidden from public that is guided by internal party rules, informal practices and power relationships (Gallagher and Marsh 1988). The existing body of work on gender and political parties highlights candidate selection as one of the key processes that explains the underrepresentation of women in national politics of many countries (Krook 2010; Kenny 2013; Bjarnegård and Coffé 2015). The feminist-institutionalist theories also explore how candidate selection processes in parties produce gendered outcomes and adversely affect the descriptive representation of women in the national legislatures of many countries (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Krook 2010; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2012).

This existing work explains that the institutional mechanisms of candidate-selection in parties generally are successful in keeping most potential women candidates outside formal party politics in a majority of the electoral democracies in the world (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Krook 2010; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2012). The feminist-institutionalist theoretical framework combines feminist and institutionalist perspectives to analyze how gender dynamics and institutional structures intersect to influence the candidate selection process within political parties. This approach emphasizes the role of formal and informal institutions in shaping gendered patterns of political representation and aims to uncover the ways in which these institutions sustain or challenge gender inequalities (Krook 2010).

Feminist theory focuses on understanding and addressing gender inequalities and it examines how power relations and societal norms shape the experiences and opportunities of men and women differently (Childs and Krook 2006). In the context of politics, feminist theory highlights the institutional barriers that hinder women's political participation and representation in legislatures (Mackay 2008). Institutional theory examines how institutions- defined as the rules, norms, and practices that structure political behavior affect political outcomes (Hall and Taylor 1996). Institutions can be both formal (constitutions, laws) and informal (norms, traditions, networks) (March and Olsen 1986). Institutionalists analyze how these structures influence the behavior of political actors and the distribution of power within political systems. Feminist-institutionalism combines these two approaches to investigate how gendered power dynamics and institutional arrangements interact (Krook 2010). This framework seeks to understand how institutional rules and norms perpetuate gender biases in political recruitment and candidate selection processes, and how these can be reformed to promote gender equality (Kenny 2013).

Building on feminist-institutionalist theories, my thesis posits that candidate selection processes within Indian political parties produce gendered outcomes, significantly contributing to the underrepresentation of women in the national parliament. This perspective will emphasize the intersection of gender, power, and institutional structures in shaping political representation in India. Feminist-institutionalism provides a framework to understand how institutional norms and practices, often perceived as gender-neutral, systematically disadvantage women. For instance,

candidate selection processes that favor candidates with greater financial resources and political experience inherently benefit men, who are more likely to possess these assets due to historical and societal inequalities. My research addresses a crucial gap in the existing literature by applying the feminist-institutionalist framework to the study of Indian political parties' candidate selection processes (Spary 2014; Ruchika Singh 2015). While previous studies have acknowledged the underrepresentation of women in Indian national politics, they often lack a comprehensive analysis of how institutional practices in candidate selection processes perpetuate the disparity between men and women candidates (Spary 2014; 2020). On the other hand, Singh's (2023) study on candidate selection within the BJP during local elections in India reveals that unofficial lobbying for party tickets is an important yet often overlooked informal practice (Rashmi Singh 2023). Additionally, it significantly impacts the selection process and hinders inclusion in party nomination procedures at the local level (Rashmi Singh 2023). However, this existing study by Singh (2023) has not clearly examined how the informal party practices and selection criteria within the two major parties of India constrains the opportunities for women as electoral candidates during national elections. By examining both the formal and informal mechanisms that influence candidate selection within the parties, my research uncovers the specific ways in which these processes are gendered and disadvantages women. This approach not only highlights the institutional barriers that women face but also provide insights into potential reforms that can promote greater gender equity in political representation. In doing so, my research contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play and offers a path forward for addressing gender inequality in Indian national politics.

Political parties are the principal gatekeepers of political representation in electoral democracies. They play a pivotal role in determining who gets nominated as candidates and ultimately elected to office. I analyze the candidate selection methods in political parties as it helps in explaining the underrepresentation of women in Indian national politics. By examining candidate selection processes of the two major political parties in India, my research identifies if biases or discriminatory practices exists against women within the parties. This includes both formal and informal barriers, such as sexism or entrenched power dynamics within the parties, which can disadvantage potential women candidates in national politics. By investigating the institutional mechanisms involved in candidate selection (e.g. organisational structures, formal selectorate, informal selection criteria) within the parties my research provides insights into how these mechanisms systematically can exclude women from opportunities to contest for elections. Candidate selection methods often reflect broader power dynamics within the parties and by examining these processes my research sheds light on how power is distributed and exercised within parties, especially the role of male party leaders in shaping candidate selection outcomes.

2.3. Formal and informal candidate selection methods

This section reviews the formal and informal aspects of candidate selection in parties and why both these aspects matter in determining the descriptive representation of women in national legislatures.

2.3.1. Formal candidate selection methods

Candidate selection methods are the mechanisms by which political parties choose their candidates for elections and selecting candidates is one of most important things that parties must do prior to elections (Rahat and Hazan 2001; Rahat 2007). Rahat and Hazan (2001) develop certain analytical tools to examine candidate selection methods in parties. These analytical tools enable researchers to draw a map of a party's internal power structure and help in examining how this internal power structure affects the nature of their selection method (Rahat and Hazan 2001). The analytical framework for examining candidate selection methods within parties is built around four major questions (Rahat and Hazan 2001). The first question is who can be selected? Are there any restrictions on presenting candidacy in each party? The second question is who selects candidates? Are there any restrictions on participating in each party's candidate selection process? The third question is where are the candidates selected? Are candidates selected by a national or sub-national selectorate? The fourth question is how are candidates nominated? Is candidacy determined by a voting procedure or are candidates simply appointed? (Rahat and Hazan 2001). My research draws on Rahat and Hazan's (2001) analytical framework to investigate the mechanisms of formal candidate selection methods in the two major parties of India and their effects on women's representation in national politics.

Hazan and Rahat (2006) highlight that the process of classifying formal candidate selection methods can be based on several criteria, such as the selectorate, candidacy, decentralization, and voting versus appointment. However, it is possible to focus on a single criterion, or dimension, because there is a clear hierarchy of criteria when one assesses the representational consequences of candidate selection in parties. While each criterion used in the classification of candidate selection methods has a distinct influence on representational politics, it is the selectorate[4] that exhibits the most significant and far reaching consequences in determining women's representation in politics (Hazan and Rahat 2006). It is the inclusiveness or the exclusiveness of the selectorate that does so in particular (Hazan and Rahat 2006). A more inclusive selectorate has a positive impact on women's representation in politics by broadening the range of voices and perspectives involved in the candidate selection process. When a party's selectorate includes a diverse array of members from different social, economic, and gender backgrounds, it is more likely to prioritize and support the nomination of women candidates. This inclusiveness helps to counteract the entrenched biases and stereotypes that often disadvantage women. It ensures that the selection process is more reflective of the broader electorate, increasing the likelihood that women, who constitute half of the population, are adequately represented among candidates (Hazan and Rahat 2006).

[4] The selectorate is the body that selects candidates before elections within the parties (Rahat and Hazan 2001; Hazan and Rahat 2006). It is the most important intermediary actor in the process of recruitment and can be composed of one person, several or many-indeed, as many as the entire electorate of a given nation (Rahat and Hazan 2001; Hazan and Rahat 2006).

On the contrary, an exclusive selectorate tends to have a negative impact on women's representation in politics by limiting their roles and perspectives in the candidate selection process. When the power to select candidates is concentrated in the hands of a small, homogeneous group- typically dominated by elite male party members- the interests and biases of this group disproportionately influence the outcomes. This often results in the perpetuation of traditional gender norms which identifies men as natural leaders and decision-makers in politics, and they are expected to be assertive, authoritative, and capable of handling power and responsibility. Political leadership is often viewed as a male domain, with men more likely to be perceived as competent, financially equipped, experienced, and legitimate leaders. The traditional gender norms views women as less suitable for leadership roles due to their perceived lack of financial resources, experience, assertiveness, and authority. They are typically expected to be more supportive and collaborative rather than dominant in politics. Thus, an exclusive selectorate limits the opportunities for women to be nominated as electoral candidates, further reinforcing gender imbalances in political representation and failing to reflect the diversity of the electorate (Hazan and Rahat 2006).

Drawing from existing candidate selection scholarship, I examine the formal selectorate as the key gatekeeper for evaluating candidate selection procedures during national elections within the two major political parties in India, the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). The aim is to assess the extent to which the formal selectorate affect the demand of women candidates in national elections.

2.3.2. Informal party practices

The existing literature on gender and party politics points out that informal institutions have an impact on a party's gendered candidate selection procedures (Cheng and Tavits 2011; Kenny 2013; Verge 2015; Kenny and Verge 2016; Azari and Smith 2012). Research on gender in politics provides ample evidence that many informal rules[5] for candidate selection are also gendered- in other words, they prescribe and proscribe "acceptable" masculine and feminine forms of behavior, rules, and values for men and women within institutions (Kenny 2013; Azari and Smith 2012; Helmke and Levitsky 2004). Although candidate selection is generally governed by a set of formal institutions in many countries, namely the electoral system, the legal system, and internal party rules, the process in practice involves more informal understandings of the "ways things are done" (Bjarnegård and Kenny 2015; Cheng and Tavits 2011; Azari and Smith 2012; Helmke and Levitsky 2004).

Political parties sometimes establish informal selection criteria to define the required qualities in a candidate to be eligible for election from the party (Cheng and Tavits 2011; Azari and Smith

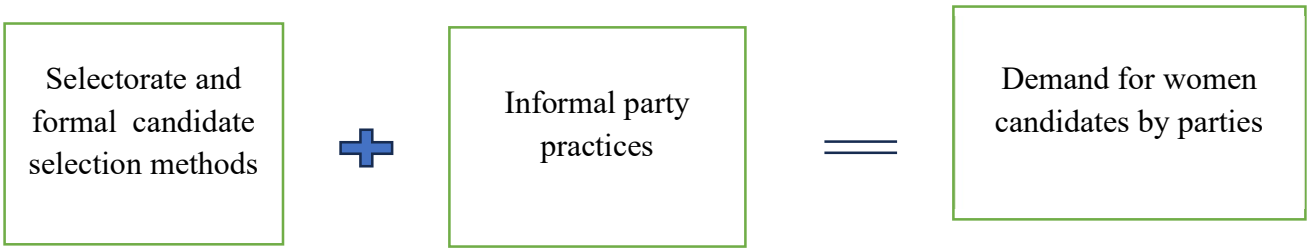
[5] Some scholars define informal rules as 'socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of official rules, therefore, generally not open to public scrutiny or demands for reform' (Bjarnegård and Kenny 2015; Kenny and Verge 2016).

2012). Furthermore, even though such informal selection criteria may circumscribe the pool of potential candidates, including in ways that unconsciously favor members of certain groups but exclude others, "the scholarly literature rarely covers this aspect of candidate selection, if at all" in the Indian context (Sircar 2018b; Vaishnav 2011b; Chandra 2016; Sircar 2018a). Some previous studies indicate that gendered norms and practices within political parties create different opportunities for men and women (Caul 1999; Kenny and Verge 2016). Thus, informally emphasizing that seemingly gender-neutral merits- such as to what extent an aspiring candidate have access to clientelist networks (Franceschet and Piscopo 2013), is a key local figure (Kenny 2013), or has experience in holding a party position (Verge 2015) - nevertheless creates selection criteria resulting in more men than women candidates in party politics. My research builds on this literature and argues that informal rules and practices for candidate selection within the two major political parties of India are often gendered, applying different selection criteria for men and women candidates.

2.4. Theoretical framework

To explain the demand for women candidates in Indian parties, I develop a theoretical framework to highlight the interactions of intra-party mechanisms of candidate selection. The key is to showcase not only the formal candidate selection methods but also the informal party practices that are understudied. My research focuses on both the formal candidate selection methods and informal criteria of candidate selection in the parties and the interplay between them. Chart 1-2 lays out the theoretical framework that explains the demand for women candidates in the Indian political parties.

Chart 1-2: A theoretical framework on the demand for women candidates



Source: By the author

2.4.1. Selectorate and formal candidate selection methods in India

I examine the formal selectorate[6] as the key gatekeeper for evaluating candidate selection procedures during national elections within the two major political parties namely the Indian

[6] The selectorate is the body that selects candidates before elections within the parties (Rahat and Hazan 2001; Hazan and Rahat 2006). It is the most important intermediary actor in the process of recruitment and can be composed of one person, several or many-indeed, as many as the entire electorate of a given nation (Rahat and Hazan 2001; Hazan and Rahat 2006).

National Congress (INC) and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in India. I examine where the selection process occurs within the parties, the gender composition of the formal selectorate, and its effects on the underrepresentation of women in Indian national politics. By understanding and assessing the dynamics of the formal selectorate in the parties, my research provides insights into the formal mechanisms that shape political representation of women and barriers to gender equality in Indian national politics. I posit that the formal selectorate within the parties is one of the principal determinants of underrepresentation of women in Indian national politics. The formal selectorate represents the body responsible for choosing candidates within political parties and by examining its composition, structure, and decision-making processes, I gain insights into how candidates are nominated and selected within the parties.

I posit that investigating these intra-party mechanisms is essential for identifying potential barriers that can hinder women's participation and representation in political processes in India. The inclusiveness or exclusiveness of the selectorate can significantly impact the diversity of the candidates chosen by the parties. A more inclusive selectorate, where a broader range of party members or even the entire electorate participate in candidate selection, can lead to greater representation of marginalized groups, including women. Conversely, an exclusive selectorate dominated by a select few individuals or party leaders can perpetuate biases and limit opportunities for women to secure nominations. Thus, examining the formal selectorate within the two major parties helps to identify whether institutional barriers contribute to the underrepresentation of women in Indian national politics. The institutional barriers can include gender biases in the formal candidate selection processes and lack of opportunities for women to participate in the formal decision-making processes within the parties.

2.4.2. Informal party practices and preferences in India

The informal “rules of the game” devised by the two major parties of India have gendered consequences, as a limited pool of women are likely to be in strategic positions to influence their party nominations. Existing literature on candidate selection in India consistently highlights the significance of informal selection criteria such as wealth, higher education, criminality, and dynastic affiliations in determining candidates' electability in the national parliament (Sircar 2018b; Chandra 2016; Vaishnav 2011b; Sircar 2018a). However, there is a critical gap in these existing studies on candidate selection in India. There is a lack of focus on the implications of these informal selection criteria on candidates’ gender within political parties in both general and reserved seats during national elections.

My research aims to build on existing literature by examining how the informal selection criteria influence the nominations of women candidates in both the general and reserved seats by the parties in national elections. I particularly examine the interplay between gender-binary categories of women and men concerning their informal selection criteria of wealth, dynastic ties, criminality, and higher-education within intra-party dynamics, in both general and reserved seats. These intra-party dynamics emphasize the constraints faced by women in accessing electoral opportunities

within parties during national elections. The section below reviews how the different candidate traits are dominant in Indian politics.

Wealth

Wealth is important for candidate selection in India because it plays a crucial role in developing a strong electoral organization and covering campaign costs (Sircar 2018b; Tiwari 2014). Candidates are expected to finance various activities such as road shows, rallies, and advertisements, as well as recruit polling agents and mobilize voters (Sircar 2018b; Tiwari 2014). However, to what extent wealth plays an important role in the nominations of women candidates by the two major parties in India is still unclear. I examine how the gender of candidates correlates with their wealth at the intra-party level shedding light on the dynamics of candidate selection and the barriers faced by women in party politics.

Parties can demand wealthy women candidates who show financial independence and capability which can help in counteracting gender biases that otherwise undermine their perceived electability. Wealth can act as a compensatory factor for women candidates as it helps them to enhance their credibility and counter stereotypes about women's limited roles and capabilities in electoral politics. Wealthy women candidates can be perceived as more authoritative and capable of navigating the political landscape as much as men, thus, making them more attractive to the party elites looking to nominate strong contenders in national elections. Parties believe that nominating wealthy women candidates can attract a broader spectrum of voters, including those who value gender equality and progressive representation. This strategy can appeal to voters who support women's empowerment and are more likely to vote for a party that promotes gender diversity in its candidate pool.

Wealthy candidates generally have better access to media and can command greater visibility in the electoral process. For women candidates who are often underrepresented in media coverage of politics, having financial resources can ensure they receive adequate attention, thereby boosting their public profile and electability (Bathla 2004; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991). Thus, media visibility is crucial for electoral success and wealthy women can leverage their resources to overcome the party bias that often sidelines women candidates. By nominating wealthy women candidates, parties can project an image of modernization and inclusivity. This can be a strategic move to appeal to young voters who are increasingly valuing gender equality and women's participation in politics (R. Deshpande 2009). A wealthy woman candidate can symbolize progress and modernization and be a suitable candidate for the party to enhance its image. Wealthy women candidates especially those from affluent and influential backgrounds, bring additional advantages such as connections to high-profile donors and networks that can benefit the party beyond just their personal wealth. These connections can be crucial for party funding and resource mobilization during elections; therefore, the parties can demand women candidates who are as wealthy as their male counterparts in both general and reserved seats. My study investigates how wealth influences

the selection of women candidates in parties, examining the extent to which financial resources impact their candidacy for contesting in national elections.

Dynastic ties

Dynastic ties matter in Indian politics because they significantly influence a politician's access to financial resources and inherited political networks which affects their electoral success and opportunities in politics (Chandra 2016; Basu 2016). Politicians with dynastic backgrounds refers to relations with a family member who was or still are active in electoral politics (Chandra 2016; Folke, Rickne, and Smith 2016). Dynastic candidates by virtue of their family's legacy, often possess name-recognition and established political networks, which are critical for electoral success (Chandra and Umaira 2011). Parties can demand women candidates from political dynasties as they can leverage their family name to gain voter trust and legitimacy, often more effectively than non-dynastic candidates. This recognition can compensate for any perceived gender disadvantage and make dynastic women strong candidates as much as men in the national elections.

The two major political parties in India can prioritize dynastic women candidates to ensure the continuation of a political legacy and maintain voter loyalty within some specific seats. This nomination strategy of parties helps in retaining the support base built by previous generations of the family (Chhibber 2013). It can also offset the risk of nominating women candidates who are generally perceived as weak candidates in national elections. The parties consider dynastic women candidates as custodians of their family's political heritage who can evoke strong emotional and loyal voter responses and thereby secure votes to win elections.

The intersection of gender and dynastic ties can provide a dual advantage to parties for prioritizing dynastic women candidates in national elections. Dynastic women candidates can face less scrutiny and resistance compared to their male counterparts due to societal perceptions that view them as weaker candidates only extending their family's legacy rather than asserting their individual political ambition. This can make the candidacies of dynastic women more palatable for majority of the male party elites who dominate decision-making structures within the parties. Parties often seek to enhance their image by promoting gender diversity and by nominating dynastic women as it will help them to signal commitment to gender inclusion while still relying on the safety net of dynastic advantage. This can help parties in appealing to progressive voters and addressing calls for greater women's representation in Indian national politics.

Dynastic candidates also typically have better access to financial resources and established patronage networks essential for effective electoral campaigning during national elections (Gowda and Sridharan 2012; Nagi 2008). The parties can demand dynastic women candidates who have access to inherited financial resources and patronage networks and their access to such networks and resources makes them attractive candidates for parties aiming to maximize electoral gains. Women from political dynasties are often perceived to have inherent political acumen and experience gained through their family's political involvement (Basu 2005; 2016). This perception

about dynastic women can make them appear as competent and capable leaders thereby reducing the perceived risk associated with nominating women candidates. Thus, the two major parties in India can prefer dynastic women candidates over men in both general and reserved seats due to the combined benefits of name-recognition, legacy continuation, their access to inherited financial resources, and strategic gender representation. Therefore, I investigate how the preference for dynastic women candidates influences the overall representation of women in Indian national politics, examining whether this preference effectively addresses gender disparities or perpetuates existing power structures within the parties.

Criminality and wealth

Wealthy candidates regardless of their gender are preferred by Indian parties since they can self-finance their electoral campaigns and also contribute to their party coffers (Vaishnav 2011b). Moreover, Vaishnav (2011) also shows that candidates with criminal backgrounds often have greater access to financial resources and are preferred by party elites for contesting national elections in India. In a political landscape where electioneering is getting increasingly expensive, parties can prefer women candidates with criminal backgrounds who have access to financial resources as they can ease financial burdens of the party and potentially fund other candidates. Parties favor women candidates with criminal backgrounds as it can help them overcome traditional gender biases by projecting an image of toughness and capability in handling political challenges.

Women with wealth and criminal cases can be seen as breaking gender stereotypes and positioning themselves as strong electoral candidates in a male-dominated field. This duality can make them particularly attractive to parties seeking to demonstrate gender inclusivity while still relying on tried-and-tested strategies for winning elections. The combination of wealth and a criminal background can make women appear more formidable and, thus, more electable in Indian national elections. The concept of "patriarchal bargaining" suggests that women can navigate patriarchal structures by aligning with existing power dynamics to gain political influence (Kandiyoti 1988). Thus, wealthy and criminal women candidates can symbolize this strategic navigation appealing to party elites who prefer wealth and criminal ties among candidates, regardless of their gender. The nomination of wealthy and criminal women candidates also serve to fulfill tokenistic gender representation while ensuring that these candidates remain within the party's control mechanisms.

The media often sensationalizes candidates with criminal backgrounds, leading to increased visibility and name-recognition before elections (Bathla 2004). Wealthy and criminal women candidates can leverage the media attention to enhance their public profiles which is crucial for competitive national elections. Moreover, nominating wealthy and criminal women candidates can help in maintaining existing power structures within the parties. Thus, the two major parties in India can prefer wealthy and criminal women candidates as much as criminal men due to their ability to finance their electoral campaigns and break traditional gender stereotypes which expects women to remain restricted to household duties. Therefore, I examine how the preference for

wealthy and criminal women candidates influences gender dynamics in political nominations and assess whether their strategic alignment with patriarchal structures enhances their nominations or merely reinforces traditional power hierarchies within political parties.

Higher-education

An existing study on the nomination patterns of candidates by political parties reveals that individuals with post-graduate degrees are more likely to be renominated for national elections in India compared to those without such qualifications (Sircar 2018a). Highly-educated candidates are often perceived as more competent and credible for contesting national elections in India (Sircar 2018a). For women candidates, having higher educational qualifications can help them counteract traditional gender biases that question their capabilities in leadership roles and make them less risky candidates compared to men in the parties. By nominating more highly-educated women candidates over men in both general and reserved seats during national elections, the two major parties in India can signal a commitment to ensure meritocracy among women who are perceived as risky candidates and attract voters who value education among candidates. This perception of competence can be particularly important in fields traditionally dominated by men, such as electoral politics (Jalalzai and Krook 2010).

In an increasingly globalized and modernizing India, parties can demand highly-educated women candidates over men as they can embody modern values and progressive change making them attractive to young voters. Moreover, the parties can prefer women candidates with high-levels of education as they bring specialized knowledge and expertise to governance. This can be particularly advantageous in policy-making and legislative processes, where technical knowledge is critical (P. Rai 2011). Parties seek to leverage the expertise of highly-educated women candidates to enhance their policies and legislative effectiveness as they can contribute to a more effective governance which can be a significant electoral asset.

By nominating more highly-educated women candidates compared to men, parties can project an image of gender equality and inclusivity. This can help the parties to counter criticisms of patriarchal practices and enhance their reputation among progressive voters. The nomination of highly-educated women candidates by the parties can also inspire other women and girls, indicating that gender need not be a barrier to achieving political office and thereby fostering a more inclusive political culture. Furthermore, parties can use the nomination of more highly-educated women candidates over men in national elections as a strategy to balance gender representation while maintaining a strong candidate pool. This approach can satisfy both intra-party dynamics and external demands for greater gender diversity in national politics.

Additionally, highly-educated women candidates are often perceived as less corrupt and more ethical compared to their male counterparts (Bjarnegård 2013). This perception can be beneficial in a political environment where corruption is rampant among electoral candidates (Sukhtankar and Vaishnav 2015). The nominations of more highly-educated women candidates over men can also enhance the party's image of integrity and commitment to clean governance and appeal to

voters who prioritize anti-corruption measures. Thus, the two major parties in India can prefer to nominate more highly-educated women candidates over men in both general and reserved seats due to their perceived competence, voter appeal, policy expertise, and potential to enhance the party's image of inclusivity and integrity. Therefore, I investigate the influence of higher-education on the selection of women candidates within parties and if it inadvertently limits the overall pool of potential women candidates in national elections.

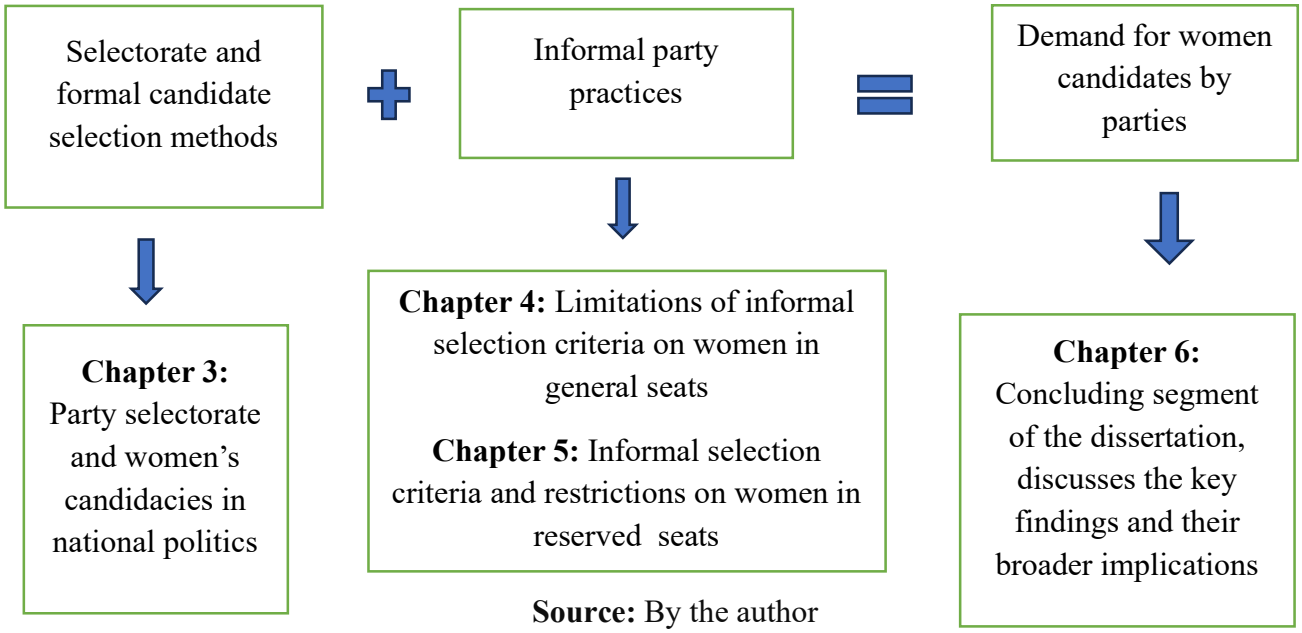
2.4.3. Demand for women candidates in parties

Building on existing scholarship as reviewed above, I posit that the two major parties in India have certain preferences in nominating women candidates as opposed to male candidates. Specifically, they prefer women who possess wealth, come from dynastic backgrounds in politics, have criminal cases, or are highly-educated and significantly limit the overall representation of women in national politics. The preferred informal selection criteria in parties collectively create a narrow pathway for women to enter politics in both general and reserved seats during national elections in India, where only those who meet the stringent and often gender-biased expectations are considered for candidacy. Moreover, by limiting women's presence in the formal decision-making structures within parties, the party elites narrow the pool of potential women candidates to a small and elite section, thereby excluding the vast majority of women in India who do not fit the informal selection criteria. The formal candidate selection methods and the informal party practices reinforces the existing socio-economic and political hierarchies, thereby making it difficult for women from ordinary backgrounds to enter and thrive in Indian national politics. Thus, the representation of women in Indian national politics has remained skewed, dominated by women candidates who already have significant advantages based on their wealth, dynastic connections, criminality, and higher-education, thereby failing to reflect the diversity and plurality of the female population in India.

Moreover, the selective nomination process can perpetuate the notion that women candidates must meet extraordinary criteria to be deemed suitable for political office, unlike their male counterparts who often face fewer and less stringent prerequisites. This creates additional barriers for women aspiring to succeed in electoral politics, discouraging many women from even attempting to enter politics due to the perception that only women with exceptional financial, educational, or familial backing can succeed in Indian national politics. This systemic bias within the parties undermines efforts to achieve genuine gender equality in political representation and hampers the development of an inclusive and representative democratic process in India. As a result, the perspectives and needs of a broader spectrum of women remain underrepresented in policy-making, perpetuating gender disparities in governance and public life in India.

Chart 2-2 shows how my theoretical framework will be operationalized across the next four chapters of my dissertation.

Chart 2-2: Theoretical framework and organization of chapters in my dissertation



Source: By the author

My research posits that the formal candidate selection methods and informal party practices in India's two major political parties contribute to biases against women and shape the preferred qualities sought in women candidates for both general and reserved seats in national elections. By applying a gendered lens, my study examines how the parties exhibit gender biases and how gender dynamics influence their candidate selection processes in India. A "gendered lens" refers to an analytical perspective that focuses on how gender influences and shapes institutions, practices, and their interactions (Charles and Bradley 2009). In the context of my research on the two major parties in India, applying a "gendered lens" means scrutinizing how gender dynamics and biases influence candidate selection processes, and the informal qualities preferred in women candidates. It examines how power relations and gender roles within the formal organisational structures of the parties impact their decision-making in candidate-selection. Moreover, it examines the different expectations and informal selection criteria applied to women candidates compared to their male counterparts by the parties in national elections. Through an inter-party analysis of formal candidate selection methods and by examining the preferred informal selection criteria based on gender of candidates at the intra-party level for both general and reserved seats, my research explains the persistent underrepresentation of women in Indian national politics.

Chapter 3 conducts an inter-party analysis of the formal selection methods and selectorate in India's two major parties, the INC and the BJP, to determine the inclusivity and centralization of these processes. It scrutinizes the formal structures and procedures for candidate nominations, emphasizing the gender composition of the selectorate and its impact on the descriptive representation of women in national politics. By analyzing gender dynamics within the formal

selectorate, the chapter aims to uncover patterns of exclusion that hinder women's access to political candidacy at the national level.

Chapter 4 engages in a nuanced analysis of the informal selection criteria employed by the two major political parties in India. Through an intra-party analysis of the informal selection criteria exhibited by all candidates nominated to the general seats in national elections by the two major parties, the INC, and the BJP, spanning the period from 2004 to 2019, this chapter uncovers the preferred informal selection criteria for "general" women that contribute to limiting their opportunities as electoral candidates. Additionally, chapter 5 undertakes a systematic comparison of informal selection criteria exhibited by candidates across normative gender categories, focusing specifically on those nominated to the reserved seats in national elections by the two major parties, the INC, and the BJP, spanning the period from 2004 to 2019. Through an intra-party analysis of the informal selection criteria exhibited by all candidates nominated to the reserved seats, chapter 5 discerns the specific informal selection criteria favoured by the two parties when nominating "reserved" women candidates in national elections.

Chapter 6 encapsulates the key findings and their broader implications on women's underrepresentation in Indian national politics. Through this summary, the chapter reiterates the critical insights garnered regarding the formal methods and informal party practices of candidate selection within the INC and the BJP, shedding light on the institutional barriers and gender biases that hinder women's participation as electoral candidates in Indian national politics.

I posit that the underrepresentation of women in Indian national politics is influenced by the candidate selection processes within the parties, which is shaped by their formal selection methods, informal party practices, and selection criteria or their combinations. I emphasize that both the formal methods and informal party practices governing candidate selection have gendered consequences, with women facing greater barriers to accessing political power in India compared to men. Understanding the nuances of formal methods and informal party practices of candidate selection is crucial for comprehending how parties choose women candidates to contest national elections in India.

My research establishes the importance of formal and informal institutions, which are highly contextual, and raise questions as to whether the similarities between the two cases are largely coincidental. However, comparisons within cases and between cases in a similar context can help to develop at least limited generalizations which may "travel" well across different settings (Pierson 2000; 2004). By examining the cases of India's two major political parties, the INC and the BJP, my study illuminates gendered mechanisms of institutional resistance and reproduction that can potentially resonate in other contexts. Furthermore, it contributes substantially to the existing literature on gender and party politics by highlighting the detrimental effects of formal centralized candidate selection processes, gender exclusivity within formal selectorate, and the prevalence of biased informal selection criteria on women's candidacies within the parties. The

next chapter explains why the formal candidate selection methods in the two major parties i.e. the INC and the BJP limit opportunities for women candidates in Indian national politics.

Chapter 3: Party selectorate and women's candidacies in national politics

3.1. Introduction

Candidate selection methods are the intra-party institutional mechanisms by which parties select their candidates in advance of national elections (Gallagher and Marsh 1988; Hazan and Rahat 2006; Barnea and Rahat 2007). These formal selection mechanisms have significant implications for power distribution within party structures, especially in the context of increasing importance of candidate-centered or personalized politics in electoral democracies (Rahat 2007). The formal selectorate, which is the body responsible for selecting candidates before each election, holds particular importance in this process (Rahat and Hazan 2001). In contrast to the selectorate theory of war, which explains patterns of conflict among states (de Mesquita et al. 2004), the concept of the formal selectorate focuses on who select candidates within political parties before national elections. The inclusiveness or exclusiveness of the formal selectorate has profound consequences for political representation, with more inclusive selectorate often leading to greater diversity and representation of marginalized groups (Scarrow 2005; Hazan and Rahat 2006).

This chapter examines the role of the formal selectorate as the principal gatekeeper for evaluating candidate selection methods during national elections in India within the two major political parties namely the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). It examines where the selection process occurs within the parties, the gender composition of the formal selectorate, and its effects on the underrepresentation of women in Indian national politics. By understanding and assessing the dynamics of the formal selectorate in the parties, I gain insights into the formal mechanisms that shape political representation of women and barriers to gender equality in Indian national politics. This chapter builds upon existing literature and also incorporate insights gained from semi-structured elite interviews with key stakeholders in Indian politics, including politicians, poll strategists, and scholars. The evidence regarding the gender composition of the formal selectorate in both the parties are drawn from the last two national election cycles (2014 and 2019).

Despite their ideological differences, both the INC and the BJP have consistently nominated a limited number of women candidates in national elections held between 2004 and 2019. My evidence shows that the formal and centralized candidate selection processes within both parties significantly limit women's ability to influence their own nominations for national elections, ultimately hindering the nomination of women candidates. My evidence shows that the limited involvement of affiliated subsidiary women's organizations in the formal candidate selection processes in both the parties highlight underlying gender biases and limit women's opportunities as electoral candidates. Women are notably underrepresented in the highest decision-making structures of both the parties, where positions responsible for candidate selection are primarily situated. This limited representation of women diminishes their influence and agency in shaping the formal candidate nomination process, further exacerbating their underrepresentation in national politics.

This chapter provides valuable insights into the systemic barriers women face in Indian political parties. Organized into three sections, the first section compares the formal organizational structures and selectorate of the two parties, shedding light on their implications on women's candidacies in national elections. The second section analyzes the gender composition of the formal selectorate in the two parties. In the concluding section, I synthesize the findings from the analyses and their implications on the "demand" for women candidates.

3.2. Formal selectorate and implications on women's candidacies in national politics: Comparing the INC and BJP

The INC and the BJP nominate candidates who contest national elections in a larger range of both general and reserved seats across all sub-national states and union territories in India. The two parties' dominance in Indian national politics has reshaped the dynamics of women's political representation. Thus, examining formal candidate selection methods and selectorate in the INC and the BJP are important as these parties determine the supply of women candidates to national elections. By examining the methods by which the parties select their candidates, we can assess the parties' commitment to diversity, inclusivity, and gender equality in candidate selection processes. Since both the parties hold significant importance in Indian politics, therefore, examining its formal candidate selection methods and selectorate allows for the identification of gender disparities within the party's leadership and decision-making structures that has an impact on women's candidacy in national politics.

In addition to their dominance in Indian national politics, their distinct ideological foundations can influence their nomination of women candidates during national elections. The INC, which was established in 1885, is traditionally a centrist party with a strong emphasis on secularism, social democracy, and inclusive politics (Guha 2010). Over the years, the INC has implemented various policies aimed at improving the status of women in India. For instance, during the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government led by the INC after the national elections of 2004 and 2009, significant legislations like the Domestic Violence Act (2005) and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (2013) were enacted (Dagar 2011; Bhattacharyya 2015). This suggests the INC's commitment at improving the status of women in India. On the other hand, the BJP was founded in 1980, and is rooted in Hindu nationalist ideology and promotes a vision of India as a nation that values its Hindu cultural heritage, and its policies often reflect conservative social values (Malik and Singh 1992; Jaffrelot 2013).

The INC's centrist and inclusive ideology can typically result in a more proactive approach on gender equality, including the nomination of women candidates in national elections. In contrast, the BJP's approach, influenced by its conservative and nationalist ideology, can prioritize traditional roles for women and lead to fewer women candidates being nominated by the party in national elections. The INC's history of advocating for gender-focused legislation and social reforms can lead it to nominate a sizeable proportion of women candidates in national elections. The BJP, while also supporting key legislations for women in India, can balance its ideological commitments with pragmatic electoral strategies, which sometimes lead to fewer women being

nominated by the party in national elections. Both the parties consider the electoral advantages of nominating women candidates but the INC's ideological commitment to social democracy can translate into a stronger push for women's political representation, whereas the BJP's nominations of women candidates can be more influenced by the need to secure votes from specific regions. There is evidence in an existing study that the INC had a stronger record than the BJP historically of nominating women candidates to run for elected office (Basu 2016, 157). Basu (2016) has offered several explanations for this including the fact that the INC is at an advantage over the BJP in its potential to select women candidates from dynastic backgrounds. Compared to the BJP, the INC has nominated a larger proportion of women candidates in almost every national election until 2009 (Basu 2016, 157). However, in the recent past, the BJP has compensated for its previous policies by nominating some women who have been active in local or state politics and in social movement activities (Basu 2016, 157). The ideological differences between the INC and the BJP can play a significant role in shaping their approaches to nominating women candidates during national elections. These ideological underpinnings might not only affect the parties' candidate selection processes but also helps to understand the intra-party dynamics that affects women's participation in Indian national politics. This section systematically examines and compares the formal organizational structures, processes, and selectorate associated with candidate selection in both the parties. It engages in a comprehensive discussion on the formal aspects of candidate selection in the two parties, shedding light on their impact on women's limited candidacies in national elections.

3.2.1. INC: Formal organisations

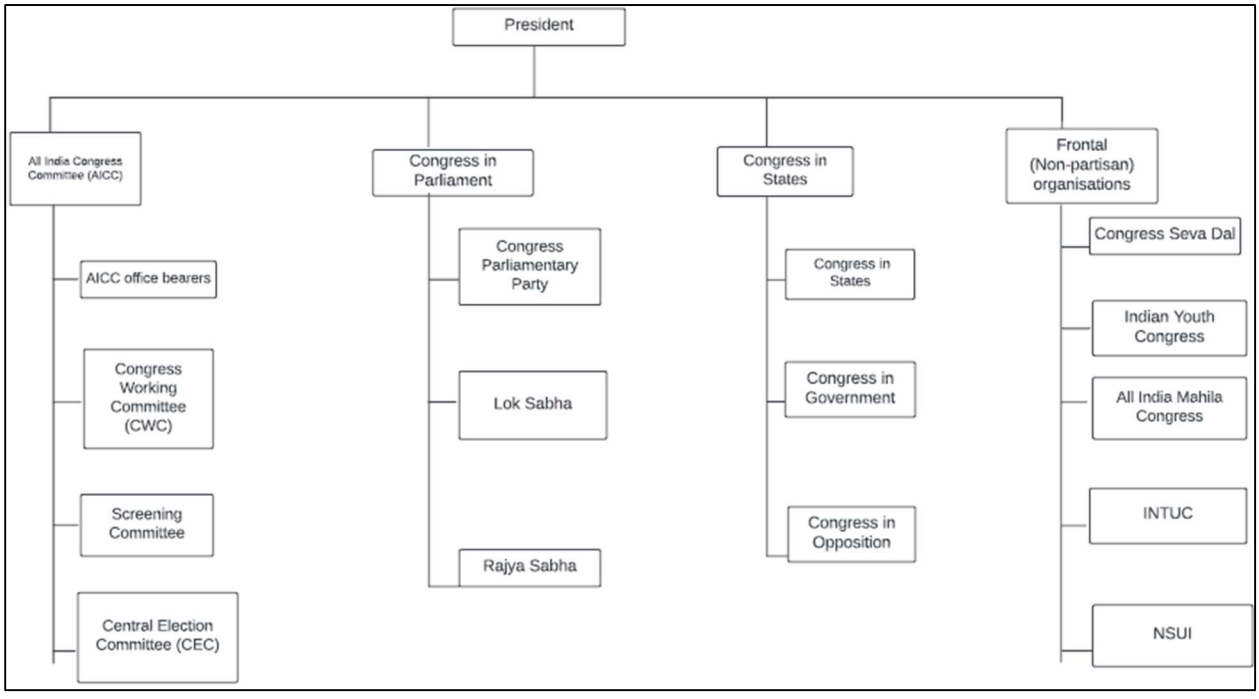
The first primary national unit is the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) which plays an important role in determining the party's objectives (K. N. Kumar 1990, 41–43). It also serves as the organ for resolving internal disputes in the party (Guha 2010; Soikham 2019). Additionally, different departments and sub-committees operates under the AICC to discuss the party's strategies, which includes the office bearers, Congress Working Committee (CWC), the Screening Committee (SC), and the Central Election Committee (CEC) (Kothari 2006; Farooqui and Sridharan 2014; Soikham 2019). The primary units of the party are headed by the party president. The CWC is the executive committee of the party and serves as its highest decision-making body. It is composed of senior party leaders, and also includes the president of the party. It is responsible for formulating and approving party policies on various national and international issues (Soikham 2019). Additionally, the CWC includes provisions that emphasize the representation of women within the party. Notably, it mandates that six members nominated by the AICC should be from marginalized groups such as women, minorities, or youth (Indian National Congress, 2024). This shows the party's commitment to including women in its leadership and decision-making processes. The CWC plays a critical role in planning and overseeing the party's election strategies and it also oversees the internal functioning of the party, including administrative decisions, disciplinary actions, and organizational reforms (Guha 2010; Soikham 2019). The CWC's decisions and actions significantly impact the overall direction and effectiveness of the party. Its role is crucial in maintaining party cohesion, and it responds to political developments, and drives

the party's mission and values. In addition to the CWC, the Screening Committee (SC), and the Central Election Committee (CEC) headed by the party president are primarily involved in the formal candidate selection procedures of the party.

The secondary unit comprises of the Congress in Parliament which consists of the members of Congress in Lok Sabha and Congress in Rajya Sabha. This internal organ of the party regulates activities of the party members elected to the national parliament (Soikham 2019). Moreover, there is a third unit which comprises of the Pradesh Congress Committee (PCCs) or Congress in States- it coordinates the activities of the party at the sub-national state level (Kothari 2006; Farooqui and Sridharan 2014). The PCCs are responsible for the party's popularity and performance in 28 sub-national states and eight union territories in the federation (Soikham 2019).

Apart from the formal primary and secondary internal units, there are also frontal units affiliated to the party which works independently as supporting units for providing an accessible platform to people from various sections of the society to engage in the activities of the party. These frontal units include the Congress Seva Dal (Self-help group), the Indian Youth Congress, the All-India Mahila Congress (women's unit), the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) and the National Student Union (NSUI) (Soikham 2019). These units are informally associated with the party and function to enhance the civil society participation from various social categories, such as youth, factory workers, students, and women. Figure 1-3 shows the organisational structures within the party.

Figure 1-3: Formal organisational structures of the INC



Source: Developed based on descriptions in INC's website at https://www.inc.in/

3.2.2. INC: Formal and centralized candidate selection methods

According to the existing literature, the party president takes all important executive and political decisions in the party and is solely responsible for candidate selection in national elections (K. N. Kumar 1990; Kothari 2006; Farooqui and Sridharan 2014; Ruchika Singh 2015). Even though the party has a strong formal organisational structure, the party constitution still lacks clear guidelines on candidate selection procedures, guidelines on intra-party democracy, and an accountable system of checks and balances to address conflicts among its various units (Hasan 2006; Nauriya 1991; Voll 2014; Soikham 2019). Moreover, there are no clear guidelines and timelines as to when internal elections within the party units have taken place over the past two decades.

Despite being a party with a structure, the party under Indira Gandhi did not hold any organisational elections after 1972 (Sanghvi 2006; Soikham 2019). Since Indira Gandhi took charge as the president of the party in 1978, the president of the party has effectively been the party's national leader, head of the organisation, head of the working committees, chief spokesperson, and the party's choice for the prime ministerial candidate (Sanghvi 2006; Kidwai 2019). According to its constitution, the party president is elected by the PCCs, and the members of the AICC; however, this procedure has often been bypassed by the CWC, which has elected its candidate without consulting the members of the PCCs (K. N. Kumar 1990; Nauriya 1991). This highlights the lack of intra-party democracy within the formal internal organs of the party where decision-making power is centralized in the hands of the party president and few members of the CWC.

The formal selectorate responsible for candidate selection in national elections is headed by the party president, who considers recommendations from the Screening Committee (SC), and the Central Election Committee (CEC) of the party, but the final decision rests upon the president (Sanghvi 2006). Both the members of the SC and the CEC are appointed from the senior party members by the party president. An active member of the party stated in an interview:

> The selectorate which is primarily responsible for recommending candidates for national elections are the members of the Screening Committee (SC) which comprises of important party leaders, who are the few senior members of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) and some senior state PCC chiefs. The members of the SC are appointed by the party president and exercises significant discretionary powers to evaluate and select candidates who will represent the party in various seats. The primary consideration for the members of SC is the candidate's ability to win the election. The SC considers factors such as wealth, dynastic connections, higher education, and regional balance to ensure a candidate pool which is winnable in the national elections. The discretionary powers of the senior party members in the SC enable them to make judgement calls based on their political experience and acumen. These senior members of the SC are primarily men and usually recommend more men for nominations in the national elections. The SC has the authority to make the final decision on the list of candidates to be recommended to the CEC for approval. (Rajeev Gowda, interview with the author, Zoom, July 2022)

Currently, there are about fifty senior party leaders who form the SC from across all sub-national states and recommend prospective candidates for nominations in national elections. The statement from the interview suggests that a small group of senior male party members in the SC use their discretionary powers to select more men to contest national elections in the party. Moreover, Basu (2016) also highlights that the INC's procedure for identifying suitable electoral candidates is much less democratic.

An ex-spokesperson of the party stated in the interview that " the SC prepares a report evaluating the potential of winnability and relevant details of each potential candidate and sends their recommendations to the CEC, which is the highest decision-making organ in the process, and responsible for forwarding the list of potential candidates to the president for his/her final selection. The CEC is comprised of eleven senior party leaders, and the members of the CEC are also appointed by the party president " (Sanjay Jha, interview with the author, Zoom, June 2022). These statements from the interviews highlight that all decision-making powers related to candidate selection in national elections are primarily vested with smaller national executive bodies headed by the party president. The CEC selects candidates for state and national legislatures without considering recommendations from the state and local bodies. As a result, women with experience in state and local politics might often go unnoticed by the Central Election Committee (CEC) (Basu 2016, 160). Moreover, the party's finances are concentrated in the leadership at the highest level, which has remained in the hands of the Gandhi family for over four decades (Chhibber 2013). This highlights the party's centralizing tendencies and lack of intra-party democracy within its organisational units which can be detrimental for potential women willing to enter national politics. This also indicates that the formal candidate selection methods and the selectorate are highly centralized in the party which nominates candidates in national elections. The centralization of candidate selection process that is dominated by a male-dominated selectorate is more likely to be detrimental to the selection of women candidates. Research on political party structures highlights that centralized selection mechanisms often consolidate power in the hands of a small group of elites, who are predominantly male, leading to bias in candidate selection. Studies show that when party elites—mostly men—hold the authority to nominate candidates, they are less likely to prioritize gender diversity, as they tend to favor candidates who reflect their own demographic and ideological preferences (Kenny 2013). This male-dominated selectorate often perpetuates existing gender imbalances by nominating more male candidates, viewing them as more electable or aligning with established party dynamics (Bjarnegård and Kenny 2016). Additionally, Paxton and Hughes (2015) note that centralized party structures often lack transparency and are resistant to pressures for greater gender inclusivity, further disadvantaging women in the candidate selection process.

3.2.3. INC: Limited involvement of affiliated frontal organizations in formal candidate selection processes

The existing literature indicates that along with low intra-party democracy within the internal party structures of the INC, there is lack of independence and involvement of affiliated frontal party

organizations like the Mahila Congress (women's wing) or NSUI, in the candidate selection processes at the national level (Ruchika Singh 2015; Farooqui and Sridharan 2014). My interview with an ex-spokesperson of the party confirms that the Mahila Congress (women's wing) or any other frontal organisations are not actively involved in the formal centralized candidate selection processes of the party. An ex-spokesperson of the party, Sanjay Jha stated in an interview:

> The candidate selection process in all political parties are very opaque. As far as the INC is concerned it could do better, and I do think that the party needs to be a lot more robust and transparent in selecting candidates during national elections. The frontal units informally affiliated to the party like the Mahila Congress (women's wing), or Indian Youth Congress have no role to play in the formal candidate selection processes of the party. Although I am convinced that all political parties are guilty of favouritism and nepotism, they are influenced by both the candidate's muscle and money power, and women score less on these accounts. (Sanjay Jha, interview with the author, Zoom, June 2022)

This statement indicates that men with muscle[7] and money power can influence their nominations for national elections more frequently than women in the party. It also suggests that underlying sexism among party members and the opaque nomination procedures in the party make it difficult for women to access national politics.

Existing literature also highlights that the Mahila Congress (women's wing) of the INC was less active than the BJP's Mahila Morcha (women's wing) in mobilizing women to participate in election campaigns and recruiting women candidates in the recent past (*OneIndia* 2008; Basu 2016). This makes it difficult for active women party workers to access internal party structures and influence candidate selection in their favour among the dominant party elites. My interview with a poll strategist suggests that the Mahila Congress (women's wing) of the INC is a dormant organization in the party with no active involvement in its formal candidate selection processes. The poll strategist stated that " in the BJP's Mahila Morcha (women's wing), women do organize and participate in electoral campaigns, and among these women a small number of them also eventually become political leaders. However, this phenomenon is not visible in the INC's Mahila Congress, which is a dormant informal women's organization affiliated to the party "(Kanksshi Agarwal, interview with the author, Zoom, July 2022). This statement suggests that the party was not successful in creating a pool of potential women party workers and candidates through its frontal women's organization over the years. My interview with the poll strategist diverge from the existing literature by presenting a more critical view of the Mahila Congress' role. While the existing literature describes the Mahila Congress (women's wing) of the INC as less active compared to the BJP's Mahila Morcha (women's wing) (*OneIndia* 2008; Basu 2016), my interview

[7] Muscle power in Indian politics refers to the influence and use of force, intimidation, and violence by certain political actors to achieve electoral success and maintain control in their respective areas (Vaishnav 2011b).

data suggests that in practice, the Mahila Congress has a negligible or non-existent role in mobilizing and recruiting women candidates in national elections.

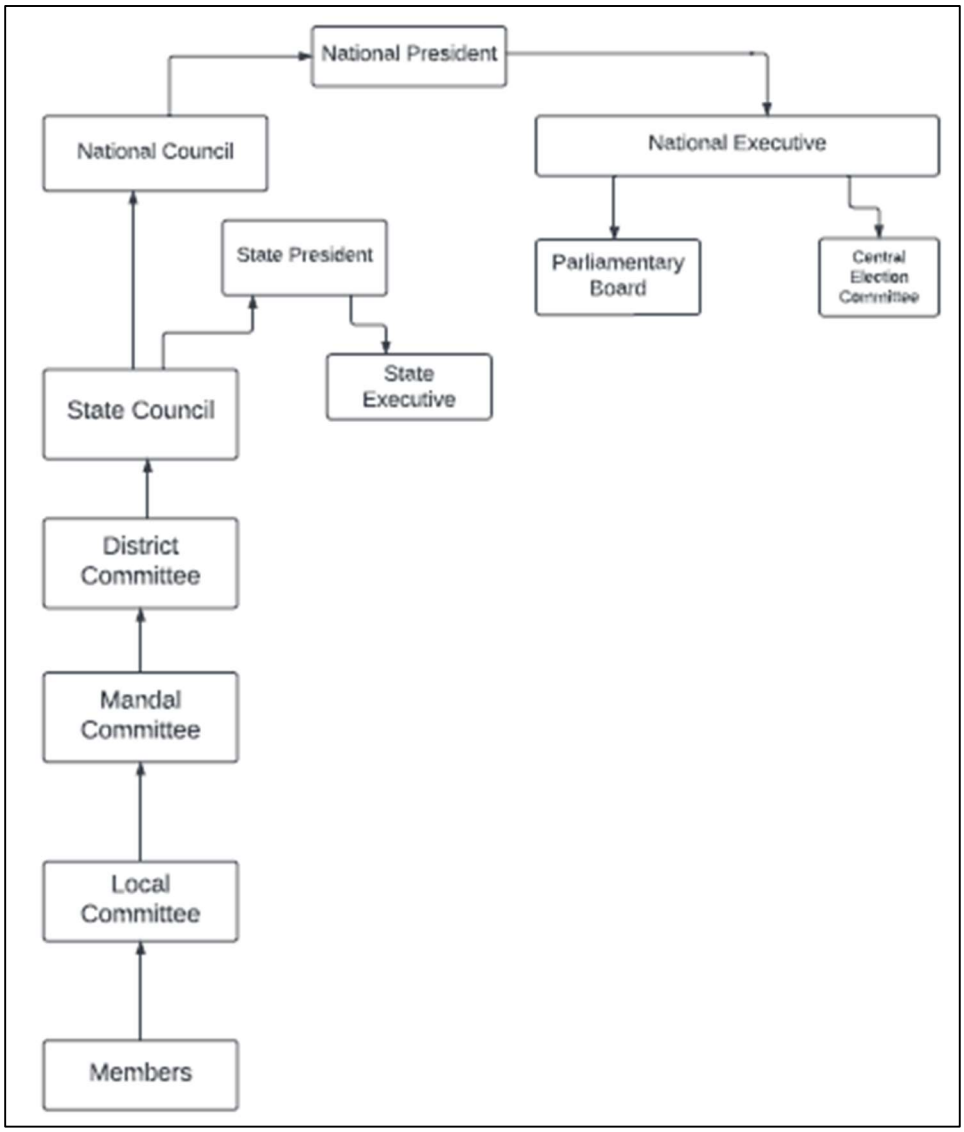
Furthermore, in the recent past the presidents of the Mahila Congress, Sushmita Dev and Supriya Srinate had dynastic affiliations and were mostly able to secure their presidential positions because of their close links to party elites. This suggests that the preference for women with dynastic ties for leadership positions in the party's frontal units makes it difficult for other active, non-elite women to access internal party positions. The formal centralized candidate-selection procedures and biases against women among the party elites eventually limits the opportunities of women as electoral candidates in national politics within the INC.

3.2.4. BJP: Formal organisations

The organisation of the party is hierarchical, with the party president being the highest authority in the internal formal organisations (Swain 2001; Ashraf 2005)**.** The primary units of the party at the national level are the National Executive, the Parliamentary Board, and the Central Election Committee (CEC), headed and selected by the party president. The primary role of the CEC is to select candidates for national level elections mostly in consultation with the party president. Below the president is the National Executive, it is comprised of senior leaders of the party from across the country (Swain 2001; Jha 2021). The National Executive is the highest decision-making internal organ which regulates the activities of the party, but has no direct role in the candidate selection processes of the party (Swain 2001; *Financial Express* 2017; Jha 2021).

The party members who form the National Executive are vice-presidents of other internal organs of the party, general-secretaries, treasurers and secretaries, who work directly with the party president, and are also chosen by the party president (Swain 2001; Ashraf 2005; *Financial Express* 2017; Jha 2021). The Parliamentary Board selected by the party president is the governing organ which is responsible for taking decisions on behalf of the National Executive (*Financial Express* 2017). It is also responsible for supervising the activities of the parliamentary and other state legislative groups of the party (*Rediff.Com* 2014). This eventually makes the National Executive less powerful than the Parliamentary Board in the party's internal formal organizational structure. Since the Parliamentary Board comprises of few senior members of the party and is headed by the party president, it guides and regulates all the other formal organisational units of the party (*Rediff.Com* 2014). The party president is also responsible for setting up the Central Election Committee (CEC) from among its senior party members in the National Executive (*Rediff.Com* 2014; Anand 2019), which selects candidates for national elections in consultation with the party president. Additionally, the National President of Mahila Morcha (women's wing) of the party should be an ex-officio member of the CEC (Bhartiya Janata Party, Constitution of the Bhartiya Janata Party). At the same time, the President of each sub-national State Mahila Morcha (women's wings at sub-national levels) can only be the ex-officio members of the sub-national State Election Committee (Bhartiya Janata Party, Constitution of the Bhartiya Janata Party). Figure 2-3 shows the internal formal organisations of the party.

Figure 2-3: Formal organisational structures of the BJP



Source: Developed based on descriptions in BJP's website at https://www.bjp.org/home

3.2.5. BJP: Informal organizations

Along with its hierarchical formal internal organisations, the party has informal links with the non-partisan organisation Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and other organisations related to the RSS. The informal links with RSS are important because the active members of the party at the grassroots level are largely derived from the RSS and its non-partisan affiliates, loosely known as the "Sangh Parivar" (Swain 2001; Narayan 2014; Jha 2021). These non-partisan affiliates of the RSS from where BJP derives its active party members are the Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (All India Student's Union), the student's wing of the RSS, the Bhartiya Kisan Sangh (Indian

Farmer's Union), the farmers' division in RSS, and the Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh (Indian Labourers Union), the labour union associated with the RSS (Swain 2001; Narayan 2014).

Since the formation of RSS in 1925, its informal role in the functioning of BJP's activities has been continuously changing over time rather than remaining fixed (Narayan 2014). Currently, the RSS-BJP nexus functions like a corporation with highly committed volunteers and party workers respectively and with clear division of responsibilities (Narayan 2014; Jha 2021). The RSS volunteers help the BJP workers to mobilize voters, and are also responsible for structuring and coordinating the party's electoral campaigns for elections (Ashraf 2005; Narayan 2014; Jha 2021). The active members and volunteers of the RSS supplement the party activities and its social welfare related work.

In addition to the informal non-partisan organisations of the RSS which has close links to the party, this party also has subsidiary organisations of its own, such as the BJP Mahila Morcha (BJP Women's Front) its women's division, the Bhartiya Janata Yuva Morcha (Indian People's Youth Front), its youth wing, and the BJP Minority Morcha (BJP Minority Front), its minority division (Swain 2001; *The Indian Express* 2010; Ghoge 2016; Narayan 2014). These subsidiary organizations are informally associated with the party and function to enhance the civil society participation from various social categories, such as youth, women, and minorities for party related activities.

3.2.6. BJP: Formal and centralized candidate selection methods

In spite of having clear formal internal structures within the party, there are just two formal levels of decision-making organs which are responsible for candidate selection: the State Election Committee (SEC) and the Central Election Committee (CEC) (Farooqui and Sridharan 2014; Ruchika Singh 2015; Rashmi Singh 2023). This indicates a top-down approach to decision-making where only two formal levels of decision-making organs are responsible for candidate selection. This further highlights that key decisions on candidate selection in the party are made by a select few rather than through a broader consultative or democratic process involving a wider array of party members.

The existing literature highlights that for national elections the SEC plays a recommendatory role, recommending names of candidates for each general and reserved seat, but the CEC makes the final selection of candidates in national elections (Farooqui and Sridharan 2014; Ruchika Singh 2015; Rashmi Singh 2023). During the national election of 2009, there was a change in the process where the SEC, instead of providing a choice of candidate for each seat, merely forwarded all the names to the CEC (Farooqui and Sridharan 2014; Ruchika Singh 2015). The CEC was itself sidelined by the formation of an informal "core group" for selecting candidates in each sub-national state by the then party president Rajnath Singh (*India Today* 2014). This informal "core group" included certain key national leaders like Arun Jaitley, Sushma Swaraj, Venkaiah Naidu, and Ananth Kumar and some selected sub-national state leaders in the party (Farooqui and

Sridharan 2014). They were solely responsible for the selection of candidates who contested the national election in 2009 on a BJP ticket.

The existing literature also indicates that during the national election of 2009 some national level party leaders were on the informal "core group" of two or more sub-national states and wielded enormous influence and functioned arbitrarily, and with very little knowledge of the realities of the grassroots in the sub-national states concerned, were able to select candidates (Farooqui and Sridharan 2014; Ruchika Singh 2015; Rashmi Singh 2023). Thus, the informal "core groups" made the final decision on the nominations of candidates in the national election of 2009, in effect, which was rubber-stamped by the CEC after perfunctory debate on only a few seats (Farooqui and Sridharan 2014; Verma 2021). My interviews with active party members indicate that the formal candidate selection processes and the selectorate in the party are limited to few party elites who currently constitute the Central Election Committee (CEC), and the CEC is highly centralized for national elections. An active member of the party, stated in an interview:

> The National Executive comprises of several senior leaders in the party from across the sub-national states who are appointed by the party president. However, most of them have a limited say in the formal candidate selection process during national elections. The final selection of candidates is done by the party president in consultation with the members in the CEC for national elections. (K. P. Sarathy, interview with the author, Zoom, July 2022)

Moreover, another active member of the party stated that " although the party has a clear hierarchical structure, right from the Local Committee to the State Committee, and then the National Council which selects the party president, but the major decisions related to candidate selection during national elections are taken by a few senior party leaders in the CEC in consultation with the party president " (Chandra Kumar Bose, interview with the author, Zoom, May 2022). He further added that " the only thing that distinguishes the organisational structures of the BJP from the INC is that there are internal elections within the party to choose the party president every two-year period in the BJP " (Chandra Kumar Bose, interview with the author, Zoom, May 2022). The existing literature and the statements from the interviews with active party members show that despite having a hierarchical structure, the formal selection procedures and selectorate in the BJP for candidate-selection during national elections are limited to few party elites and the procedures are highly centralized.

The centralization of candidate selection processes, as indicated by my interviews with active party members, restricts decision-making to a small group of male party elites within the Central Election Committee (CEC). According to existing literature, such centralization can disproportionately disadvantage women candidates, as it limits the opportunity for broader input from diverse party members and reinforces the preferences of male-dominated elites. Existing studies show that centralized bodies, like the CEC, tend to prioritize candidates who align with traditional power structures, often sidelining women in favor of male candidates perceived as more electable or experienced (Kenny 2013). This concentration of power among elites can also

undermine internal party pressures for gender inclusivity, as fewer decision-makers are likely to prioritize gender diversity (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2016). Furthermore, the centralization of selection processes can marginalize women's organizations within parties, limiting their influence in advocating for female representation (Lovenduski 1993; Lovenduski 2005).

3.2.7. BJP: Informal organizations in formal candidate selection processes

Existing literature highlights that the RSS also plays an influential role in the nomination processes of the candidates in some seats across the country in the party (Farooqui and Sridharan 2014; Rashmi Singh 2023). In the past two decades, the RSS took on itself the primary role of running personalised campaigns for the party's prime ministerial candidate during national elections (Narayan 2014). As an informal non-partisan affiliate organization of the party, it adopted a centralised model of monitoring and using feedback from local volunteers to help the party organize and coordinate its electoral campaigns across the country during national elections (Ashraf 2005; Narayan 2014; Jha 2021). Since the RSS is involved in mobilizing voters and carrying out campaign activities for the party, therefore, it is also able to informally influence the candidature of some candidates in the party. For instance, the RSS ensured that its trusted "pracharaks" meaning activists like Sundar Singh Bhandari and Bhai Mahavir become governors of sub-national states and that L.K. Advani, another RSS activist leader become the deputy prime minister in 1999 (Kanungo 2006).

The RSS has some informal influence on the candidate selection processes across national elections (Narayan 2014; Ashraf 2005; Farooqui and Sridharan 2014; Jha 2021). The subsidiary organizations affiliated to the party like the BJP's Mahila Morcha (Women's Front), Bhartiya Janata Yuva Morcha (Indian People's Youth Front) its youth wing, and the BJP Minority Morcha (BJP Minority Front) have limited role to play in the formal candidate selection processes at any local, sub-national, or national election (*The Indian Express* 2010; Vashist 2022). This indicates the limited involvement from the other subsidiary units in the party in the formal candidate selection procedures across national elections.

The RSS played an influential role in the candidate selection processes over the years and therefore, it also serves as a training ground only for its major male leaders currently in the party (Kanungo 2006; 2015; Bacchetta 2004). In some instances, there is evidence in existing work that the RSS directly participates in the decision-making processes with the party's CEC on candidates and election campaigns (Basu 2016, 162). The informal influence of the RSS in candidate selection processes has a detrimental effect on women's active electoral participation through the party, since women are not formally allowed to join the RSS (Basu 2016, 163). However, they have accessed political power and visibility through their welfare work in Rashtra Sevika Samiti and through family ties to male RSS members (Basu 2016, 163). My interviews with active party members indicate that apart from the RSS, the other subsidiary organization informally affiliated to the party like the Rashtra Sevika Samiti have limited influence in the candidate selection processes during national elections. Moreover, there is limited evidence in the existing literature that the Rashtra Sevika Samiti plays as significant an informal role in the BJP's candidate selection processes as

the RSS. However, there are some instances where women politicians like Mridula Sinha, a Rashtra Sevika, became a member of the BJP's National Executive in 2010 (Basu 2016, 163). Similarly, Karuna Shukla, who has twice served as a BJP MP and party leader, is Atal Behari Vajpayee's niece and worked for the Rashtra Sevika Samiti before her foray in electoral politics (Basu 2016, 163). An active member of the party stated in an interview:

> On several occasions the RSS directly participates in the party's decision-making by negotiating with the CEC on party candidates and election campaigns. It also tries to exercise direct control over the party by having its active members serve as BJP's district, state and national organizational secretaries or leaders. Whereas women in the Rashtra Sevika Samiti are mostly involved in the welfare activities of the party. (Chandra Kumar Bose, interview with the author, Zoom, May 2022)

The informal nexus between the RSS and the BJP constrains the selection of women candidates for national elections, as women are not permitted to formally participate as volunteers or party workers in the RSS. The only subsidiary organizations that women are allowed to join are the BJP's Mahila Morcha (Women's Front) and Rashtra Sevika Samiti, but these organizations have limited influence in the party's candidate selection processes. A national woman spokesperson for the party, stated in an interview:

> Women are preferred in the party as vote mobilizers in the rural areas, campaign organizers, and social welfare workers, but are not considered to be potential candidates as much as male party workers to run for sub-national or national level elections. However, over the years few women have gained some visibility in the party through their welfare work in the BJP's Mahila Morcha and through their family ties to male RSS members. Yet, these few active women workers are usually side-lined in the regular decision-making affairs of the party and are primarily involved in its welfare activities through its subsidiary organizations. (Anila Singh, interview with the author, Zoom, August 2022)

These statements suggest a potential institutional bias in the party's formal mechanisms, which might unintentionally disadvantage active women workers in its subsidiary units. Moreover, it also highlights that the women members of the BJP's Mahila Morcha (Women's Front) are generally trained to help as canvassers and support the party's men to run their electoral campaigns effectively.

Much like the presidentship in the INC's Mahila Congress (frontal women's organization) which was limited to dynastic women politicians, the presidentship in BJP's Mahila Morcha (Women's Front) was also limited to elite women politicians like Smriti Irani and Vanathi Srinivasan. Irani is a popular celebrity, while the current president of the Mahila Morcha is Vanathi Srinivasan who has family ties with male RSS members in the party. Thus, it is evident that presidentship in the women's organizations in both the major parties are elitist with limited opportunities for local women leaders to access the leadership positions even in their subsidiary organizations. This

eventually limits the scope for women to be involved in their party's formal selectorate and candidate selection processes.

3.2.8. Selectorate and implications on women's candidacies: An analysis

In both the INC and the BJP, power is vested in a small number of party elites who select the candidates for national elections. My interviews with the party elites and poll strategists confirm that primarily candidate selection in national elections is carried out with recommendations from senior party elites, but the final decision is always made by smaller, national executive bodies headed by the party president in both the parties. Ordinary party members select only the lowest level of committee members and have little voice in the national affairs and formal candidate selection processes in both the parties. The centralized formal candidate selection processes and selectorate have a detrimental effect on women's candidacies as they have limited opportunities to influence their party nominations during national elections.

My interviews with active party members also indicate that the formal criterion for nomination of candidates in national elections is often dependent on "winnability or merit". The existing literature also highlights that selection is dependent on the holistic judgement on winning prospects of the candidate, and the general rule of thumb is that incumbents get nominated unless they are perceived to be no longer likely to win (Farooqui and Sridharan 2014; Verma 2021; Ruchika Singh 2015). While the importance of nominating winnable candidates is paramount for a party's consideration of electoral success, the formal candidate selection processes and the selectorate in both the parties might be generally biased against nominating women candidates for national elections. In the INC, there is limited involvement of affiliated frontal party organizations like the Mahila Congress (women's wing) or NSUI, in the candidate selection processes at the national level. Moreover, the Mahila Congress (women's wing) of the INC is a dormant organisation and has failed to create a pool of potential women candidates for national elections in the past two decades.

Similarly, the informal nexus between the RSS and the BJP limits the pool of women candidates in national elections since women are not officially allowed to join the RSS as volunteers or party workers. The RSS primarily recommends male candidates for candidacies, while the Rashtra Sevika Samiti have limited opportunities to recommend names of potential women candidates for national elections. Consequently, the formal selectorate within the BJP faces considerable pressure to prioritize nominations for active RSS men in national elections. Furthermore, apart from the RSS, the other subsidiary organization affiliated to the BJP like the BJP's Mahila Morcha's National President (Women's Front) holds an ex-officio position in the CEC of BJP during national elections. However, my elite interview with a woman party spokesperson suggests that the women members of the BJP's Mahila Morcha (Women's Front) are generally trained to help as canvassers and support the party's men to run their electoral campaigns effectively and are side-lined in the regular decision-making affairs of the party. Thus, the centralized formal selectorate and the limited involvement of affiliated subsidiary women's organizations in both the parties in

the candidate selection processes constrain the opportunities of women as electoral candidates in national elections.

The limited involvement of affiliated subsidiary women's organizations in the formal candidate selection processes within both the parties highlight the underlying traditional gender biases that might persist within these parties. This limited involvement suggests that women's perspectives and contributions are not valued equally, perpetuating a male-dominated political culture in both the parties. The presence of subsidiary women's wing within both the parties is symbolic rather than substantive. The limited involvement of these subsidiary women's wing in the formal candidate selection processes suggests that their role is primarily to showcase the party's commitment to issues related to gender without translating this commitment into their real power and influence within the party's hierarchy. Moreover, the subsidiary women's organizations are often better positioned to advocate for women candidates and address gender-specific barriers to political participation. The dormant role of the Mahila Congress in the INC and their limited presence in the candidate selection processes means that there is less advocacy for women candidates in the party, resulting in few women candidates being nominated in national elections. Similarly, the limited presence of most members of Mahila Morcha (women's wing) of the BJP in the candidate selection processes might deter the party's ability to identify potential active women candidates and address gender imbalances in candidate nominations in national elections.

3.3. Gender composition of the formal selectorate: Comparing the INC and BJP

This section analyzes the gender composition of the formal selectorate within the two parties. By examining this aspect, this section elucidates the patterns that exist in the representation of women within the formal decision-making bodies responsible for candidate selection in the parties, shedding light on their impact on women's limited candidacies in national elections.

3.3.1. Limited number of women in the formal selectorate of the INC

Over the last decade within the party's national leadership structures, women party members are typically underrepresented in the formal selectorate. There are only 4 (29%) women members in the CEC, which reduced to 3 (27%) across the past two national election cycles (2014 and 2019). The number of women are even lower in the other internal structures of the party which constitutes its formal primary units. Tables 1-3 and 2-3 show the gender composition of the party's formal internal organisations, across national elections held in 2014 and 2019.

Table 1-3: Gender composition in INC's decision-making structures (2014)

Internal structures	Total number of party members	Total number of men members	Percentage (%) of men members	Total number of women members	Percentage (%) of women members
Central Election Committee (CEC)	14	10	71%	4	29%
Screening Committee	40	35	88%	5	12%

AICC (Office bearers)	57	51	90%	6	10%
State leadership (PCC presidents)	36	36	100%	0	00%

Source: Compiled by (Basu 2016, 152)

Table 2-3: Gender composition in INC's decision-making structures (2019)

Internal structures	Total number of party members	Total number of men members	Percentage (%) of men members	Total number of women members	Percentage (%) of women members
Central election committee (CEC)	11	8	73%	3	27%
Screening Committee	50	44	88%	6	12%
AICC (Office bearers)	104	94	90%	10	10%
State leadership (PCC presidents)	30	29	97%	1	3%

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from INC's official website at https://www.inc.in/

Table 1-3 shows that there are only five women out of forty members in the Screening Committee (SC), which recommends potential candidates to the Central Election Committee (CEC) for nominations in national election. Moreover, there are only four women out of fourteen members in the CEC, with whom the party president consults before taking the final decision on candidate selection during national election. The number of women in the SC and the CEC of the party has not increased before the national election of 2019. This highlights the underrepresentation of women in key decision-making bodies within the party, which play pivotal roles in selecting candidates for national elections.

My interview with an active party member further confirms that women are given limited opportunities to become active members of the formal selectorate for candidate selection in the party. An active member of the party in an interview stated:

> One important reason which deters women from entering highest decision-making organs in the party, is that a bunch of political meetings happen in the evenings over a couple of drinks where men get together and discuss the party's agendas. In this type of a cultural set up if women participate in such gatherings and meetings, they are frowned upon. So, if women mingle and mix with men, then more people will speak against the women even when they do not have any negative agenda against the party. These are standard reasons to not let women be part of the highest decision-making organs of the party. (Rajeev Gowda, interview with the author, Zoom, July 2022)

This statement highlights that women party members have limited access to positions that are responsible for candidate selection and there is an underlying sexism among party elites. The underrepresentation of women in the formal selectorate of the INC can have significant

ramifications for women's political representation in national politics. When women are excluded from formal decision-making bodies within the party, they are less likely to have their perspectives and interests considered in the candidate selection process. This lack of representation can perpetuate a cycle where women are marginalized from political power and resources, making it more difficult for them to advance their political ambitions.

3.3.2. Limited number of women in the formal selectorate of the BJP

Women party members are poorly represented in the BJP's internal organizations which forms the formal selectorate for national elections. Tables 3-3 and 4-3 show the gender composition in the party's formal internal organisations, across national elections held in 2014 and 2019.

Table 3-3: Gender composition in BJP's decision-making structures (2014)

Internal structures	Total number of party members	Total number of men members	Percentage (%) of men members	Total number of women members	Percentage (%) of women members
National Executive	74	52	70%	22	30%
Office-bearers	54	45	84%	9	16%
Central Election Committee (CEC)	15	13	87%	2	13%
State leadership (presidents)	37	36	97%	1	3%

Source: Compiled by (Basu 2016, 153)

Table 4-3: Gender composition in BJP's decision-making structures (2019)

Internal structures	Total number of party members	Total number of men members	Percentage (%) of men members	Total number of women members	Percentage (%) of women members
National Executive	104	58	56%	46	44%
Office-bearers	50	40	80%	10	20%
Central Election Committee (CEC)	15	13	87%	2	13%
State leadership (presidents)	37	36	97%	1	3%

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from BJP's official website at https://www.bjp.org/home

The party president in consultation with the Central Election Committee (CEC) makes the final decisions on candidate selection during national elections. Tables 3-3 and 4-3 show that in the BJP, women members are poorly represented in their CEC, highlighting their limited role in the formal selectorate for candidate selection in the party. My interviews with an active party member and a scholar further suggests that women have limited opportunities to become active members of the

formal selectorate for candidate selection in the party. A prominent woman spokesperson of the party stated in the interview:

> Despite having a hierarchical structure in the party, majority of the women members in the BJP are given lesser important roles in the formal internal party structures. They are preferred as spokespersons, canvassers, general secretaries etc. in the present day and are mostly side-lined from the party's formal selectorate positions which is responsible for candidate selection in national or state-level elections. In India, women have to battle out in every career and profession, and a political career is no different. (Anila Singh, interview with the author, Zoom, August 2022)

Furthermore, the scholar Praveen Rai stated in another interview:

> Women have equal opportunities to join political parties as members and canvassers, but they face invisible and subtle discrimination when it comes to allotment of legislative seats and party positions. National elections are a do or die battle in India for men dominated political class and parties, which wrongly perpetrate the misconception that women are weaklings and incompetent in winning elections. Therefore, equal rights for men and women in Indian politics is a utopian dream, as in reality, it is not a level-playing field due to deep-rooted patriarchal system of society and hegemonic masculinity. (Praveen Rai, interview with the author, Zoom, June 2022)

These statements suggest that the limited representation of women in the highest decision-making bodies of the party might be influenced by underlying gender biases and potentially ingrained sexist attitudes among party elites. This limited presence of women in the highest decision-making structures of the party might contribute to a broader gender gap in their political candidacies during national elections. When women do not see themselves represented well within the decision-making structures of their party, they might be less inclined to engage in party politics or pursue leadership positions themselves.

3.4. Formal selectorate and implications on women's candidacy

The existing literature on women's underrepresentation in Indian national politics highlight that political parties are biased against women, as evident in their record in nominating limited number of women candidates in national elections (S. M. Rai 2012; Spary 2020; P. Rai 2017; Raychaudhury 2023). My additional evidence presented in this chapter aligns with the claims made in the existing literature, emphasizing that political parties act as significant gatekeepers in deterring women from participating as electoral candidates in Indian national politics.

My analysis reveals that the underlying institutional gender bias in both the major parties of India, might deter women from accessing national politics as electoral candidates. My evidence suggests that the centralization of formal selectorate processes and candidate selection methods potentially create institutional barriers that disproportionately hinder the selection of women candidates, as these mechanisms often consolidate decision-making power among male party elites, who might not prioritize gender diversity. Additionally, the limited influence of affiliated subsidiary women's organizations in candidate selection processes within both the parties, might curtail women's

ability to assert influence over their nominations for national elections. This marginalization of women's groups/organizations within party structures can reinforce patriarchal norms, perpetuating the perception of political leadership and decision-making as predominantly male spheres. The underlying gender biases are evident in the higher prevalence of male leaders in powerful party positions and the limited opportunities for women to influence critical decisions. This practice might reflect and perpetuate societal views that question women's capabilities in leadership roles. When the role of subsidiary women's organizations in both the parties are side-lined and limited in scope, it might eventually discourage women's political participation and leadership within the party. Women within the party can feel that their contributions are undervalued, leading to disengagement and a lack of motivation to pursue higher political ambitions and this dynamic perpetuates the gender imbalances in political representation.

By limiting the role of subsidiary women's organizations in the candidate selection processes both the parties fail to fully leverage their potential to advocate for gender equality and promote women's candidacy in national elections. Additionally, women's underrepresentation in the highest decision-making structures in both the major parties of India, limits their formal access to positions responsible for candidate selection and reduces their influence in nominating women candidates for national elections. These systemic limitations to women from decision-making processes in the parties undermine the opportunities for them to actively shape the candidate selection process.

Despite the ideological differences between the INC and the BJP, both the parties have nominated a limited number of women candidates in national elections held between 2004 and 2019. Indian society remains deeply patriarchal, which influence the political parties and attitudes towards women in leadership roles (Dagar 2011). Both the parties operate within this societal framework which often hinders the political advancement of women. Both the parties prioritize winning elections, which often leads them to nominate candidates they perceive as most likely to secure votes. This pragmatic approach often outweighs the ideological commitments to gender equality in the INC and pushes it to nominate limited number of women candidates in national elections. Similarly, the BJP's conservative and nationalist ideology can prioritize traditional roles for women and a combination of its ideological commitments with pragmatic electoral strategies pushes it to nominate limited number of women candidates in national elections. My findings show that in both the parties, power structures are often dominated by male leaders who might be less inclined to promote women candidates. Potential women candidates might also lack the same level of support, mentorship, and resources that their male counterparts enjoy, making it harder for them to rise through the party ranks and secure nominations in national elections.

My findings reveal that despite Sonia Gandhi's extended tenure as president of the Indian National Congress (INC), the party has consistently nominated relatively few women candidates in national elections, highlighting a contradiction between its pro-women rhetoric and its actual candidate selection practices. Over the past two decades, the INC's commitment to promoting women's representation has been limited in practice, with few substantial efforts to increase the number of women candidates in national elections. Similarly, the BJP has never appointed a woman as a party

president, highlighting a lack of political will to ensure equitable leadership opportunities for women within the party. Both parties engage in tokenism, nominating a few high-profile women candidates to signal a commitment to gender equality while making minimal changes to the overall representation of women candidates in national elections. This allows them to project a progressive image while preserving the gender-exclusive status quo. Despite their differing ideological foundations, both the INC and BJP are influenced by practical considerations such as electoral strategy/pragmatism, internal party dynamics, and prevailing societal norms, which have contributed to the limited nomination of women candidates in national elections between 2004 and 2019. These findings are explored and examined in greater detail in the subsequent chapters of my dissertation. The formal barriers within party structures compel party elites to rely on informal, often exclusionary criteria when selecting women candidates for national elections in India. The subsequent chapters examines the informal selection processes and practices favored by the two major parties, revealing how entrenched gender biases in both general and reserved seats persistently limit women's opportunities as viable electoral candidates in Indian politics.

Chapter 4: Limitations of informal selection criteria on women in general seats

4.1. Introduction

This research builds on existing research to examine the significance of informal selection criteria such as wealth, higher education, criminality, and dynastic affiliations in determining candidates' electability in the national parliament (Sircar 2018b; Vaishnav 2011b; Chandra 2016; Sircar 2018a). My study builds on existing literature by examining how these informal selection criteria influence the nomination of "general" women candidates by the parties in national elections. It undertakes a systematic comparison of the informal selection criteria exhibited by the candidates across normative gender categories, specifically focusing on those nominated to the general seats in national elections by the two major parties, namely the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), spanning the period from 2004 to 2019.

Through an intra-party analysis of the informal selection criteria exhibited by all candidates nominated to the general seats, I aim to uncover the preferred informal selection criteria in parties for women that contribute to limiting their opportunities as electoral candidates in the seats. I argue that the informal selection criteria shape the preferred qualities sought after by parties when nominating "general" women candidates and constrains their opportunities to participate as electoral candidates in national elections. This perspective offers insights into the dynamics of candidate selection processes in Indian parties to highlight the challenges faced by women seeking party nominations in general seats.

My findings suggest a pattern in the selection of women candidates characterized by a preference for informal criteria such as wealth, dynastic ties, criminality, and higher-education. This trend appears consistent across both major political parties in most national elections. The reliance on these informal selection criteria emphasizes a systemic issue within the parties, where traditional gender norms and biases significantly influence the candidate selection process. These norms often portray women as secondary or dependent, reinforcing the belief that only women with exceptional financial resources or from political backgrounds are suitable for electoral candidacy. By prioritizing women who fit these informal criteria, parties inadvertently restrict opportunities for a broader range of women to engage in electoral politics at the national level. Overall, my findings highlight the complex interplay between informal selection criteria, gender and intra-party dynamics in candidate selection processes, emphasizing the challenges that "general" women face in achieving equitable representation in national politics.

The general seats in the national parliament are characterized by their competitiveness, as they are open to be contested by any citizen above the age of 25 years, regardless of gender, language, creed, educational background, occupation, income, religion, social background etc. This inclusivity ensures a diverse pool of potential candidates for these seats. Moreover, approximately seventy-six per cent of members in the directly elected Lok Sabha of the national parliament represent from these general seats, indicating their significant role in shaping the composition of the legislature (Ambagudia 2019; 2020). Additionally, all residents above the age of 18 years in

these seats, irrespective of their gender, language, socio-economic status, or cultural identities, have the right to vote for their preferred candidates using the "first-past-the-post" (FPTP) system (Ambagudia 2020). This voting system emphasizes the importance of appealing to a wide range of constituents to secure electoral success in the general seats. In the general seats, despite the absence of formal entry barriers to contest national elections, the centralized candidate selection procedures in both the national parties influences the nominations of candidates (Chhibber 2013; Farooqui and Sridharan 2014). The parties rely on informal criteria for the selection of their candidates in the politically competitive general/unreserved seats.

4.1.1. Research methods

In this chapter, I employ simple descriptive tools in excel to conduct an intra-party analysis of candidates based on their gender normative categories—specifically, women and men nominated to the general seats. The objective is to assess to what extent each party prefers informal selection criteria for nominating women candidates. To compare the wealth of the candidates based on gender, simple descriptive tools are used, and a difference in means t-test is employed to determine the statistical significance of the findings in each national election. Few difference in proportions tests are used to determine the statistically significant difference between the two gender categories regarding the informal selection criteria of dynastic ties, criminality, and higher-education. Additionally, to compare the wealth of dynastic candidates with non-dynastic candidates, simple descriptive tools are used alongside difference in means t-tests to ascertain the statistical significance of the findings in each national election.

Moreover, to further investigate the wealth disparities, the research contrasts the wealth of dynastic women candidates with non-dynasts, again using simple descriptive tools and difference in means t-tests to determine statistical significance. To compare the wealth of criminal women and criminal men with non-criminals, the same methods are used to assess statistical significance. Furthermore, the empirical findings and the arguments are substantiated with valuable information from semi-structured elite interviews with politicians, poll strategists, and scholars based in India. Additionally, I also use examples to substantiate the arguments regarding the type of women that the parties prefer to nominate as candidates to run for national elections.

4.1.2. Organization of the chapter

The chapter is structured into two main sections to provide a comprehensive analysis of the preferred informal selection criteria of candidates based on their gender within the INC and the BJP in the general seats. The first section systematically examines the intra-party dynamics within the INC and the BJP, focusing on the informal criteria preferred for candidate selection based on gender in the seats. The concluding section summarizes the findings from both the parties and discusses the broader implications of the study on the persistent under-representation of "general" women candidates in national politics.

4.2. Preferred informal selection criteria for candidates based on their gender: Intra-party dynamics in INC and BJP

This section presents my findings on the gender outcomes in the candidate selection process within the INC and the BJP and highlights the existing disparities and biases. The systematic examination of the informal selection criteria suggests that "general" women often face different standards compared to their male counterparts on certain informal criteria when being considered as electoral candidates within the parties. This disparity and demand for women candidates who fulfill certain informal criteria in the parties perpetuates the underrepresentation of women in Indian national politics.

4.2.1. Gender composition of candidates within the parties in the general seats

The INC and the BJP are the two major parties which nominates candidates who contest national elections in a larger range of general seats across all sub-national states and union territories in India. All the other parties in India are small regional parties whose support bases and nominations are limited and restricted to one or two sub-national states during national elections in India (Ziegfeld 2018). Despite their ideological differences, both the INC and the BJP have consistently nominated an overwhelming proportion of men over women candidates in the general seats. The INC, traditionally positioned as a party advocating for social democracy and inclusive policies, and the BJP, a right-wing party promoting nationalism and conservative values, diverge significantly in their political ideologies (R. Kumar 2009; Soikham 2019; Chhibber and Verma 2019b). However, when it comes to gender inclusivity both the parties show a similar pattern as they nominated a proportionately low number of women candidates in the seats highlighting a systemic issue of gender bias within their ranks. Tables 1-4 and 2-4 show the proportion of the candidates, based on their gender, nominated by the INC and the BJP in the general seats.

Table 1-4: Gender composition of the candidates nominated by the INC in general seats

Year	Total number of candidates	Total number of men (%)	Total number of women (%)
2004	310	281 (90%)	29 (10%)
2009	309	280 (90%)	29 (10%)
2014	351	306 (87%)	45 (13%)
2019	318	282 (89%)	36 (11%)

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

Table 2-4: Gender composition of the candidates nominated by the BJP in general seats

Year	Total number of candidates	Total number of men (%)	Total number of women (%)
2004	276	251 (91%)	25 (9%)
2009	310	280 (90%)	30 (10%)
2014	329	300 (91%)	29 (9%)
2019	337	292 (87%)	45 (13%)

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

From the data presented in the tables, it is evident that the overall nominations of women candidates was indeed proportionately lower than men in the seats across the years mentioned in both the parties. This trend shows a lack of commitment to gender inclusivity and equitable representation, suggesting that regardless of their ideological differences, both the parties fall short in promoting gender diversity in their candidate selection processes. The data also reveal that the gender gap in nominations is likely driven by various informal factors influencing candidate selection within the parties.

4.2.2. Influence of wealth on the selection of women candidates within parties

Electoral campaigns are expensive and apart from the costs of travel and advertisements, the contesting candidates are also expected to pay for road shows, rallies, and public-speaking grand events (Sircar 2018b). The existing studies indicate that the financial capacity of a candidate matters for developing a good electoral organization and paying for campaign expenses in India (Tiwari 2014; Sircar 2018b). Moreover, parties in India tend to favour wealthy candidates as they are perceived to have higher electability due to their financial resources and ability to fund their own electoral campaigns (Verniers and Jaffrelot 2020; Sircar 2018b). My findings show that the INC nominated both wealthy men and women candidates in the seats. There are minor variations in the mean wealth between men and women candidates across the national elections. My findings show that there are no statistically significant differences in the wealth levels of men and women candidates, suggesting that women candidates in the INC are likely to be as wealthy as their men counterparts, in the general seats.

Table 3-4 presents a comparison of wealth[8] between men and women candidates nominated by the INC, in the general seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 3-4: Comparison of wealth between men and women candidates in the INC in general seats

Year	Total number of men candidates	Mean wealth of men candidates in Indian rupees	Median wealth of men candidates in Indian rupees	Total number of women candidates	Mean wealth of women candidates in Indian rupees	Median wealth of women candidates in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	281	781 lakhs	60 lakhs	29	374 lakhs	89 lakhs	0.807
2009	280	820 lakhs	185 lakhs	29	1261 lakhs	229 lakhs	0.591
2014	306	3683 lakhs	434 lakhs	45	1782 lakhs	313 lakhs	0.81
2019	282	2160 lakhs	517 lakhs	36	2185 lakhs	824 lakhs	0.995

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

[8] The wealth calculation involves subtracting liabilities from assets, with both clearly listed and differentiated within the electoral affidavits. Monetary values are standardized if necessary, and any discrepancies or missing values are addressed appropriately.

My findings are not statistically significant in any of the national elections, and my descriptive statistics show that in the national elections of 2009 and 2019 the mean wealth of women candidates tend to be higher than the men. The national election of 2009 was held post the global financial crisis of 2008 which had significant repercussions worldwide and India was no different (Loxley 2012). In the aftermath of the financial crisis, the INC embarked on a notably expensive election campaign in 2009, characterized by substantial investments in advertisements, rallies, and other promotional activities (Chauchard 2018b; Sircar 2018b). This might have pushed the INC party elites to select women candidates who tend to be wealthier than the men in the national election of 2009, to offset the risk of their electability in the seats. Moreover, the women candidates nominated in the general seats are likely to be as wealthy as their men counterparts in the INC across national elections.

Similarly, candidates with enough capacity to fund their campaigns through personal wealth are usually preferred by the party elites in the BJP. My findings show that the BJP also preferred to nominate both wealthy men and women candidates to the seats. There are minor variations in the mean wealth between men and women candidates nominated by the BJP in the national elections of 2004 and 2009. Moreover, the women candidates tend to be wealthier than the men in the national elections of 2014 and 2019. Table 4-4 presents a comparison of wealth[9] between men and women candidates nominated by the BJP, in the general seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 4-4: Comparison of wealth between men and women candidates in the BJP in general seats

Year	Total number of men candidates	Mean wealth of men candidates in Indian rupees	Median wealth of men candidates in Indian rupees	Total number of women candidates	Mean wealth of women candidates in Indian rupees	Median wealth of women candidates in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	251	88 lakhs	43 lakhs	25	129 lakhs	47 lakhs	0.418
2009	280	283 lakhs	89 lakhs	30	239 lakhs	66 lakhs	0.807
2014	300	1010 lakhs	264 lakhs	29	3868 lakhs	844 lakhs	0*
2019	292	1205 lakhs	395 lakhs	45	2107 lakhs	549 lakhs	0.013*

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

My findings are statistically significant in the national elections of 2014 and 2019, and my descriptive statistics also show that there are minor variations in the mean wealth between men and women candidates nominated by the BJP in the national elections of 2004 and 2009. In the national elections of 2014 and 2019 women candidates nominated by the BJP tend to be wealthier

[9] The wealth calculation involves subtracting liabilities from assets, with both clearly listed and differentiated within the electoral affidavits. Monetary values are standardized if necessary, and any discrepancies or missing values are addressed appropriately.

than their men in the general seats. For instance, in the national election of 2019, the men and women candidates reported a mean wealth of Rs. 1205 lakhs and Rs. 2107 lakhs respectively- approximately 1200 times and 2200 times respectively wealthier than the nominal per capita income of India in 2019-2020 of Rs. 94,270- which made them wealthier than the general population (*The Economic Times* 2022).

The national election of 2014 was seen as a crucial turning point in Indian politics as the INC which was in power after the 2004 and 2009 national elections was embroiled in several corruption scandals and faced significant anti-incumbency sentiments (Sardesai 2015). The BJP, the main opposition party of the INC aimed to capitalize on this discontent and position itself as an agent of change and the high stakes of the election justified a substantial investment in the campaign to maximize their chances of winning a significant majority (Sardesai 2015). Given the INC's established presence and resources, the BJP had to match and surpass the incumbent party's campaign efforts to gain a competitive edge. This meant that the BJP would mobilize significant funds to ensure that their campaign was more visible, persuasive, and effective in reaching voters across diverse regions of India (Vaishnav and Smogard 2014). Thus, the party might have preferred to nominate wealthier women candidates over their men in the general seats to offset the risk of their electability in the seats.

Building on the momentum of their landslide victory in the national election of 2014, the BJP aimed to maintain and strengthen their dominance in the national parliament. The success of the party's leadership needed to be effectively communicated to the electorate, requiring significant financial investment in media and outreach activities to reinforce their narrative of development and strong governance (Vaishnav 2019). Moreover, the national election of 2019 also saw the INC aligning with several regional parties to counter the BJP's influence and to outmaneuver the opposition parties the BJP engaged in an expensive campaign to ensure their message reached the masses and to prevent any dilution of their voter base due to regional and local dynamics (Jaffrelot and Verniers 2020). By nominating wealthier women candidates over men in the national election of 2019, the BJP ensured that these women candidates had the financial capability to compete robustly in the general seats, thereby enhancing their chances of winning.

My findings suggest that women candidates who are likely to be as wealthy as their men counterparts are preferred by the INC in the general seats. A similar pattern was prevalent in the BJP during the national elections of 2004 and 2009 in the general seats. However, the BJP nominated wealthier women candidates over men in the general seats during the national elections of 2014 and 2019. The preference for wealthy women candidates by both the parties in the general seats suggest that economic barriers are a substantial impediment to political candidacy for women. Women, who generally have less access to financial resources compared to men due to systemic gender inequalities, face higher thresholds for entering national politics in India (Jeffery and Basu 1997, 2; Bhavnani 2009). The necessity of possessing substantial wealth to be considered a viable electoral candidate within both the parties means that only a small subset of women can

realistically pursue political careers, significantly narrowing the pool of potential women candidates.

4.2.3. Influence of dynastic ties on the selection of women candidates within parties

A quarter of Indian politicians at the national parliament are dynastic, on average, between 2004 and 2014: 20% in 2004, 30% in 2009, and 22% in 2014 (Chandra 2016, 15). The two largest parties INC and BJP have significant numbers of dynastic members of parliament (MPs), albeit with variation in the degree of dynasticism across the parties (Chandra 2016, 15). The INC has long been characterized by its dynastic leadership, with key party positions often held by members of the Nehru-Gandhi family across generations. This dynastic tendency has shaped its political culture and organizational structure, reinforcing the centrality of familial lineage in its leadership choices and decision-making processes (Guha 2010; Verniers and Jaffrelot 2020). On the other hand, although the BJP became electorally successful in the 1980s, yet it built its own range of dynastic leaders over the past few decades.

Dynastic politics has become a pervasive feature in Indian elections because it offers a sense of continuity and familiarity to voters, often translating into trust and loyalty towards political families (Chandra 2016; Chandra and Umaira 2011). Additionally, candidates with dynastic backgrounds in politics have established networks and resources, making it easier for them to mobilize support and manage successful electoral campaigns (Chandra 2016). My findings show that both the parties nominated a sizeable number of dynastic candidates in the general seats. Moreover, women candidates in both the parties benefitted more than men for their dynastic ties to secure their nominations in the general seats. Tables 5-4 and 6-4 show the number/proportion of dynastic candidates, nominated by the INC and BJP in the general seats, respectively.

Table 5-4: Proportion of dynastic candidates nominated by the INC in general seats

Year	Total number of candidates nominated	Total number of dynastic candidates (%)	Total number of non-dynastic candidates (%)
2004	310	59 (19%)	251 (81%)
2009	309	81 (26%)	228 (74%)
2014	351	96 (27%)	255 (73%)
2019	318	68 (21%)	250 (79%)

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info and secondary sources[10]

[10] The coding of candidates' dynastic ties was conducted manually using online secondary resources, which included English language newspapers like Times of India, Hindustan Times, Deccan Chronicle, and web-based news sources like Quint, Wire, Scroll.in and Print among others.

Table 6-4: Proportion of dynastic candidates nominated by the BJP in general seats

Year	Total number of candidates nominated	Total number of dynastic candidates (%)	Total number of non-dynastic candidates (%)
2004	276	23 (8%)	253 (92%)
2009	310	39 (13%)	271 (87%)
2014	329	53 (16%)	276 (84%)
2019	337	56 (17%)	281 (83%)

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info and secondary sources[11]

My findings show that the INC tend to nominate a higher proportion of dynastic candidates compared to the BJP across all the national elections. The BJP, while nominating fewer dynastic candidates than the INC, has also shown an increasing trend in the proportion of dynastic candidates over the years. My finding confirms that the attractiveness of a political career has surged in India since the 1990s, driven by the increasing returns associated with holding national power (Chandra 2016). As economic liberalisation and political decentralization have expanded the scope and benefits of political office in India, including access to resources, influence, and opportunities for patronage, relatives of politicians are more inclined to enter electoral politics. This trend has contributed to the increasing prevalence of dynastic politics in India, as established political families leverage their name-recognition, networks, and existing political capital to secure positions for their kin, perpetuating their influence and control over the political landscape. Thus, both the major parties in India, despite their differing public stances, recognize the electoral advantages of nominating candidates with dynastic backgrounds in the general seats. My findings also point out that dynastic ties benefitted women candidates more than men in the general seats within both the parties. Tables 7-4 and 8-4 show the proportion of dynastic candidates, based on their gender, nominated by the INC and the BJP in the general seats, respectively.

Table 7-4: Proportion of dynastic candidates based on gender nominated by INC in general seats

Year	Total men candidates	Total dynastic men candidates (%)	Total non-dynastic men candidates (%)	Total women candidates	Total dynastic women candidates (%)	Total non-dynastic women candidates (%)	Z-values (Difference in proportion)
2004	281	45 (16%)	236 (84%)	29	14 (48%)	15 (52%)	-4.35*
2009	280	61 (22%)	219 (78%)	29	20 (69%)	9 (31%)	-5.69*
2014	306	69 (23%)	237 (77%)	45	27 (60%)	18 (40%)	-4.66*
2019	282	50 (18%)	232 (82%)	36	18 (50%)	18 (50%)	-4.15*

[11] The coding of candidates' dynastic ties was conducted manually using online secondary resources, which included English language newspapers like Times of India, Hindustan Times, Deccan Chronicle, and web-based news sources like Quint, Wire, Scroll.in and Print among others.

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info and secondary sources[12] (Comparing the proportions of dynastic men and dynastic women candidates)

Table 8-4: Proportion of dynastic candidates based on gender nominated by BJP in general seats

Year	Total men candidates	Total dynastic men candidates (%)	Total non-dynastic men candidates (%)	Total women candidates	Total dynastic women candidates (%)	Total non-dynastic women candidates (%)	Z-values (Difference in proportion)
2004	251	15 (6%)	236 (94%)	25	8 (32%)	17 (68%)	-3.90*
2009	280	31 (11%)	249 (89%)	30	8 (27%)	22 (73%)	-2.37*
2014	300	40 (13%)	260 (87%)	29	13 (45%)	16 (55%)	-3.92*
2019	292	32 (11%)	260 (89%)	45	24 (53%)	21 (47%)	-5.47*

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info and secondary sources[13] (Comparing the proportions of dynastic men and dynastic women candidates)

My findings in tables 7-4 and 8-4 show that in all the four national elections the observed differences in proportions between dynastic men and dynastic women candidates are statistically significant in both the parties. Proportionately, more women candidates nominated to the general seats are dynastic compared to the men in the parties. Existing accounts show that elected women candidates access national politics through dynastic channels in major Asian democracies like Japan, India, Indonesia, and Bangladesh (Dalton 2015; Basu 2016; Wardani and Subekti 2021; Md. M. R. Khan and Ara 2023). This is reflected in the nomination patterns of women candidates for general seats, and it suggests that dynastic ties play a significant role in shaping the political trajectories of women candidates in both the parties.

The preference for women dynasts over men dynasts in the general seats by the INC and BJP restricts the pool for women candidates by limiting opportunities for non-dynastic women and reinforces elite representation. It also reinforces gender biases in the candidate selection processes within both the parties as the practice of nominating dynastic women can perpetuate the notion that women need familial political ties to succeed in politics. This undermines efforts to achieve gender equality and indicates a dependency in both the parties on established political families to fulfill gender representation mandates. This can further lead to a cyclic dependency where only

[12] The coding of candidates' dynastic ties was conducted manually using online secondary resources, which included English language newspapers like Times of India, Hindustan Times, Deccan Chronicle, and web-based news sources like Quint, Wire, Scroll.in and Print among others.

[13] The coding of candidates' dynastic ties was conducted manually using online secondary resources, which included English language newspapers like Times of India, Hindustan Times, Deccan Chronicle, and web-based news sources like Quint, Wire, Scroll.in and Print among others.

certain women from political families continue to dominate in Indian national politics, thus, hindering the democratization and broadening of women's political participation.

4.2.4. Influence of wealth on the selection of dynastic candidates within parties

Dynastic politicians are believed to possess more wealth than non-dynastic politicians as they are expected to inherit it from family members who previously held office (Chandra and Umaira 2011; Chandra 2014; 2016). My finding echoes this claim by showing that the dynastic candidates tend to be wealthier than the non-dynasts nominated to the general seats by the INC during the national election of 2019. In the other national election cycles, there was minimal disparity in wealth between dynastic and non-dynastic candidates nominated to the general seats by the INC. This suggests that wealth was not the only factor influencing the selection of dynastic candidates by the INC. Table 9-4 presents a comparison of wealth between dynastic and non-dynastic candidates nominated by the INC, in the general seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 9-4: Comparison of wealth between dynasts and non-dynasts nominated by INC in general seats

Year	Total number of dynastic candidates	Mean wealth of dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	Median wealth of dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	Total number of non-dynastic candidates	Mean wealth of non-dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	Median wealth of non-dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	59	451 lakhs	123 lakhs	251	815 lakhs	53 lakhs	0.758
2009	81	951 lakhs	326 lakhs	228	830 lakhs	152 lakhs	0.865
2014	96	2368 lakhs	930 lakhs	255	3886 lakhs	286 lakhs	0.725
2019	68	6842 lakhs	1516 lakhs	250	1253 lakhs	441 lakhs	0*

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info and secondary sources[14]

My findings are statistically significant in the national election of 2019 indicating that only in this election year the dynastic candidates nominated to the general seats are wealthier than the non-dynasts. The national election of 2019 was marked by a strong competition from the BJP, under the strong leadership of Narendra Modi, and to counter this formidable challenge, the INC might have selected dynastic candidates who were perceived as stronger, which often included those with substantial financial resources. My finding also suggests that apart from wealth, other factors might have influenced the INC in selecting dynastic candidates in general seats. These factors include political legacy, experience, voter trust, party loyalty and strategic electoral calculations.

[14] The coding of candidates' dynastic ties was conducted manually using online secondary resources, which included English language newspapers like Times of India, Hindustan Times, Deccan Chronicle, and web-based news sources like Quint, Wire, Scroll.in and Print among others.

My interview with an active party member reinstates that dynastic candidates are selected by the INC for factors beyond their wealth. He stated in an interview:

> Dynastic candidates often come with established name recognition, which can be advantageous in elections. This recognition creates a sense of continuity and stability, appealing to voters who have historically supported the family. Dynastic candidates often have a loyal voter base that consistently supports them, providing a reliable source of votes. They usually have extensive exposure to politics from a young age, which provides them with a deeper understanding of political processes and strategies. The party elites see dynastic candidates as more loyal to the party's leadership and its ideology, and this helps to ensure greater internal cohesion. This loyalty can help mitigate internal conflicts and factionalism, promoting unity within the party. Moreover, dynastic candidates often have significant influence over local political dynamics, including control over local party units and grassroots networks. This influence and connections can be crucial in negotiating alliances and securing support from influential local figures. (Rajeev Gowda, interview with the author, Zoom, July 2022)

This statement suggests that dynastic candidates are selected by the INC in the general seats not only for their wealth but also for their established name-recognition, loyal voter bases, their perceived loyalty to party leadership and their significant influence over local political dynamics that help to ensure internal party cohesion and facilitate strategic alliances.

Contrary to this, my findings show that the dynastic candidates nominated to the general seats by the BJP tend to be wealthier than the non-dynasts across all national elections. My finding echoes the existing literature that claims dynastic politicians are believed to possess more wealth than non-dynastic politicians as they are expected to inherit it from family members who previously held political office (Chandra and Umaira 2011; Chandra 2014; 2016). Thus, in the BJP the access to inherited wealth among dynasts tilts the party elites in favour of them in the politically competitive general seats. Table 10-4 presents a comparison of wealth between dynastic and non-dynastic candidates nominated by the BJP, in the general seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 10-4: Comparison of wealth between dynastic and non-dynastic candidates nominated by BJP in general seats

Year	Total number of dynastic candidates	Mean wealth of dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	Median wealth of dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	Total number of non-dynastic candidates	Mean wealth of non-dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	Median wealth of non-dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	23	206 lakhs	90 lakhs	253	82 lakhs	39 lakhs	0.029*
2009	39	462 lakhs	230 lakhs	271	252 lakhs	74 lakhs	0.0307*
2014	53	2452 lakhs	573 lakhs	276	854 lakhs	233 lakhs	0*
2019	56	2435 lakhs	1448 lakhs	281	1094 lakhs	324 lakhs	0*

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info and secondary sources[15]

My findings are statistically significant across all the national elections, suggesting the party's preference for dynastic candidates since they possess inherited wealth over those with modest means in the general seats. The BJP has historically positioned itself against dynastic politics, and it often criticizes the INC for its reliance on family-based political succession, portraying itself as a party that values internal democracy and opportunities for non-dynastic leaders to rise through the party ranks (Chhibber and Jassal 2018; Jaffrelot 2015). In many regions of India, local political dynamics are deeply entrenched in dynastic traditions, therefore, to effectively compete with the INC, which has a history of dynastic politics, the BJP might have adopted a strategy to nominate dynastic candidates with inherited wealth. This adaptation might have helped the BJP resonate with the regional electorates who are accustomed to dynastic representation (Jaffrelot 2015). By selecting dynastic candidates with inherited wealth, the BJP might have ensured that they can run well-funded campaigns, increasing their chances of electoral success. My interview with a poll strategist confirms that while the BJP positions itself against dynastic politics, its practical approach of nominating wealthy dynasts in general seats in national elections reflects a balance between its ideological purity and electoral pragmatism.

The poll strategist stated in an interview:

> By fielding wealthy dynastic candidates in general seats where it made electoral sense, the BJP could maintain a competitive edge without entirely abandoning its ideological stance. This pragmatic approach enabled the party to navigate the complex dynamics of Indian politics effectively. Moreover, the INC has long been associated with dynastic politics, with the Nehru-Gandhi family at its core and controlling the internal dynamics of the party. Thus, to counteract the INC's strongholds, especially in seats where the INC's dynastic candidates had a significant influence, the BJP had to field equally formidable candidates. The dynastic candidates with inherited wealth from the BJP could challenge the INC's dominance in these areas more effectively than newcomers without such advantages. (Abhimanyu Bharti, interview with the author, Zoom, July 2022)

This statement suggests that the BJP's preference for dynastic candidates with inherited wealth was driven by a combination of strategic considerations aimed at enhancing electoral viability, resource mobilization, and regional adaptability to counter its main opposition party, the INC.

4.2.5. Influence of wealth on the selection of dynastic women candidates within parties

My analysis shows that the party elites in both INC and BJP preferred proportionately more women dynasts compared to men in the general seats across all the national elections. Some scholars also argue that parliamentary seats are often allegedly "sold" to aspiring candidates (Nagi 2008; Jensenius 2016). My findings confirm that in the national election of 2019 women dynasts in the

[15] The coding of candidates' dynastic ties was conducted manually using online secondary resources, which included English language newspapers like Times of India, Hindustan Times, Deccan Chronicle, and web-based news sources like Quint, Wire, Scroll.in and Print among others.

INC with access to inherited wealth were more able to garner support for their party nominations in the general seats. Table 11-4 presents a comparison of wealth between women dynasts and non-dynasts nominated by the INC, in the general seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 11-4: Comparison of wealth between women dynasts and non-dynasts nominated by INC in general seats

Year	Total number of women dynasts	Mean wealth of women dynasts in Indian rupees	Median wealth of women dynasts in Indian rupees	Total number of non-dynastic candidates	Mean wealth of non-dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	Median wealth of non-dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	14	564 lakhs	94 lakhs	251	815 lakhs	53 lakhs	0.914
2009	20	1118 lakhs	332 lakhs	228	830 lakhs	152 lakhs	0.8
2014	27	1762 lakhs	576 lakhs	255	3886 lakhs	286 lakhs	0.861
2019	18	2787 lakhs	1182 lakhs	250	1253 lakhs	441 lakhs	0.011*

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info and secondary sources[16]

My findings are statistically significant in the national election of 2019, and in the other national elections there are small variations between the wealth of women dynasts and non-dynasts nominated by the INC in the general seats. The INC has historically benefitted from dynastic politics, where voters show their loyalty to well-established political families (Ziegfeld 2016). The women dynasts nominated by the INC in the general seats tend to be preferred not just for their inherited wealth but also for their political legacy that translate into their loyal voter bases. This preference for women dynasts in the general seats tend to help the INC to retain and mobilize its traditional support bases and offsets the risk of nominating women candidates. However, during the national election of 2019 the BJP was successful in projecting an image of strong and charismatic leadership, and to counterbalance this, the INC might have needed women candidates who could draw significant public and media attention. Thus, the INC might have nominated wealthy women dynasts in the general seats who tend to have the resources that could attract voters and media coverage, helping to counter the BJP's narrative and presence during the national election of 2019.

My interviews with an active party member and a poll strategist suggests that the INC tend to prefer women candidates with dynastic connections for their perceived name-recognition and access to political networks in the general seats. An active member of the party stated in the interview:

[16] The coding of candidates' dynastic ties was conducted manually using online secondary resources, which included English language newspapers like Times of India, Hindustan Times, Deccan Chronicle, and web-based news sources like Quint, Wire, Scroll.in and Print among others.

> To be honest, and to speak practically the number of women who do well in national politics from the Congress party get access to the political space because of their family connections. They are either a politician's wife, or sister, or daughter, or daughter-in-law. Family connections is the largest and the easiest way for women to access the national political space in the party as their family name makes them instantly popular among their political constituents. Moreover, the life of a politician is bizarrely difficult, and it is a full-time job and if there is a party program, you need to be there in every event and get noticed by the party's leadership. Thus, having a popular political family name helps a woman candidate to get noticed by the party's leadership. Additionally, organizing public meetings in an area is a regular affair, a politician must have access to political networks and money to organize such public meetings to discuss the agendas of the party. Therefore, all these might get expensive to bear for a politician. So, women from politically connected and affluent backgrounds have access to these resources and networks to organize public meetings and are preferred candidates of the party. (Rajeev Gowda, interview with the author, Zoom, July 2022)

This statement highlights that the party elites prefer women dynasts due to their established political networks, resources, and name-recognition in the seats. Furthermore, a poll strategist mentioned that " parties look for candidates who are popular in their contesting seat, have a core set of supporters in their area/seat, are loyal towards their party leaders, ideologically aligned with the party, and have adequate access to resources like money and locally embedded political networks. These qualities are usually present among women candidates from reputed political families as their families have a strong political clout within the party and with the popularity of the political family these women dynasts can garner popular support within the party's leadership " (Diggaj Mogra, interview with the author, Zoom, August 2022). For instance, Shruti Choudhury, a woman dynast was nominated by the INC three times since the 2009 national election, she entered politics following the death of her father Surender Singh who was an active politician in the party. She was nominated for the first time to contest the 2009 national election from the Bhiwani-Mahendragarh seat, which was previously represented by her father (Chaudhury 2011; Saini 2014). Her grandfather Bansi Lal, was also a former chief-minister of Haryana, a sub-national state in India, who won the same seat thrice, and her father won the same seat twice before she was nominated to the same seat (Chaudhury 2011; Saini 2014). The party continued to renominate her in all the national elections since 2009 owing to her strong dynastic roots and name-recognition among her political constituents. Similar instances occurred with other women dynasts such as Priya Dutt, Deepa Das Munshi, Jyotsna Mahant, Jyoti Mirdha, and many others who were nominated in seats which were previously won by their family members. Even the then party president, Sonia Gandhi consistently fought the last four national elections (2004 to 2019) from Rae Bareli, a seat which was previously won by her mother-in-law and former prime minister Indira Gandhi four times in the past. These examples and the statements from the interviews suggest that the INC tends to prefer women dynasts for nominations in general seats which are previously won by their family members due their perceived name-recognition and political networks owing to their families.

On the other hand, my findings show that the women dynasts nominated to the general seats by the BJP tend to be wealthier than the non-dynasts in the majority of national elections. My finding echoes the existing literature which highlights that parliamentary seats are sometimes allegedly "sold" to aspiring candidates (Nagi 2008; Jensenius 2016). The women dynasts in the BJP with access to inherited wealth were more equipped to buy their seats during national elections. Table 12-4 presents a comparison of wealth between women dynasts and non-dynasts nominated by the BJP, in the general seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 12-4: Comparison of wealth between women dynasts and non-dynasts nominated by BJP in general seats

Year	Total number of women dynasts	Mean wealth of women dynasts in Indian rupees	Median wealth of women dynasts in Indian rupees	Total number of non-dynastic candidates	Mean wealth of non-dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	Median wealth of non-dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	8	349 lakhs	177 lakhs	253	82 lakhs	39 lakhs	0.005*
2009	8	492 lakhs	407 lakhs	271	252 lakhs	74 lakhs	0.207
2014	13	3859 lakhs	1115 lakhs	276	857 lakhs	234 lakhs	0*
2019	24	3025 lakhs	1660 lakhs	281	1094 lakhs	324 lakhs	0*

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info and secondary sources[17]

My findings are statistically significant in the national elections of 2004, 2014, and 2019, and show that women dynasts nominated to the general seats by the BJP tend to be wealthier than non-dynasts in majority of national elections. My findings suggest that the party elites tend to prefer women dynasts in the seats due to their access to inherited wealth which eventually helps them to fund their own electoral campaigns and supply funds to the party. There might be differences in candidate selection strategy for nominating women dynasts within the INC and the BJP in general seats. The INC's origin is rooted in the Indian independence movement, and it has a strong focus on legacy, tradition, and relies on established political families for leadership within the party (Chhibber 2013). The INC has a long history associated with the Nehru-Gandhi family and beyond the Nehru-Gandhi family it also has a network of regional and local political families whose names carry significant political clout (Ziegfeld 2016). The political families in the INC often have deep-rooted connections in their respective seats, making it advantageous for the party to nominate women candidates from these backgrounds. Thus, women dynasts tend to rely more on their name-

[17] The coding of candidates' dynastic ties was conducted manually using online secondary resources, which included English language newspapers like Times of India, Hindustan Times, Deccan Chronicle, and web-based news sources like Quint, Wire, Scroll.in and Print among others.

recognition and political networks established by their families for their party nominations within the INC, as they can mobilize their traditional Congress voters.

On the contrary, the BJP emerged as a party in the 1980s with a strong focus on economic reforms, nationalism, and a more business-oriented approach (Chhibber and Jassal 2018; Jaffrelot and Verniers 2020). Thus, as a party it might prioritize women candidates who can contribute financially to the electoral campaigns and align with its vision of development and economic growth. Thus, while nominating women dynasts to the general seats the party elites in the BJP tend to focus more on the practical advantages associated with them such as their financial resources and their ability to fund and manage effective electoral campaigns. My interview with an active party member indicates that the BJP prefers women with dynastic connections for their inherited wealth in the general seats. An active member of the BJP stated in an interview:

> There is no problem in being connected to a political family. In India, if a doctor's son can become a doctor, then there should be no problem if a politician's son or daughter becomes a politician. Dynastic women politicians can also be good politicians, so there are no problems with it in the party nominations in national elections. There are considerable advantages in nominating women dynasts, since parliamentary seats are geographically large, and women without dynastic ties generally lack access to tangible resources to contest from these seats. Thus, women candidates from popular political dynasties will already have access to tangible resources to pull off expensive electoral campaigns in the geographically large parliamentary seats. (Chandra Kumar Bose, interview with the author, Zoom, May 2022)

This statement suggests that the BJP prefers women dynasts in the general seats for their access to inherited wealth to contest national elections. The INC's preference for women dynasts with name-recognition and the BJP's preference for women dynasts with inherited wealth reflect their distinct candidate selection strategies in the general seats during national elections. Despite these strategic differences, both the parties exhibit a substantial demand for women dynasts in the general seats. This preference for dynastic women candidates in both the major parties, however, tends to restrict the wider pool of women candidates who lack either name-recognition or wealth, thereby limiting women's representation in national elections from general seats.

4.2.6. Influence of criminality and wealth on the selection of women candidates within the parties

Criminals have been active in Indian politics for decades, dating back to the country's first national election following independence in 1947 (Vaishnav 2011b; Duraisamy 2014). Back then, the INC which led India's struggle for independence was the centre of political gravity and it contracted with criminals to mobilize or suppress turnout, hand out pre-election "goodies" or, in some extreme cases, for capturing polling booths (Vaishnav 2011b). Over time, political competition intensified and, as the INC's hegemony began to atrophy, criminals realized that they accumulated enough political clout, notoriety, and resources to cut out the politicians and contest elections on their own (Vaishnav 2011b). My analysis shows that both the INC and BJP has nominated a sizeable proportion of candidates with criminal cases to the seats, and their numbers increased over

the past two decades. My findings also show that in both the parties a sizeable number of both men and women candidates with criminal cases are nominated in the general seats over the past two decades. The nomination of women candidates with criminal cases by the parties can be seen as an attempt to maintain gender balance or equality in political representation. Moreover, it also suggests that women candidates are not immune to the issues of criminality that are present among men candidates.

Table 13-4 shows the number/proportion of candidates with and without criminal cases, nominated by the INC in the general seats. Additionally, table 14-4 shows the number/proportion of candidates with criminal cases, based on their gender, nominated by the INC in the general seats.

Table 13-4: Proportion of candidates with and without criminal cases nominated by INC in general seats

Year	Total number of candidates	Total number of candidates with criminal cases (%)	Total number of candidates without criminal cases (%)
2004	310	46 (15%)	264 (85%)
2009	309	89 (29%)	220 (71%)
2014	351	100 (28%)	251 (72%)
2019	318	131 (41%)	187 (59%)

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

Table 14-4: Proportion of candidates with and without criminal cases based on their gender nominated by INC in general seats

Year	Total number of men candidates	Total number of men with criminal cases (%)	Total number of men without criminal cases (%)	Total number of women candidates	Total number of women with criminal cases (%)	Total number of women without criminal cases (%)	Z-value (Difference in proportion)
2004	281	44 (16%)	237 (84%)	29	2 (7%)	27 (93%)	1.68
2009	280	78 (28%)	202 (72%)	29	11 (37%)	18 (63%)	-2.32*
2014	306	92 (30%)	214 (70%)	45	8 (17%)	37 (82%)	3.36*
2019	282	121 (43%)	161 (57%)	36	10 (28%)	26 (73%)	2.95*

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

My findings show that in the national elections of 2009, 2014 and 2019 the observed differences in proportions between men with criminal cases and women candidates with criminal cases are statistically significant. The proportion of women candidates with criminal cases are higher in the national election of 2009 suggesting that sometimes women candidates with criminal cases might be seen as strong contenders by the party elites in the INC which also helps them in meeting gender

representation targets. The national election of 2009 was pivotal in determining whether the INC would remain in power, after its victory in the 2004 national election. The INC aimed to continue its economic reforms and policies that had been credited with India's growth during the global economic slowdown (Chandran 2009). Thus, the party elites might have selected more women candidates with criminal cases to offset the risk of their electability in the general seats during the national election of 2009.

In addition to dynastic ties, candidates with criminal cases often play a significant role in funding political parties (Vaishnav 2011b). Due to limited party resources and the high cost of campaigns, parties rely on wealthy candidates with criminal cases to supply funds for party activities and electoral campaigns (Vaishnav 2011b; Duraisamy 2014). However, my findings show that the candidates with criminal cases nominated by the INC are not consistently wealthier than the candidates without criminal cases in the general seats. Table 15-4 presents a comparison of wealth between candidates with and without criminal cases nominated by the INC, in general seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 15-4: Comparison of wealth between candidates with and without criminal cases nominated by INC in general seats

Year	Total number of candidates	Total number of candidates with criminal cases (%)	Mean wealth of candidates with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of candidates with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Total number of candidates without criminal cases (%)	Mean wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	310	46 (15%)	230 lakhs	90 lakhs	264 (85%)	842 lakhs	60 lakhs	0.647
2009	309	89 (29%)	1298 lakhs	133 lakhs	220 (71%)	685 lakhs	194 lakhs	0.227
2014	351	100 (28%)	1367 lakhs	342 lakhs	251 (72%)	4423 lakhs	435 lakhs	0.534
2019	318	131 (41%)	2428 lakhs	526 lakhs	187(59%)	1958 lakhs	520 lakhs	0.52

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

My findings are not statistically significant in any of the national elections, and my descriptive statistics show that only in the national elections of 2009 and 2019 the mean wealth of the candidates with criminal cases tend to be higher than the candidates without criminal cases in the seats. My finding echoes the claims in the existing literature which highlights the correlation between wealth and criminality among the candidates within the INC only in the national elections held in 2009 and 2019 (Vaishnav 2011b; Duraisamy 2014). My analysis also shows that the men with criminal cases nominated by the INC are not consistently wealthier than the candidates without criminal cases in the seats. Table 16-4 presents a comparison of wealth between men with

criminal cases and candidates without criminal cases nominated by the INC, in the general seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 16-4: Comparison of wealth between men with criminal cases and candidates without criminal cases nominated by INC in general seats

Year	Total number of men candidates with criminal cases	Mean wealth of men with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of men with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Total number of candidates without criminal cases	Mean wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	44	210 lakhs	90 lakhs	264	842 lakhs	60 lakhs	0.643
2009	78	1200 lakhs	130 lakhs	220	685 lakhs	194 lakhs	0.335
2014	92	1390 lakhs	354 lakhs	251	4423 lakhs	435 lakhs	0.548
2019	121	2393 lakhs	507 lakhs	187	1958 lakhs	525 lakhs	0.558

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

My findings are not statistically significant in any of the national elections, and my descriptive statistics show that only in the national election of 2009 and 2019, the mean wealth of men with criminal cases was marginally higher than the candidates without criminal cases in the general seats. My finding aligns with the claims in the existing literature which highlights the correlation between wealth and criminality among the men candidates only in the national elections of 2009 and 2019 (Vaishnav 2011b; Duraisamy 2014). My findings show that women candidates with criminal cases are wealthier than candidates without criminal cases in the seats in the national election of 2009. This is also the same election year in which the women candidates with criminal cases are proportionately higher than men with criminal cases in the general seats. Table 17-4 presents a comparison of wealth between women with criminal cases and candidates without criminal cases nominated by the INC, in the general seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 17-4: Comparison of wealth between women with criminal cases and candidates without criminal cases nominated by INC in general seats

Year	Total number of women candidates with criminal cases	Mean wealth of women with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of women with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Total number of candidates without criminal cases	Mean wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	2	702 lakhs	702 lakhs	264	842 lakhs	60 lakhs	0.98
2009	11	1959 lakhs	229 lakhs	220	685 lakhs	194 lakhs	0.022*

2014	8	1126 lakhs	235 lakhs	251	4423 lakhs	435 lakhs	0.869
2019	10	2871 lakhs	1100 lakhs	187	1958 lakhs	525 lakhs	0.646

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

My findings are statistically significant in the national election of 2009, and my descriptive statistics show that the mean wealth of women with criminal cases tend to be higher than the candidates without criminal cases in the national election of 2019. Existing literature suggests a correlation between criminal cases and wealth for the selection of candidates (Vaishnav 2011b; Duraisamy 2014), and this echoes on the nomination patterns of women candidates with criminal cases in the seats in the national election of 2009. During the national election of 2009, under the leadership of Manmohan Singh, the INC sought to project an image of stability and experienced governance, and engaged in an expensive electoral campaign to solidify its position which was seen as essential during the global economic crisis of 2008-2009 (Gatade 2013). The national election of 2009 might have prompted the party elites in INC to select women candidates with criminal cases who had access to financial resources, as wealthier women candidates are better positioned to fund their own electoral campaigns and provide financial support to the party. My interview with a poll strategist who closely works with the party substantiates my empirical evidence and she stated that " having access to criminal networks enhances the social capital of women and increases their chances of nominations to the politically competitive general seats in the Congress party " (Kanksshi Agarwal, interview with the author, Zoom, July 2022). This statement suggests that women candidates with criminal cases and financial resources are more likely to offset the risk of their electability and are preferred by party elites in the INC.

Much like the INC, the BJP also nominated a sizeable number of candidates with criminal cases in the general seats across the national elections in the past two decades. It also nominated a sizeable number of both men and women candidates with criminal cases in the general seats. Table 18-4 shows the number/proportion of candidates with and without criminal cases, nominated by the BJP in the general seats. Additionally, table 19-4 shows the number/proportion of candidates with criminal cases, based on their gender, nominated by the BJP in the general seats.

Table 18-4: Proportion of candidates with and without criminal cases nominated by BJP in general seats

Year	Total number of candidates	Total number of candidates with criminal cases (%)	Total number of candidates without criminal cases (%)
2004	276	50 (18%)	226 (82%)
2009	310	93 (30%)	217 (70%)
2014	329	117 (36%)	212 (64%)
2019	337	145 (43%)	192 (57%)

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

Table 19-4: Proportion of candidates with and without criminal cases based on their gender nominated by BJP in general seats

Year	Total number of men candidates	Total number of men with criminal cases (%)	Total number of men without criminal cases (%)	Total number of women candidates	Total number of women with criminal cases (%)	Total number of women without criminal cases (%)	Z-value (Difference in proportion)
2004	251	48 (19%)	203 (81%)	25	2 (8%)	23 (92%)	1.25
2009	280	87 (31%)	193 (69%)	30	6 (20%)	24 (80%)	2.57*
2014	300	110 (37%)	190 (63%)	29	7 (24%)	22 (76%)	3.54*
2019	292	129 (44%)	163 (56%)	45	16 (35%)	29 (65%)	1.89

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

My findings show that in the national elections of 2009 and 2014 the observed differences in proportions between men and women candidates with criminal cases are statistically significant. This suggest that the party nominated more men with criminal cases compared to women candidates with criminal cases in the national elections of 2009 and 2014. However, there are a sizeable number of women candidates with criminal cases compared to men who are nominated by the party in the other two national elections. Candidates with criminal cases often have a strong local influence and the ability to mobilize voters in India (Vaishnav 2011b). This might have prompted party elites in the BJP to nominate women with criminal cases, as they might have a significant support base, making them strong candidates in their respective general seats.

My findings also show that the candidates with criminal cases nominated by the BJP in the general seats are not consistently wealthier than the candidates without criminal cases across all the national elections. Table 20-4 presents a comparison of wealth between candidates with and without criminal cases, nominated by the BJP in the general seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 20-4: Comparison of wealth between candidates with and without criminal cases nominated by BJP in general seats

Year	Total number of candidates	Total number of candidates with criminal cases (%)	Mean wealth of candidates with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of candidates with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Total number of candidates without criminal cases (%)	Mean wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	276	50 (18%)	68 lakhs	38 lakhs	226 (82%)	97 lakhs	45 lakhs	0.713

2009	310	93 (30%)	377 lakhs	112 lakhs	217 (70%)	237 lakhs	82 lakhs	0.049*
2014	329	117 (36%)	1160 lakhs	281 lakhs	212 (64%)	1085 lakhs	254 lakhs	0.817
2019	337	145 (43%)	996 lakhs	415 lakhs	192 (57%)	1636 lakhs	435 lakhs	0.418

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

My finding is statistically significant in the nation election of 2009; however, the candidates with criminal cases are not consistently wealthier than the candidates without criminal cases in the seats. My finding in the national election of 2009 echoes the existing literature which highlights the correlation between wealth and criminality among the candidates (Vaishnav 2011b; Duraisamy 2014). The BJP might have nominated candidates with criminal cases in the national election of 2009 who had access to financial resources since this election was fought during the global economic crisis of 2008-09. Candidates with criminal cases and wealth might have been perceived to have a strong local presence and substantial financial resources to fund their campaigns, which might be crucial for mobilizing voters and managing election logistics.

My analysis also shows that the men with criminal cases nominated by the BJP are not consistently wealthier than the candidates without criminal cases in the seats. Similarly, the women candidates with criminal cases nominated by the BJP are not consistently wealthier than the candidates without criminal cases in the seats. Table 21-4 presents a comparison of wealth between men with criminal cases and candidates without criminal cases, nominated by the BJP in the general seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 21-4: Comparison of wealth between men with criminal cases and candidates without criminal cases nominated by BJP in general seats

Year	Total number of men candidates with criminal cases	Mean wealth of men with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of men with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Total number of candidates without criminal cases	Mean wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	48	66 lakhs	35 lakhs	226	97 lakhs	45 lakhs	0.713
2009	87	369 lakhs	112 lakhs	217	237 lakhs	82 lakhs	0.069
2014	110	1160 lakhs	281 lakhs	212	1085 lakhs	254 lakhs	0.86
2019	129	977 lakhs	417 lakhs	192	1636 lakhs	435 lakhs	0.807

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

My findings are not statistically significant in any of the national elections, and my descriptive statistics show that only in the national elections of 2009 and 2014 the mean wealth of men with criminal cases tend to be slightly higher than the candidates without criminal cases nominated by

the BJP in the seats. My findings are similar with respect to women candidates with criminal cases nominated by the BJP in the general seats. Table 22-4 presents a comparison of wealth between women with criminal cases and candidates without criminal cases, nominated by the BJP in the general seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 22-4: Comparison of wealth between women with criminal cases and candidates without criminal cases nominated by BJP in general seats

Year	Total number of women candidates with criminal cases	Mean wealth of women with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of women with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Total number of candidates without criminal cases	Mean wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	2	92 lakhs	92 lakhs	226	97 lakhs	45 lakhs	0.965
2009	6	500 lakhs	246 lakhs	217	237 lakhs	82 lakhs	0.239
2014	7	1169 lakhs	573 lakhs	212	1085 lakhs	254 lakhs	0.537
2019	16	1132 lakhs	304 lakhs	192	1636 lakhs	435 lakhs	0.47

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

My findings are not statistically significant in any of the national elections, and my descriptive statistics show that the mean wealth of women candidates with criminal cases tend to be slightly higher than the candidates without criminal cases nominated by the BJP in national elections of 2009 and 2014. My findings with respect to the BJP echoes the claims in the existing literature that highlights the correlation between wealth and criminality among the candidates only in the national elections of 2009 and 2014 (Vaishnav 2011b; Duraisamy 2014). The BJP might have nominated both the men and women candidates with criminal cases in the general seats as they were perceived to be strong, decisive, had access to financial resources in the national elections of 2009 and 2014, and were capable of protecting the interests of their political constituents.

Both the major parties in India have nominated a sizeable number of women candidates with criminal cases in the general seats. The paradoxical preference for candidates with criminal cases could be linked to a perception of strength and resilience. The parties might perceive women candidates with criminal cases to demonstrate toughness, countering stereotypes of women as weak or overly compassionate. As a result, parties are drawn towards women with criminal cases which offsets the risk of their electability in national elections. Consequently, this approach contributes to the overall underrepresentation of women in national politics from general seats, as it limits the opportunities for women who are less likely to have criminal cases against them.

4.2.7. Influence of higher education on the selection of women candidates within the parties

An existing study on nomination patterns of candidates by parties highlights that a candidate with a post-graduate degree (i.e., a university degree) is more likely to be renominated to contest

national elections in India as compared to a candidate without one (Sircar 2018a). My findings show that the women candidates nominated by the INC are likely to be as highly-educated as the men in the general seats. Table 23-4 shows the proportion of candidates with university degrees, based on their gender, nominated by the INC in the general seats.

Table 23-4: Proportion of candidates with university degrees based on their gender nominated by INC in general seats

Year	Total men candidates	Men candidates with university degrees (%)	Total women candidates	Women candidates with university degrees (%)	Z-values (Difference in proportion)
2004	281	211 (75%)	29	28 (96%)	-2.16*
2009	280	218 (77%)	29	24 (83%)	-0.61
2014	306	243 (79%)	45	39 (87%)	-1.14
2019	282	204 (72%)	36	29 (81%)	-1.04

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

My finding shows that only in the national election of 2004 there is a statistically significant difference between the proportions of men and women candidates with university degrees, in this year more women candidates are highly-educated than men in the seats. In all the other national elections there is no statistically significant difference between the observed proportions of men and women candidates with university degrees. This suggests that women candidates nominated by the INC are likely to be as highly-educated as the men in the general seats.

Similarly, my findings also show that the women candidates nominated by the BJP are likely to be as highly-educated as the men in the general seats. Table 24-4 shows the proportion of candidates with university degrees, based on their gender, nominated by the BJP in the general seats.

Table 24-4: Proportion of candidates with university degrees based on their gender nominated by BJP in general seats

Year	Total men candidates	Men candidates with university degrees (%)	Total women candidates	Women candidates with university degrees (%)	Z-values (Difference in proportion)
2004	251	186 (74%)	25	21 (84%)	1.51
2009	280	208 (74%)	30	25 (83%)	1.47
2014	300	229 (76%)	29	25 (86%)	1.72
2019	292	212 (76%)	45	40 (89%)	2.50*

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

My findings show that only in the national election of 2019 there is a statistically significant difference between the proportions of men and women candidates with university degrees, in this

year more women candidates are highly-educated than men in the seats. In all the other national elections there is no statistically significant difference between the observed proportions of men and women candidates with university degrees. This suggests that women candidates nominated by the BJP are likely to be as highly-educated as the men in the general seats.

My findings suggest that both the parties tend to prefer women candidates who are likely to be as highly educated as the men in the general seats. For women candidates, their higher educational qualifications help them to counteract the traditional gender biases that question their capabilities in leadership roles. By nominating almost similar proportions of both women and men candidates with university degrees in the seats both the parties aim to attract voters who value education and professional expertise. Both the parties might also prefer highly educated women candidates as much as men because women with high-levels of education could bring their specialized knowledge and expertise in governance. The nomination of highly educated women candidates helps the parties to project an image of gender inclusivity and helps them to offset the risk of their electability in the seats.

4.3. Implications of informal selection criteria on women candidates in general seats

My findings provide a comprehensive analysis of the complex dynamics surrounding the selection of women candidates by the two major parties for general seats in Indian national elections. It suggests that the informal selection criteria preferred for women by these two major national parties significantly limit the participation of "general" women in party politics. Both the parties have nominated a limited number of women candidates compared to men in the general seats in the national elections held between 2004 and 2019. The parties tend to prefer women candidates who exhibit the informal criteria such as wealth, dynastic ties, criminal cases, and higher education in the general seats.

Women, on average, have fewer financial assets than men in India due to persistent gender pay gaps and limited inheritance rights (Agrawal 2014; Mazumdar and Chaudhary 2022). This economic disparity translate into fewer women being able to meet the financial criteria that both the parties often prioritize in the general seats, thereby reducing their representation. Women candidates with dynastic connections who have name-recognition and inherit patronage networks tend to be preferred by the INC in the general seats. Moreover, women candidates with dynastic connections who have access to inherited wealth tend to be preferred by the BJP in the general seats. Despite these strategic differences, both the parties tend to exhibit a substantial demand for women dynasts in the general seats. This preference for dynastic women candidates in both the major parties, however, restricts the wider pool of women candidates who lack either name-recognition or wealth, thereby limiting women's representation in national elections from general seats.

Furthermore, both the parties have also nominated a sizeable number of women with criminal cases in the general seats across the past two decades limiting the opportunities for women who are less likely to have criminal cases against them. Additionally, both the parties tend to prefer

women candidates who are likely to be as highly educated as the men in the general seats. As of 2021, around half of the "general" male population aged between 15 and 49 years stayed in school for at least 10 years, compared to only 41 per cent of their "general" female counterparts in India (Kanwal 2022). The gender gap in education also remained evident in rural India, with only one out of three women in these regions receiving at least 10 years of schooling in India (Kanwal 2022). Furthermore, an existing study shows that women across sixteen states in India perform poorly in post-graduation and technical education courses (S. Ghosh and Kundu 2021). Despite the gender gap in education, both the major parties in India tend to exhibit a preference for highly educated women candidates as it helps the women to overcome the risk of their electability in the seats. This preference for highly educated women candidates among party elites restricts the pool of potential women candidates, as fewer women have access to higher education compared to men in India.

Traditional gender norms prescribes specific roles and behaviors for men and women, often positioning women as less suitable for electoral politics compared to men. These norms suggest that women are inherently more nurturing and less competitive, traits traditionally seen as incompatible with political leadership. This gender bias is manifested through the informal selection criteria preferred by the party elites that undervalues women's capabilities, fostering a perception that women should possess extraordinary qualities to be considered as viable electoral candidates. In the context of candidate selection in general seats, these gender norms manifest in several ways when parties prefer wealthy women who assumably are more capable of handling the financial demands of electoral campaigns, reflecting a bias that equates financial resources with competence and viability. Women from political dynasties are often perceived as more acceptable electoral candidates because they carry the legitimacy, influence of their family name, and inherited financial resources, which might counterbalance the skepticism about their individual capabilities as politicians. The preference for women with criminal cases can be associated to a perception of strength and resilience and these women candidates might also demonstrate toughness, countering stereotypes of women as weak and overly compassionate. Additionally, educational attainment is often used as a proxy for intelligence and given the traditional beliefs about women's abilities, higher education becomes a critical factor in legitimizing their political candidacy. These informal selection criteria collectively create a narrow pathway for women to enter electoral politics in general seats in Indian national elections, where only those who meet these criteria, and often gender-biased expectations are considered for candidacy. As a result, the supply of women candidates remains constrained, discouraging many qualified women from entering politics and reinforcing the perception that only a select few can meet the heightened expectations imposed by party elites.

Chapter 5: Informal selection criteria and restrictions on women in reserved seats

5.1. Introduction

This chapter examines if the reserved seats are more accessible for "reserved" women in the two major parties, namely the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), spanning the period from 2004 to 2019. My analysis builds on previous chapter to examine the significance of informal selection criteria such as wealth, higher education, criminality, and dynastic affiliations in determining candidates' electability in the national parliament (Sircar 2018b; Vaishnav 2011b; Chandra 2016; Sircar 2018a). The politics around nominations in reserved seats matters in India because it restricts competition in these seats by reducing the pool of potential candidates. The aim is to contribute to the existing literature by examining how these informal selection criteria determine the nomination of "reserved" women candidates by the parties in national elections. I engage in a systematic comparison of the informal selection criteria exhibited by the candidates across normative gender categories, specifically focusing on those nominated to the reserved seats in national elections by the two major parties, namely the INC and the BJP, spanning the period from 2004 to 2019.

Post-independent India implemented a quota system to ensure political representation for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) through reserved seats, constituting approximately twenty-four percent of the seats in the Lok Sabha of the national parliament (Jensenius 2012). Reserved seats are exclusively contested by members of the respective reserved communities above the age of 25 years and all residents above the age of 18 years in these seats, irrespective of their gender, language, socio-economic status, or cultural identities, have the right to vote for their preferred candidates using the "first-past-the-post" (FPTP) system (Ambagudia 2020). Despite being reserved for SCs and STs, these seats at the national level are highly concentrated with non-reserved populations, as a result, "reserved" candidates heavily depend on voters from non-reserved categories (Jensenius 2012; 2013b; Ambagudia 2019; 2020). Reserved seats do not have separate electorates, thus, "reserved" candidates are integrated into mainstream party politics, requiring qualities preferred by party leaders in general seats rather than solely group-specific attributes (Jensenius 2012; 2016). Candidates from SC and ST communities who contest elections in "reserved" seats often rely heavily on the votes of non-reserved populations to win. The need to appeal to a broader electorate can influence the political strategies and priorities of the "reserved" candidates, and they are likely to get integrated into mainstream party politics like politicians in the general seats.

Despite integration into mainstream politics, SC and ST politicians are often perceived as weaker than other politicians (Jensenius 2015; Ambagudia 2020). This is because SCs and STs have historically faced severe social discrimination and economic disadvantages in India (Jensenius 2015; Ambagudia 2019). The long history of marginalization of the SC and ST communities has often limited their access to education, economic resources, and social capital, which are crucial for political success in India (Jensenius 2015; Ambagudia 2019). Moreover, as noted in the existing

literature, candidates from SC and ST communities contesting in "reserved" seats often rely on votes from non-reserved population in national elections (Jensenius 2012; 2013b; Ambagudia 2019; 2020). This reliance on non-reserved population to win elections weaken their political standing as they need to cater to the interests of more dominant communities, potentially compromising their ability to advocate effectively for the issues specific to SCs and STs. Thus, the SC and ST politicians are less assertive in promoting their community's interests, thereby appearing weaker compared to politicians who represent from the general seats (Jensenius 2015; Ambagudia 2019). Furthermore, the absence of separate electorates in the "reserved" seats, coupled with centralized candidate selection procedures in national parties, results in limited formal entry barriers for candidates in the "reserved" seats. Thus, the parties rely on informal criteria for the selection of their candidates in the politically less competitive "reserved" seats. Through an intra-party analysis of the informal selection criteria exhibited by all candidates nominated to the reserved seats, I infer the preferred informal selection criteria for women that limit their opportunities to be nominated. The aim is to offer a nuanced explanation of the intersection between informal selection criteria, gender, and party politics, providing an alternative view of the barriers to women's access to reserved seats.

My research suggests a distinct pattern in the selection of women candidates within both the INC and BJP, emphasizing how the informal selection criteria reinforce gender biases within the party structures. In the INC, it suggests that wealth, dynastic ties, and higher-education are prioritized for women candidates, indicating a preference for established, politically-connected, and affluent women in the reserved seats. This trend emphasizes INC's inclination towards women candidates with significant resources and connections. Conversely, the BJP shows a preference for women candidates who exhibit informal criteria such as wealth, criminality, and higher-education, revealing a broader reliance on these factors for their selection in the reserved seats. These findings suggest a pervasive use of informal criteria for selection of women candidates within the parties. The preference for specific informal selection criteria for women candidates in both the major parties emphasizes the entrenched nature of gender biases and norms in Indian politics. It mirrors broader societal dynamics and power structures that favour women with certain informal qualities like political backgrounds, financial resources, higher-education etc. thereby shaping their candidate selection processes within the parties. This pattern not only perpetuates existing gender biases but also limits the diversity and representation of women in reserved seats.

My findings also provide insights into the differing nomination patterns of women candidates across reserved and general seats within the INC and the BJP. An existing study by Jensenius (2016) suggests a proportional increase in the nomination of women candidates in reserved seats compared to general seats by major parties since 1990s in India. However, my in-depth analysis reveals that this trend is evident only within the INC in two national election cycles and not in the BJP in any national elections held between 2004-2019. This disparity highlights the differing approaches and priorities of the two major parties in addressing gender representation in Indian national politics. The distinct nomination patterns for women candidates in the INC and BJP can

be attributed to their differing political ideologies and limited political competition in reserved seats. The INC is traditionally an inclusive party, which often emphasizes social justice and representation as its guiding principle, and this might align well with their proportional increase of women candidates in reserved seats compared to general seats in some national elections. On the other hand, the BJP, with its right-leaning and nationalist ideology, might prioritize different criteria in candidate selection, such as political loyalty, organizational strength, and broader socio-political strategies (Chhibber and Jassal 2018). This focus can lead to a lesser emphasis on women's representation in the reserved seats, reflecting their differing approach to addressing gender issues within their electoral framework.

5.1.1. Research methods

In this chapter, I employ simple descriptive tools in excel to conduct an intra-party analysis of candidates based on their gender normative categories—specifically, women and men nominated to the reserved seats. The objective is to assess to what extent each party prefers informal selection criteria for nominating women candidates. To compare the wealth of the candidates based on gender, simple descriptive tools are used, and a difference in means t-test is employed to determine the statistical significance of the findings in each national election. Few difference in proportions tests are used to determine the statistically significant difference between the two gender categories regarding the informal selection criteria of dynastic ties, criminality, and higher-education.

Additionally, to compare the wealth of dynastic candidates with non-dynastic candidates, simple descriptive tools are used alongside difference in means t-tests to ascertain the statistical significance of the findings in each national election. Moreover, to further investigate the wealth disparities, the research contrasts the wealth of dynastic women candidates with non-dynasts, again using simple descriptive tools and difference in means t-tests to determine statistical significance. To compare the wealth of criminal women and criminal men with non-criminals, the same methods are used to assess statistical significance. Furthermore, the empirical findings and the arguments are substantiated with valuable information from semi-structured elite interviews with politicians, poll strategists, and scholars based in India. I also use examples to substantiate the arguments regarding the type of women that the parties prefer to nominate as candidates to run for national elections.

5.1.2. Organization of the chapter

This chapter is divided into two main sections analyzing the preferred informal selection criteria for candidates based on their gender within the INC and BJP in reserved seats. The first section examines the intra-party dynamics and gender-based informal selection preferences in these parties. The concluding section summarizes the findings and discusses the broader implications of the study on the persistent underrepresentation of "reserved" women in national politics.

5.2. Preferred informal selection criteria for candidates based on their gender: Intra-party dynamics in INC and BJP

This section presents my findings on the gender outcomes in the candidate selection process within the INC and the BJP and highlights the existing disparities and biases. The systematic examination of the informal selection criteria suggests that "reserved" women often face different standards compared to their male counterparts on certain informal criteria when being considered as electoral candidates within the parties. This disparity and demand for women candidates who fulfill certain informal criteria in the parties perpetuates the underrepresentation of women in Indian national politics.

5.2.1. Gender composition of candidates within the parties in the reserved seats

As discussed in chapter 4, the INC and the BJP are the two major parties which also nominates candidates who contest national elections in a larger range of reserved seats across all sub-national states and union territories in India. All the other parties in India are small regional parties whose support bases and nominations are limited and restricted to one or two sub-national states in Indian national elections (Ziegfeld 2018). The INC, founded in 1885 is historically associated with the Indian independence movement and advocates for a secular, inclusive, and democratic India, emphasizing social justice, economic reforms, and welfare policies (Guha 2010; Soikham 2019). On the other hand, the BJP, established in 1980, is rooted in the ideology of Hindutva, which promotes the cultural and religious values of Hinduism (Vaishnav 2019). It is a right-wing party advocating for conservative social policies, nationalism, and economic liberalism and it also emphasizes a strong central government, national security, and market-oriented economic reforms (Jaffrelot 2013; Hansen 1999; Vaishnav 2019). Despite these ideological differences, both the INC and BJP have shown similar patterns in nominating women candidates in reserved seats in the national elections held between 2004-2019. Both the parties have consistently nominated an overwhelming proportion of men over women candidates in the reserved seats across all the national elections. Tables 1-5 and 2-5 show the proportion of the candidates, based on their gender, nominated by the INC and the BJP in the reserved seats.

Table 1-5: Gender composition of the candidates nominated by the INC in reserved seats

Year	Total number of candidates	Total number of men (%)	Total number of women (%)
2004	70	56 (80%)	14 (20%)
2009	98	89 (91%)	9 (9%)
2014	112	97 (86%)	15 (14%)
2019	104	86 (82%)	18 (18%)

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

Table 2-5: Gender composition of the candidates nominated by the BJP in reserved seats

Year	Total number of candidates	Total number of men (%)	Total number of women (%)
2004	61	58 (95%)	3 (5%)
2009	95	85 (89%)	10 (11%)
2014	98	89 (91%)	9 (9%)
2019	104	93 (89%)	11 (11%)

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

From the data presented in the tables, it is evident that the overall nominations of women candidates was indeed proportionately lower than men in the seats across the years mentioned in both the parties. My findings also suggest that, between the two parties, the INC nominated proportionately more women candidates in the reserved seats compared to the BJP across majority of the national election cycles. The distinct patterns in the nomination of women candidates in the reserved seats between the two parties can be attributed to their differing political ideologies. The INC, with its roots in social democracy and a legacy of promoting inclusivity, tends to prioritize women candidates compared to the BJP in reserved seats. However, within both the parties there is lack of commitment for equitable representation between men and women candidates, and both the parties fail to promote gender diversity in their candidate selection processes even in the reserved seats. The data also reveal that the gender gap in nominations is likely driven by various informal factors influencing candidate selection within the parties.

5.2.2. Comparison of women candidates nominated in reserved versus general seats within the INC and BJP

An existing study on nomination patterns of women candidates across national and state elections highlights that major parties in India proportionately increased the nomination of women in the reserved seats compared to the general seats since the 1990s (Jensenius 2016, 450). She argues that reserved seats have created a political space which is more accessible to women candidates in India (Jensenius 2016). In the INC, my finding echoes the claim in the existing study and indicates that in two national election cycles of 2004 and 2019, it nominated proportionately more women candidates to the reserved seats compared to the general seats. However, in the BJP, my finding challenges the claim in the existing study, suggesting that in the national elections held between 2004-2019, the party did not nominate proportionately more women candidates to the reserved seats compared to the general seats. Tables 3-5 and 4-5 show the proportions of women candidates in general and reserved seats, nominated by the INC and BJP, respectively, in the national elections held between 2004-2019.

Table 3-5: Comparison of proportions of women candidates in general and reserved seats nominated by the INC

Year	Total number of candidates in general seats	Total number of women (%) in general seats	Total number of candidates in reserved seats	Total number of women (%) in reserved seats
2004	310	29 (10%)	70	14 (20%)
2009	309	29 (10%)	98	9 (9%)
2014	351	45 (13%)	112	15 (14%)
2019	381	36 (11%)	104	18 (18%)

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

Table 4-5: Comparison of proportions of women candidates in general and reserved seats nominated by the BJP

Year	Total number of candidates in general seats	Total number of women (%) in general seats	Total number of candidates in reserved seats	Total number of women (%) in reserved seats
2004	276	20 (7%)	61	3 (5%)
2009	310	30 (10%)	95	10 (11%)
2014	329	29 (9%)	98	9 (9%)
2019	337	45 (13%)	104	11(11%)

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

Table 3-5 shows that the INC nominated proportionately more women candidates to the reserved seats compared to the general seats in the national elections of 2004 and 2019. During the 2004 national election, the INC wanted to successfully capitalize on the perceived disconnect between the BJP's "India Shining" slogan and the reality of widespread rural distress and economic inequality (Wilkinson 2005). Secondly, it also strategically aligned with regional parties, and formed the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), to counter the BJP's influence in national politics (Wilkinson 2005). The focus on inclusivity and social welfare in the electoral campaigns running up to the national election of 2004 might have pushed the INC to increase the nomination of women candidates in the reserved seats. Similarly, after suffering a significant defeat in the national election of 2014, the INC aimed to rebuild its image and political strength before the national election of 2019 (Bansal 2019). The 2019 national election campaign of the INC was viewed as an opportunity to challenge the dominance of the BJP and reclaim its position as a key player in Indian national politics. The INC's campaign focused on issues such as unemployment, women empowerment, agrarian distress, and economic inequalities, attempting to resonate with a wide spectrum of voters who were disillusioned with the BJP's policies (Jaffrelot and Verniers 2020). Thus, the INC might have increased the nomination of women candidates in reserved seats compared to general seats as part of its strategy to address gender disparities and promote social justice. By nominating more women candidates in reserved seats, before the national election of 2019 the INC perhaps aimed to showcase its commitment to gender inclusivity and empowerment, which were key components of its broader campaign platform. When the INC was in power i.e.

before the national elections of 2009 and 2014, it did not attempt to increase the nomination of women candidates in the reserved seats compared to the general seats. My finding suggests that the INC increased the nomination of women candidates in reserved seats compared to general seats in the 2004 and 2019 national elections, as part of their strategy to address gender disparities in the less politically competitive reserved seats. This approach aimed to counter the BJP's influence in national politics and showcase the INC's commitment to gender inclusivity during these crucial national elections in the reserved seats.

Additionally, the contradiction between my findings and Jensenius's (2016) work highlights that the INC's strategy of nominating more women candidates in reserved seats might not have been a consistent practice across all election cycles, but rather a targeted response to specific political contexts, such as the 2004 and 2019 elections. This selective increase in women's nominations in reserved seats suggests that gender inclusivity within the INC's candidate selection process was perhaps driven more by electoral calculations and limited electoral competitiveness in the reserved seats than by a sustained commitment to addressing gender disparities across all national election cycles.

In contrast to the INC, the BJP did not increase the nomination of women candidates in reserved seats compared to general seats in the national elections held between 2004 and 2019. This might be attributed to the party's traditional emphasis on conservative and patriarchal values, which prioritize male leadership and preserve the status quo in reserved seats, thereby limiting women's political candidacies in national elections. The divergent patterns in the INC and BJP's nomination of women candidates reflect their broader ideological commitments and strategic priorities, particularly in the less politically competitive reserved seats. The INC's focus on social inclusivity during the 2004 and 2019 elections likely influenced its decision to proportionally increase women's nominations in reserved seats. In contrast, the BJP's adherence to traditional right-wing nationalist ideology resulted in a different approach, contradicting Jensenius's (2016) claim that all major parties in India have increased the nomination of women candidates in reserved seats compared to the general seats.

5.2.3. Influence of wealth on the selection of women candidates within parties

As discussed in chapter 4, the financial capacity of a candidate matters for developing a good electoral organization and paying for campaign expenses in India (Tiwari 2014). Moreover, over the years with affirmative policies in the post-independence era the members of the reserved communities are mainstreamed into education, labour markets, and in party politics requiring qualities preferred by party leaders in general seats rather than solely group-specific attributes (Jensenius 2015; Ambagudia 2020). Furthermore, parties in India tend to favour wealthy candidates as they are perceived to have higher electability due to their financial resources and ability to fund their own electoral campaigns (Verniers and Jaffrelot 2020; Sircar 2018b). My findings show that the INC nominated both wealthy men and women candidates in the seats. There are minor variations in the mean wealth between men and women candidates across the national elections. My findings show that there are no statistically significant differences in the wealth

levels of men and women candidates, suggesting that women candidates in the INC are likely to be as wealthy as their men counterparts, even in the reserved seats.

Table 5-5 presents a comparison of wealth[18] between men and women candidates nominated by the INC, in the reserved seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 5-5: Comparison of wealth between men and women candidates in the INC in reserved seats

Year	Total number of men candidates	Mean wealth of men candidates in Indian rupees	Median wealth of men candidates in Indian rupees	Total number of women candidates	Mean wealth of women candidates in Indian rupees	Median wealth of women candidates in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	56	171 lakhs	48 lakhs	14	94 lakhs	53 lakhs	0.627
2009	89	271 lakhs	72 lakhs	9	278 lakhs	176 lakhs	0.98
2014	97	788 lakhs	200 lakhs	15	440 lakhs	115 lakhs	0.764
2019	86	499 lakhs	205 lakhs	18	657 lakhs	234 lakhs	0.528

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

My findings are not statistically significant in any of the national elections, and my descriptive statistics show that in the national elections of 2009 and 2019 the mean wealth of women candidates tend to be higher than the men. As discussed in chapter 4, the national election of 2009 was held post the global financial crisis of 2008 which had significant repercussions worldwide, and India was no different (Loxley 2012). Moreover, the INC which was in power since the national election of 2004 also needed to communicate its achievements and vision to the diverse electorate of India (Gatade 2013). This included highlighting the successes of the INC led national government, particularly in areas such as economic growth, social welfare schemes, and rural development programs. These factors, in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, pushed the INC to indulge in an expensive electoral campaign which involved investments in rallies and other promotional activities (Chauchard 2018a; Sircar 2018b). Moreover, the national election of 2019 was crucial for the INC because after suffering a significant defeat in the national election of 2014, it indulged in an expensive electoral campaign to challenge the dominance of the BJP, and reclaim its power in national politics (Bansal 2019). These factors might have pushed the INC party elites to select women candidates who tend to be wealthier than men in the national elections of 2009 and 2019, to offset the risk of their electability in the reserved seats. Furthermore, the women

[18] The wealth calculation involves subtracting liabilities from assets, with both clearly listed and differentiated within the electoral affidavits. Monetary values are standardized if necessary, and any discrepancies or missing values are addressed appropriately.

candidates in the INC nominated to the reserved seats are likely to be as wealthy as their men counterparts across national elections.

Similarly, party elites in the BJP usually prefer candidates who can fund their electoral campaigns through personal wealth in the reserved seats. My findings show that the BJP also preferred to nominate both wealthy men and women candidates to the seats. There are minor variations in the mean wealth between men and women candidates nominated by the BJP in the national elections of 2004, 2014, and 2019. Moreover, the women candidates tend to be wealthier than the men in the national election of 2009. Table 6-5 presents a comparison of wealth[19] between men and women candidates nominated by the BJP, in the reserved seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 6-5: Comparison of wealth between men and women candidates in the BJP in reserved seats

Year	Total number of men candidates	Mean wealth of men candidates in Indian rupees	Median wealth of men candidates in Indian rupees	Total number of women candidates	Mean wealth of women candidates in Indian rupees	Median wealth of women candidates in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	58	100 lakhs	30 lakhs	3	53 lakhs	54 lakhs	0.791
2009	85	59 lakhs	34 lakhs	10	128 lakhs	86 lakhs	0.004*
2014	89	204 lakhs	111 lakhs	9	297 lakhs	182 lakhs	0.081
2019	93	449 lakhs	228 lakhs	11	672 lakhs	400 lakhs	0.36

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

My findings are statistically significant in the national election of 2009, and my descriptive statistics show that in the national elections of 2014 and 2019 the mean wealth of women candidates tend to be higher than the men. In the national election of 2009, women candidates nominated by the BJP tend to be wealthier than their men in the reserved seats. For instance, in the national election of 2009, men and women candidates reported a mean wealth of Rs. 59 lakhs and Rs. 128 lakhs respectively- approximately 120 times and 270 times respectively wealthier than the nominal per capita income of India in 2009-2010 of Rs. 46,492- which made them wealthier than the general population (The Times of India 2011). The BJP's nomination of wealthier women candidates over men in reserved seats in the national election of 2009 can also be linked to the economic context of the time, particularly the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008 (Loxley 2012). During times of economic uncertainty, parties tend to prefer candidates who can project an image of stability and prosperity, and wealthier women candidates than men in the

[19] The wealth calculation involves subtracting liabilities from assets, with both clearly listed and differentiated within the electoral affidavits. Monetary values are standardized if necessary, and any discrepancies or missing values are addressed appropriately.

reserved seats can be perceived as more capable of addressing economic issues, which alleviates financial pressure from the party.

Moreover, in the national elections of 2014 and 2019 the mean wealth of women candidates tend to be higher than the men nominated by the BJP in the reserved seats. As discussed in chapter 4, the national election of 2014 was seen as a crucial turning point in Indian politics as the INC which was in power after the 2004 and 2009 national elections was embroiled in several corruption scandals and faced significant anti-incumbency sentiments (Sardesai 2015). The BJP, the main opposition party of the INC, indulged in an expensive electoral campaign in 2014 to capitalize on this discontent and surpass the incumbent party's campaign efforts to gain a competitive edge (Sardesai 2015). Similarly, building on the momentum of their landslide victory in the national election of 2014, the BJP aimed to maintain and strengthen their dominance in the national parliament. The success of the BJP's leadership needed to be effectively communicated to the electorate before the national election of 2019, requiring significant financial investment in media and outreach activities to reinforce their narrative of development and strong governance (Vaishnav 2019). Thus, the party might have preferred to nominate women candidates with higher average wealth than men in the national elections of 2014 and 2019 to mitigate the risk associated with their electability in reserved seats.

My findings suggest that women candidates who are likely to be as wealthy as their men counterparts are preferred by both the parties in the reserved seats. The demand for wealthy women candidates by both the parties limits the pool of potential women who lack substantial financial resources, thereby reducing the overall number of women candidates in reserved seats. Women from the "reserved" communities, on average, have less access to financial resources and inheritance rights compared to men due to historical and systemic economic disparities (A. Deshpande 2006; Agrawal 2014). The emphasis on wealth for the selection of candidates in reserved seats by the parties reinforces the stereotype that women need substantial financial backing to be considered as viable electoral candidates. This can discourage women without such financial resources from pursuing political careers from reserved seats, further perpetuating gender inequality in political representation. Additionally, the reliance on wealthy women candidates often perpetuate patriarchal norms within the parties, as decision-making remains concentrated among male party elites who prioritize financial considerations over gender equality, even in reserved seats.

5.2.4. Influence of dynastic ties on the selection of women candidates within parties

Political dynasties exists among all ethnic groups, the two reserved communities (SCs and STs) that benefited most from affirmative actions in politics since independence, are no exception to this practice (Chauchard 2016, 173). However, for better or for worse, it is also the case that aspiring political dynasts from the "reserved" communities also face more hurdles, and that the dynasties they create are often more fragile and inconsistent than other dynasties (Chauchard 2016). The existing literature on dynastic members of parliament (MPs) shows that, in proportional

terms, there are fewer "reserved" political dynasties than dynasties in the "general" category in the last three parliaments (2004, 2009, and 2014) (Chandra 2016; Chauchard 2016). This is primarily because SC and ST communities have historically suffered from economic and social disadvantages and political families from these communities often lack the extensive financial resources and social networks that "general" dynasties possess, which are critical for sustaining their political influence (Chandra 2004; Chauchard 2016). My findings align with the existing literature and show that both the parties nominated a limited number of dynastic candidates to the reserved seats compared to the general seats. Tables 7-5 and 8-5 show the number/proportion of dynastic candidates in the reserved seats, nominated by the INC and BJP, respectively.

Table 7-5: Proportion of dynastic candidates nominated by the INC in reserved seats

Year	Total number of candidates nominated	Total number of dynastic candidates (%)	Total number of non-dynastic candidates (%)
2004	70	11 (16%)	59 (84%)
2009	98	12 (12%)	86 (88%)
2014	112	17 (15%)	95 (85%)
2019	104	16 (15%)	88 (85%)

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info and secondary sources[20]

Table 8-5: Proportion of dynastic candidates nominated by the BJP in reserved seats

Year	Total number of candidates nominated	Total number of dynastic candidates (%)	Total number of non-dynastic candidates (%)
2004	61	4 (7%)	57 (93%)
2009	95	6 (6%)	89 (94%)
2014	98	10 (10%)	88 (90%)
2019	104	11 (11%)	93 (89%)

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info and secondary sources[21]

My findings show that the INC tend to nominate a higher proportion of dynastic candidates compared to the BJP across all the national elections. The BJP, while nominating fewer dynastic candidates than the INC, has also shown an increasing trend in the proportion of dynastic candidates over the years. My findings also align with the existing study, which indicates that since

[20] The coding of candidates' dynastic ties was conducted manually using online secondary resources, which included English language newspapers like Times of India, Hindustan Times, Deccan Chronicle, and web-based news sources like Quint, Wire, Scroll.in and Print among others.

[21] The coding of candidates' dynastic ties was conducted manually using online secondary resources, which included English language newspapers like Times of India, Hindustan Times, Deccan Chronicle, and web-based news sources like Quint, Wire, Scroll.in and Print among others.

the BJP did not dominate the politics in the "reserved" areas in the post-independence era, there are not too many prominent politicians belonging to the "reserved" categories in the party who can field their relatives (Chauchard 2016). Thus, there is a limited supply of dynastic candidates in the BJP in reserved areas compared to the INC. My findings also echo the existing literature, which shows that there are few and less prominent "reserved" dynasties, emphasizing the relative scarcity of top-level party leaders from reserved seats in the two largest parties (Chauchard 2014; 2016). The SC and ST politicians often find it challenging to penetrate the highest decision-making structures of their parties, which are predominantly controlled by members of the "general" category. This limitation restricts their ability to wield significant influence and secure nomination for their family members. Moreover, SC and ST politicians frequently face societal and institutional biases that question their leadership abilities within their parties, further impacting their ability to establish enduring political dynasties.

My analysis also indicates that while dynastic ties help some "reserved" candidates in obtaining party nominations within both the INC and BJP, these ties have particularly benefitted women candidates in reserved seats, specifically within the INC. Tables 9-5 and 10-5 show the proportion of dynastic candidates, based on their gender, nominated by the INC and the BJP in the reserved seats, respectively.

Table 9-5: Proportion of dynastic candidates based on gender nominated by INC in reserved seats

Year	Total men candidates	Total dynastic men candidates (%)	Total non-dynastic men candidates (%)	Total women candidates	Total dynastic women candidates (%)	Total non-dynastic women candidates (%)	Z-values (Difference in proportion)
2004	56	4 (7%)	52 (93%)	14	7 (50%)	7 (50%)	-1.80*
2009	89	7 (8%)	82 (92%)	9	5 (56%)	4 (44%)	-1.67*
2014	97	12 (12%)	85 (88%)	15	5 (33%)	10 (67%)	-079
2019	86	7 (8%)	79 (92%)	18	9 (50%)	9 (50%)	-1.60*

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info and secondary sources[22] (Comparing the proportions of dynastic men and dynastic women candidates)

[22] The coding of candidates' dynastic ties was conducted manually using online secondary resources, which included English language newspapers like Times of India, Hindustan Times, Deccan Chronicle, and web-based news sources like Quint, Wire, Scroll.in and Print among others.

Table 10-5: Proportion of dynastic candidates based on gender nominated by BJP in reserved seats

Year	Total men candidates	Total dynastic men candidates (%)	Total non-dynastic men candidates (%)	Total women candidates	Total dynastic women candidates (%)	Total non-dynastic women candidates (%)	Z-values (Difference in proportion)
2004	58	3 (5%)	55 (95%)	3	1 (33%)	2 (67%)	-0.80
2009	85	5 (6%)	80 (94%)	10	1 (10%)	9 (90%)	-0.15
2014	89	8 (9%)	81 (91%)	9	2 (22%)	7 (78%)	-0.43
2019	93	6 (7%)	87 (93%)	11	5 (45%)	6 (55%)	-1.21

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info and secondary sources[23] (Comparing the proportions of dynastic men and dynastic women candidates)

My findings in table 9-5 show that in the national elections of 2004, 2009, and 2019 the observed differences in proportions between dynastic men and dynastic women candidates are statistically significant within the INC. Existing accounts show that elected women candidates access national politics through dynastic channels in major Asian democracies like Japan, India, Indonesia, and Bangladesh (Dalton 2015; Basu 2016; Wardani and Subekti 2021; Md. M. R. Khan and Ara 2023). This is reflected in the nomination patterns of women candidates within the INC, suggesting that dynastic ties play a significant role in shaping the political trajectories of women candidates in reserved seats.

On the other hand, the observed differences in proportions between dynastic men and dynastic women candidates are not statistically significant within the BJP across national elections, indicating that there are minor variations in their proportions. This suggests that dynastic ties play a limited role in shaping the selection of women candidates in reserved seats within the BJP. As discussed earlier, this phenomenon can be attributed to the INC's dominance in "reserved" seats in the post-independence era compared to the BJP (Chauchard 2016). This sustained influence allowed the INC to develop and support dynastic networks, particularly for women candidates in the reserved seats.

The preference for women with dynastic ties in reserved seats within the INC significantly narrows the pool of eligible women candidates. As discussed earlier, SC and ST politicians have fewer established political dynasties compared to the "general" category politicians, further limiting the number of women candidates who can be selected by the INC based on family connections. The preference for women dynasts within the INC reinforces patriarchal norms, where political power is inherited rather than earned and it often perpetuates male-dominated power structures within the

[23] The coding of candidates' dynastic ties was conducted manually using online secondary resources, which included English language newspapers like Times of India, Hindustan Times, Deccan Chronicle, and web-based news sources like Quint, Wire, Scroll.in and Print among others.

party, making it harder for women without such political backgrounds to break into politics in the reserved seats. On the other hand, the BJP has traditionally emphasized on strong male leadership, which often overshadows the need to promote women in the reserved seats. Since the findings in chapter 4 suggest that dynastic connections tend to provide a critical pathway to women candidates in the general seats within the BJP, fewer women dynasts in the reserved seats meant fewer overall women candidates in the reserved seats over the past two decades. The limited number of women dynasts in the reserved seats translated into a smaller pool of potential women candidates for the BJP.

5.2.5. Influence of wealth on the selection of dynastic candidates within parties

As discussed in chapter 4, dynastic politicians are believed to possess more wealth than non-dynastic politicians as they are expected to inherit it from family members who previously held office (Chandra and Umaira 2011; Chandra 2014; 2016). My finding echoes this claim by showing that the dynastic candidates tend to be wealthier than non-dynasts nominated to the reserved seats by the INC in the national elections of 2014 and 2019. This suggests that wealth is one of the major factors influencing the selection of dynastic candidates in the reserved seats by the INC in the crucial national elections of 2014 and 2019. Table 11-5 presents a comparison of wealth between dynastic and non-dynastic candidates, nominated by the INC in the reserved seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 11-5: Comparison of wealth between dynasts and non-dynasts nominated by INC in reserved seats

Year	Total number of dynastic candidates	Mean wealth of dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	Median wealth of dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	Total number of non-dynastic candidates	Mean wealth of non-dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	Median wealth of non-dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	11	212 lakhs	717 lakhs	59	145 lakhs	43 lakhs	0.688
2009	12	274 lakhs	214 lakhs	86	272 lakhs	70 lakhs	0.994
2014	17	2305 lakhs	615 lakhs	95	462 lakhs	136 lakhs	0.004*
2019	16	946 lakhs	686 lakhs	88	450 lakhs	168 lakhs	0.038*

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info and secondary sources [24]

[24] The coding of candidates' dynastic ties was conducted manually using online secondary resources, which included English language newspapers like Times of India, Hindustan Times, Deccan Chronicle, and web-based news sources like Quint, Wire, Scroll.in and Print among others.

My findings are statistically significant in the national elections of 2014 and 2019, and my descriptive statistics also show that the mean wealth of dynastic candidates tend to be higher than the non-dynasts in the national elections of 2004 and 2009. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the national election of 2014 was seen as a crucial turning point in Indian politics as the INC which was in power after the 2004 and 2009 national elections was embroiled in several corruption scandals and faced significant anti-incumbency sentiments (Sardesai 2015). To counter the anti-incumbency sentiments of the electorate, the INC might have nominated dynastic candidates with inherited wealth, since these candidates had better resources to fund their electoral campaigns, which were be crucial in reaching out to the electorate in the reserved seats. Moreover, the national election of 2019 was crucial for the INC, because after suffering a significant defeat in the national election of 2014, it indulged in an expensive electoral campaign to challenge the dominance of the BJP and reclaim its power in national politics (Bansal 2019). Thus, greater wealth among dynastic politicians perhaps have tilted the party nominations in their favour in the national election of 2019. My interview with a former party spokesperson confirms that the INC tends to prefer dynastic candidates in the reserved seats for their inherited wealth. He stated that " the Congress party dominated the politics in reserved seats in the post-independence period, therefore, it has successfully created a large pool of elite dynastic politicians in the reserved categories. The dynastic politicians from reserved communities occasionally become active members of the AICC and have access to huge financial resources and networks compared to others " (Sanjay Jha, interview with the author, Zoom, June 2022). The statements from the interview and my empirical evidence suggest that party elites within the INC tend to prefer dynastic candidates in reserved seats due to their inherited wealth.

Furthermore, my findings also indicates that the dynastic candidates nominated to the reserved seats by the BJP tend to be wealthier than the non-dynasts in the national elections of 2009 and 2014. My finding reflects the existing literature that claims dynastic politicians are believed to possess more wealth than non-dynastic politicians as they are expected to inherit it from family members who previously held political office (Chandra and Umaira 2011; Chandra 2014; 2016). Table 12-5 presents a comparison of wealth between dynastic and non-dynastic candidates, nominated by the BJP in the reserved seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 12-5: Comparison of wealth between dynastic and non-dynastic candidates nominated by BJP in reserved seats

Year	Total number of dynastic candidates	Mean wealth of dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	Median wealth of dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	Total number of non-dynastic candidates	Mean wealth of non-dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	Median wealth of non-dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	4	11 lakhs	24 lakhs	57	102 lakhs	30 lakhs	0.7
2009	6	148 lakhs	56 lakhs	89	61 lakhs	34 lakhs	0.009*
2014	10	388 lakhs	271 lakhs	88	193 lakhs	110 lakhs	0.032*

2019	11	669 lakhs	309 lakhs	93	452 lakhs	233 lakhs	0.303

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info and secondary sources[25]

My findings are statistically significant in the national elections of 2009 and 2014, and my descriptive statistics also show that the mean wealth of dynastic candidates tend to be higher than the non-dynasts in the national election of 2019. As discussed earlier in this chapter, BJP's nomination of wealthier dynastic candidates over non-dynasts in reserved seats in the national election of 2009 can also be linked to the economic context of the time, particularly the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008 (Loxley 2012). The BJP has historically positioned itself against dynastic politics, and it often criticizes the INC for its reliance on family-based political succession, portraying itself as a party that values internal democracy and opportunities for non-dynastic leaders to rise through the party ranks (Chhibber and Jassal 2018; Jaffrelot 2015). Since the INC has dominated in "reserved" seats in the post-independence era compared to the BJP, therefore, to effectively compete with the INC, which has a history of dynastic politics, the BJP might have adopted a strategy to nominate dynastic candidates with inherited wealth in the national election of 2009.

By selecting dynastic candidates with inherited wealth in 2009, the BJP ensured that they could run well-funded campaigns, increasing their chances of electoral success in the reserved seats. Additionally, the national election of 2014 was also crucial for the BJP as it wanted to overthrow the INC, which was in power since 2004 and was facing severe anti-incumbency sentiments due to its widespread corruption scandals (Sardesai 2015). The BJP wanted to capitalize on this sentiment of anti-incumbency against the INC, and its campaigns were marked by the extensive use of expensive technology and social media (Sardesai 2015). These factors perhaps have tilted the BJP's nominations in 2014 towards dynastic candidates who tend to have access to inherited wealth in the reserved seats. My findings also suggest that although the BJP positions itself against dynastic politics, its practical approach of nominating wealthy dynasts in reserved seats in the crucial national elections of 2009 and 2014 reflects a balance between its ideological stance and electoral pragmatism.

5.2.6. Influence of wealth on the selection of dynastic women candidates within parties

My analysis shows that party elites in the INC preferred proportionately more women dynasts compared to men in the reserved seats in majority of the national elections. Existing literature highlights that some parliamentary seats are often allegedly "sold" to aspiring candidates, and in the absence of state-funding, candidates must invest their own resources and networks to run a viable electoral campaign in India (Nagi 2008; Gowda and Sridharan 2012). My findings confirm that in the national election of 2019 women dynasts in the INC with access to inherited wealth are more able to garner support for their party nominations in the reserved seats. Table 13-5 presents a comparison of wealth between women dynasts and non-dynasts, nominated by the INC in the

[25] The coding of candidates' dynastic ties was conducted manually using online secondary resources, which included English language newspapers like Times of India, Hindustan Times, Deccan Chronicle, and web-based news sources like Quint, Wire, Scroll.in and Print among others.

reserved seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 13-5: Comparison of wealth between women dynasts and non-dynasts nominated by INC in reserved seats

Year	Total number of women dynasts	Mean wealth of women dynasts in Indian rupees	Median wealth of women dynasts in Indian rupees	Total number of non-dynastic candidates	Mean wealth of non-dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	Median wealth of non-dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	7	150 lakhs	71 lakhs	59	145 lakhs	43 lakhs	0.917
2009	5	406 lakhs	268 lakhs	86	272 lakhs	70 lakhs	0.732
2014	5	104 lakhs	407 lakhs	95	462 lakhs	136 lakhs	0.108
2019	9	1130 lakhs	535 lakhs	88	450 lakhs	168 lakhs	0. 36*

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info and secondary sources[26]

My findings are statistically significant in the national election of 2019, and in the other national elections of 2004 and 2009 the mean wealth of women dynasts tend to be higher than the non-dynasts in the reserved seats. The INC has historically benefited from dynastic politics, where voters show their loyalty to well-established political families (Ziegfeld 2016). In the reserved seats, women dynasts nominated by the INC tend to be preferred not just for their political legacy, which translates into their loyal voters, but also for their inherited wealth. This preference for wealthy women dynasts in reserved seats within the INC can be crucial for funding electoral campaigns, organizing rallies, and reaching the electorate. Moreover, it could help the party to retain and mobilize its traditional support bases, sustain its dominance in reserved seats, and offset the risk of nominating women candidates.

My interviews with an active party member and a scholar suggest that the INC tends to prefer women candidates with dynastic connections for their perceived name-recognition, access to political networks, and inherited wealth in the reserved seats. Praveen Rai stated in an interview:

[26] The coding of candidates' dynastic ties was conducted manually using online secondary resources, which included English language newspapers like Times of India, Hindustan Times, Deccan Chronicle, and web-based news sources like Quint, Wire, Scroll.in and Print among others.

> In the national election of 2019, five out of ten women nominated by the INC were from political families even in the reserved seats, much higher than men. The reasons for more party nominations to dynastic women candidates was attributed to passing on the family legacy to spouses and daughters in the absence of sons and de jure replacements for geographical strongmen unable to contest due to legal conviction. Parties play safe by supporting the candidature of dynastic women candidates, as they score over non-dynastic women due to inherited wealth, name-recognition, family patronage networks and localized committed voters. (Praveen Rai, interview with the author, Zoom, June 2022)

This statement highlights the inclination of the INC towards women dynasts with name-recognition, inherited wealth, and bias against other potential non-dynastic women for nomination in the reserved seats. For instance, Meira Kumar, daughter of a prominent Dalit leader Jagjivan Ram, leveraged her father's political legacy to enter electoral politics and has been a key women politician in the INC (*The Times of India* 2009). Kumar was nominated across all the past four national elections (2004-2019) from her father's seat in Sasaram where her family possessed a strong political clout and popularity. While her father did not hand down a political career to her, his own prominent career allowed her to obtain the necessary qualities (an education, access to financial resources, a connection to the party, etc.) that helped her to enter electoral politics. Similar instances occurred with other women dynasts such as Selja Kumari, Dalbir Kaur, P. Lakshmi and many others who were nominated in seats by the INC which were previously won by their family members. These examples show the INC's preference for resourceful women dynasts for nomination in reserved seats which are previously won by their family members. Additionally, a prominent member of the INC stated in an interview:

> Reserved seats are designated for SCs and STs and within these communities certain influential political families often dominate. By choosing wealthy women from these political families, the INC aims to enhance its image as a party supporting women's empowerment and gender representation in the reserved seats. Moreover, women dynasts also come with the advantage of name-recognition and established political networks which help them to contest from reserved seats. This approach has also helped the party in appealing to female voters and creating a broader base of support. (Rajeev Gowda, interview with the author, Zoom, July 2022)

The interviews suggest that the INC tends to prefer wealthy women dynasts so that they can strategically combine their financial resources, name-recognition, and political influence to maximize their electoral success in reserved seats.

On the other hand, the BJP nominated a limited number of women dynasts in reserved seats compared to the INC across all the national elections. My finding shows that in the national election of 2014 women dynasts in the BJP, with access to inherited wealth, are more able to garner support for their party nomination in the reserved seats, reflecting that some parliamentary seats are often allegedly "sold" to aspiring candidates (Nagi 2008; Jensenius 2016). Table 14-5 presents a comparison of wealth between women dynasts and non-dynasts, nominated by the BJP in the

reserved seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 14-5: Comparison of wealth between women dynasts and non-dynasts nominated by BJP in reserved seats

Year	Total number of women dynasts	Mean wealth of women dynasts in Indian rupees	Median wealth of women dynasts in Indian rupees	Total number of non-dynastic candidates	Mean wealth of non-dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	Median wealth of non-dynastic candidates in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	1	87 lakhs	87 lakhs	57	102 lakhs	30 lakhs	n/a
2009	1	465 lakhs	465 lakhs	89	61 lakhs	34 lakhs	n/a
2014	2	799 lakhs	799 lakhs	88	193 lakhs	110 lakhs	0.002*
2019	5	933 lakhs	508 lakhs	93	452 lakhs	233 lakhs	0.157

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info and secondary sources[27]

My findings are statistically significant in the national election of 2014, and in the other national elections of 2009 and 2019 the mean wealth of women dynasts tend to be higher than the non-dynasts in the reserved seats. Even though the BJP nominated a limited number of women dynasts in reserved seats in the national election of 2014, the women dynasts tend to be wealthier than the non-dynasts. Since the BJP indulged in an expensive electoral campaign in 2014, it perhaps have nominated wealthy women dynasts to surpass the INC's campaign efforts to gain a competitive edge. Moreover, it has increased the nomination of women dynasts in the national election of 2019 from previous elections, and the mean wealth of women dynasts tend to be higher than non-dynasts in the reserved seats. Building on their landslide victory of 2014, the BJP aimed to maintain dominance in the national election of 2019 by effectively communicating their achievements, necessitating significant financial investment in media campaigns and outreach activities (Vaishnav 2019). To mitigate electoral risks, the BJP likely preferred nominating wealthy women dynasts in reserved seats, to leverage their financial resources and ensure their electability.

My interview with a scholar indicates that the BJP nominates women with dynastic connections for their inherited wealth in the reserved seats. He stated that " the BJP is naturally following the informal selection criteria devised by the INC for women candidates in reserved seats, since off

[27] The coding of candidates' dynastic ties was conducted manually using online secondary resources, which included English language newspapers like Times of India, Hindustan Times, Deccan Chronicle, and web-based news sources like Quint, Wire, Scroll.in and Print among others.

late it has started to dominate in the seats. Dynastic ties and inherited wealth are slowly becoming preferred informal criteria for the selection of women candidates in the reserved seats by the BJP " (Adnan Farooqui, interview with the author, Zoom, August 2022). For instance, women dynasts like Heena Gavit, Shruthi Bangaru, Ranjeeta Kumari, Bharati Pawar, and Himadri Singh who were nominated by the BJP in the reserved seats during the national election of 2019 had access to substantial financial resources, along with their political networks built by their family members. My findings suggest that financial resources tend to play a crucial role in the selection of women dynasts by the BJP in the reserved seats. This preference for wealthy women dynasts in both the major parties, however, tends to restrict the wider pool of women candidates who lack either name-recognition or inherited wealth, thereby limiting women's representation in national elections from reserved seats.

5.2.7. Influence of criminality and wealth on the selection of women candidates within the parties

Politicians in reserved seats are less likely to engage in "money and muscle" power than other politicians (Vaishnav 2011a; Jensenius 2016). This is because these reserved seats are specifically allotted to historically marginalized groups like the SCs and STs, limiting the overall pool of the candidates and reducing the stakes involved in the electoral process (Chandra 2004; Vaishnav 2011a). My finding confirms that proportionately fewer candidates with criminal cases are nominated in the reserved seats compared to the ones nominated to the general seats by the INC. The less contentious nature of the reserved seats makes them ideal for nominating women candidates, particularly, those without criminal cases, to promote an image of inclusivity in the INC. My findings also indicate that women candidates nominated to the reserved seats by the INC are less likely to have criminal cases compared to the men in the majority of national elections.

Table 15-5 shows the number/proportion of candidates with and without criminal cases, nominated by the INC in the general and reserved seats. Additionally, table 16-5 shows the number/proportion of candidates with criminal cases, based on their gender, nominated by the INC in the reserved seats.

Table 15-5: Comparison of proportion of candidates with criminal cases in general and reserved seats nominated by INC

Year	Total number of candidates in general seats	Total number of candidates with criminal cases in general seats (%)	Total number of candidates without criminal cases in general seats (%)	Total number of candidates in reserved seats	Total number of candidates with criminal cases in reserved seats (%)	Total number of candidates without criminal cases in reserved seats (%)
2004	310	46 (15%)	264(85%)	70	9 (13%)	61 (87%)
2009	309	89 (29%)	220 (71%)	98	20 (20%)	78 (80%)
2014	351	100 (28%)	251(72%)	112	25 (22%)	87 (78%)

2019	318	131(41%)	187 (59%)	104	30 (29%)	74 (71%)

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

Table 16-5: Proportion of candidates with and without criminal cases based on their gender nominated by INC in reserved seats

Year	Total number of men candidates	Total number of men with criminal cases (%)	Total number of men without criminal cases (%)	Total number of women candidates	Total number of women with criminal cases (%)	Total number of women without criminal cases (%)	Z-value (Difference in proportion)
2004	56	8 (14%)	48 (86%)	14	1 (7%)	13 (93%)	0.76
2009	89	20 (22%)	69 (78%)	9	-	-	n/a
2014	97	24 (25%)	73 (75%)	15	1 (7%)	14 (93%)	1.99*
2019	86	27 (31%)	59 (69%)	18	3 (16%)	15 (84%)	-1.60*

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

My findings suggest that while nominating candidates with criminal cases are not uncommon, it is less prevalent in the reserved seats. It aligns with the claims in the existing literature which highlight that politicians in reserved seats are less likely to engage in "money and muscle" power than other politicians (Vaishnav 2011a; Jensenius 2016). My findings show that in the national elections of 2014 and 2019 the observed differences in proportions between men and women candidates with criminal cases are statistically significant, and this indicate that a limited number of women with criminal cases are selected by the INC in the reserved seats. The INC has historically aimed to project itself as a party that supports gender equality and women empowerment (Guha 2010). By nominating women candidates without criminal cases in reserved seats, the party intends to highlight its commitment to clean politics and gender inclusion.

As discussed in chapter 4, in addition to dynastic ties, candidates with criminal cases often play a significant role in funding political parties (Vaishnav 2011b). Due to limited party resources and the high cost of campaigns, parties rely on wealthy candidates with criminal cases to supply funds for party activities and electoral campaigns (Vaishnav 2011b; Duraisamy 2014). However, my findings show that the candidates with criminal cases nominated by the INC are not consistently wealthier than the candidates without criminal cases across all the national elections in the reserved seats. Table 17-5 presents a comparison of wealth between candidates with and without criminal cases, nominated by the INC in the reserved seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 17-5: Comparison of wealth between candidates with and without criminal cases nominated by INC in reserved seats

Year	Total number of candidates	Total number of candidates with criminal cases (%)	Mean wealth of candidates with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of candidates with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Total number of candidates without criminal cases (%)	Mean wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	70	9	269 lakhs	116 lakhs	61	139 lakhs	45 lakhs	0.462
2009	98	20	170 lakhs	84 lakhs	78	298 lakhs	88 lakhs	0.531
2014	112	25	1760 lakhs	178 lakhs	87	449 lakhs	188 lakhs	0.627
2019	104	30	356 lakhs	107 lakhs	74	603 lakhs	257 lakhs	0.182

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

My findings are not statistically significant in any of the national elections, and my descriptive statistics show that only in the national elections of 2004 and 2014 the mean wealth of the candidates with criminal cases tend to be higher than the candidates without criminal cases in the reserved seats. My findings align with the claims in the existing literature which highlight the correlation between wealth and criminality among the candidates only during the national elections of 2004 and 2014 (Vaishnav 2011b; Duraisamy 2014). My analysis also shows that the men with criminal cases nominated by the INC are not consistently wealthier than the candidates without criminal cases in the seats. Similarly, my findings show that the limited number of women with criminal cases nominated by the INC are also not consistently wealthier than the candidates without criminal cases in the seats. Table 18-5 presents a comparison of wealth between men with criminal cases and candidates without criminal cases, nominated by the INC in the reserved seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance. Additionally, table 19-5 presents a comparison of wealth between women with criminal cases and candidates without criminal cases, nominated by the INC in the reserved seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 18-5: Comparison of wealth between men with criminal cases and candidates without criminal cases nominated by INC in reserved seats

Year	Total number of men with criminal cases	Mean wealth of men with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of men with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Total number of candidates without criminal cases	Mean wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	8	288 lakhs	161 lakhs	61	139 lakhs	45 lakhs	0.425
2009	20	170 lakhs	84 lakhs	78	298 lakhs	88 lakhs	0.531
2014	24	1826 lakhs	189 lakhs	87	449 lakhs	188 lakhs	0.108
2019	27	378 lakhs	107 lakhs	74	603 lakhs	257 lakhs	0.256

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

Table 19-5: Comparison of wealth between women with criminal cases and candidates without criminal cases nominated by INC in reserved seats

Year	Total number of women candidates with criminal cases	Mean wealth of women with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of women with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Total number of candidates without criminal cases	Mean wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	1	116 lakhs	116 lakhs	61	139 lakhs	45 lakhs	n/a
2009	-	-	-	78	298 lakhs	88 lakhs	n/a
2014	1	162 lakhs	162 lakhs	87	449 lakhs	188 lakhs	n/a
2019	3	202 lakhs	131 lakhs	74	603 lakhs	257 lakhs	0.416

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

My findings in table 18-5 are not statistically significant in any of the national elections, and my descriptive statistics show that only in the national elections of 2004 and 2014, the mean wealth of men with criminal cases tend to be higher than candidates without criminal cases in the reserved seats. This could imply that wealthier men with criminal cases were more prevalent in national elections of 2004 and 2014, possibly due to their ability to leverage their financial resources for campaigning, despite their criminal cases. Additionally, my findings in table 19-5 are not statistically significant in any of the national elections, and my descriptive statistics also show that the women with criminal cases are not consistently wealthier than the candidates without criminal cases in the seats. My findings further challenge the claims in the existing literature which highlight the correlation between wealth and criminality among the candidates (Vaishnav 2011b; Duraisamy 2014). My findings indicate that, at least in terms of wealth, having a criminal background, do not confer any advantage to women seeking nomination in the reserved seats in the INC. The INC's strategy of nominating women candidates without criminal cases can also be seen as a tactical move to strengthen its position in the politically less competitive reserved seats.

Much like the INC, the BJP also nominated proportionately fewer candidates with criminal cases in the reserved seats compared to the ones nominated to the general seats in the majority of national elections. My findings also indicate that almost similar proportions of men and women candidates with criminal cases are nominated by the BJP in the national elections of 2009 and 2014. Table 20-5 shows the number/proportion of candidates with and without criminal cases, nominated by the BJP in the general and reserved seats. Additionally, table 21-5 shows the number/proportion of candidates with criminal cases, based on their gender, nominated by the BJP in the reserved seats.

Table 20-5: Comparison of proportion of candidates with criminal cases in general and reserved seats nominated by BJP

Year	Total number of candidates in general seats	Total number of candidates with criminal cases in general seats (%)	Total number of candidates without criminal cases in general seats (%)	Total number of candidates in reserved seats	Total number of candidates with criminal cases in reserved seats (%)	Total number of candidates without criminal cases in reserved seats (%)
2004	276	50 (18%)	226 (82%)	61	14 (23%)	45 (77%)
2009	310	93 (30%)	217 (70%)	95	20 (21%)	75 (79%)
2014	329	117 (36%)	212 (64%)	98	23 (23%)	75 (77%)
2019	337	145 (43%)	192 (57%)	104	30 (29%)	74 (71%)

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

Table 21-5: Proportion of candidates with and without criminal cases based on their gender nominated by BJP in reserved seats

Year	Total number of men candidates	Total number of men with criminal cases (%)	Total number of men with no criminal cases (%)	Total number of women candidates	Total number of women with criminal cases (%)	Total number of women with no criminal cases (%)	Z-value (Difference in proportion)
2004	58	14 (24%)	44 (76%)	3	-	-	n/a
2009	85	17 (20%)	68 (80%)	10	3 (30%)	7 (70%)	-0.58
2014	89	20 (22%)	69 (78%)	9	3 (33%)	6 (67%)	-0.69
2019	93	29 (31%)	64 (69%)	11	1 (9%)	10 (91%)	2.04*

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

My findings suggest that barring the national election of 2004, nomination of candidates with criminal cases is less prevalent in the reserved seats within the BJP. This finding echoes the claims in the existing literature which highlight that politicians in reserved seats are less likely to engage in "money and muscle" power than other politicians (Vaishnav 2011a; Jensenius 2016). My

findings also show that only in the national election of 2019, the observed differences in proportions between men and women candidates with criminal cases are statistically significant. My descriptive statistics show that a sizeable number of women candidates with criminal cases are nominated in the national elections of 2009 and 2014 within the BJP. The women candidates nominated by the BJP have criminal charges related to disobedience related to order duly promulgated by a public servant and charges related to voluntarily causing hurt to deter a public servant from his/her duty. These criminal charges suggest that these women candidates could have been involved in incidents where they actively resisted or obstructed public officials in the performance of their duties. These charges indicate that these women have been actively involved in political movements or protests, and their participation might have been vigorous enough to lead to confrontations with public officials. The BJP's decision to nominate women candidates with criminal cases reflect the party's stance on preferring candidates who are active in their advocacy and who project a strong, uncompromising image to mobilize support from specific voters in the reserved seats.

My findings also show that the candidates with criminal cases nominated by the BJP in the reserved seats are not consistently wealthier than the candidates without criminal cases across all the national elections. Table 22-5 presents a comparison of wealth between candidates with and without criminal cases, nominated by the BJP in the reserved seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 22-5: Comparison of wealth between candidates with and without criminal cases nominated by BJP in reserved seats

Year	Total number of candidates	Total number of candidates with criminal cases (%)	Mean wealth of candidates with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of candidates with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Total number of candidates without criminal cases (%)	Mean wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	61	14	36 lakhs	21 lakhs	47	113 lakhs	32 lakhs	0.382
2009	95	20	42 lakhs	23 lakhs	75	73 lakhs	37 lakhs	0.197
2014	98	23	313 lakhs	211 lakhs	75	182 lakhs	110 lakhs	0.044*
2019	104	30	431 lakhs	182 lakhs	74	502 lakhs	274 lakhs	0.652

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

My findings are statistically significant in the nation election of 2014; however, the candidates with criminal cases are not consistently wealthier than the candidates without criminal cases in the seats. My findings in the national election of 2014 echo the existing literature, which highlights the correlation between wealth and criminality among the candidates (Vaishnav 2011b; Duraisamy 2014). The BJP might have nominated candidates with criminal cases in the national election of 2014 who had access to financial resources, since this election was crucial for the party as it wanted to overthrow the INC, which was in power since 2004, and it indulged in an expensive campaign. Candidates with criminal cases and wealth have a strong local presence and substantial financial resources to fund their campaigns, which can be crucial for mobilizing voters and managing election logistics.

My findings also show that the men with criminal cases are wealthier than the candidates without criminal cases only in the national election of 2014. Moreover, the women candidates with criminal cases nominated by the BJP are not consistently wealthier than the candidates without criminal cases in the seats. Table 23-5 presents a comparison of wealth between men with criminal cases and candidates without criminal cases, nominated by the BJP in the reserved seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance. Additionally, table 24-5 presents a comparison of wealth between women with criminal cases and candidates without criminal cases, nominated by the BJP in the reserved seats between 2004-2019, indicating the mean and median values in Indian rupees, and corresponding p-values for statistical significance.

Table 23-5: Comparison of wealth between men with criminal cases and candidates without criminal cases nominated by BJP in reserved seats

Year	Total number of men candidate with criminal cases	Mean wealth of men with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of men with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Total number of candidate without criminal cases	Mean wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	14	36 lakhs	21 lakhs	47	113 lakhs	32 lakhs	0.382
2009	17	39 lakhs	21 lakhs	75	73 lakhs	37 lakhs	0.198
2014	20	331 lakhs	179 lakhs	75	182 lakhs	110 lakhs	0.049*
2019	29	432 lakhs	179 lakhs	74	502 lakhs	274 lakhs	0.659

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

Table 24-5: Comparison of wealth between women with criminal cases and candidates without criminal cases nominated by BJP in reserved seats

Year	Total number of women candidates with criminal cases	Mean wealth of women with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of women with criminal cases in Indian rupees	Total number of candidates without criminal cases	Mean wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	Median wealth of candidates without criminal cases in Indian rupees	P-value (Difference in means)
2004	-	-	-	47	113 lakhs	32 lakhs	n/a
2009	3	59 lakhs	73 lakhs	75	73 lakhs	37 lakhs	0.762
2014	3	190 lakhs	252 lakhs	75	182 lakhs	110 lakhs	0.562
2019	1	421 lakhs	421 lakhs	74	502 lakhs	274 lakhs	n/a

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

My findings in table 23-5 show that men with criminal cases were wealthier than the candidates without criminal cases in the national election of 2014, aligning with the existing literature, which highlights the correlation between wealth and criminality among the candidates (Vaishnav 2011b; Duraisamy 2014). My findings in table 24-5 suggest that only in the national election of 2014, the mean wealth of women candidates with criminal cases tend to be higher than candidates without criminal cases in the reserved seats. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the national election of 2014 was crucial for the BJP, and it might have nominated both men and women candidates with criminal cases who had access to financial resources during this election. Moreover, one significant factor that could explain why the BJP nominated a sizeable number of women candidates with criminal cases in the national elections of 2009 and 2014 in reserved seats is the limited supply of dynastic women candidates within the party. Additionally, women candidates with criminal charges like Krishna Raj, Jyoti Dhurve, Meera Kanwariya, Neelam Sonkar etc. perhaps were viewed as assertive and willing to challenge authority, potentially positioning themselves as strong leaders, and advocates for their communities. The presence of criminal charges can be controversial; however, some voters might view these women with criminal charges as champions of their causes in reserved seats.

My interview with a scholar indicates the preference for women candidates with criminal cases within the BJP for reserved seats. He stated in an interview:

> Criminality among "reserved" women is a preferred quality for their selection in the reserved seats. It adds credibility to their candidacy in the reserved areas, as having criminal charges also indicates that she is popular among her caste or tribal groups. It is not unusual for the BJP to prefer nominating women with criminal cases from reserved seats. (Adnan Farooqui, interview with the author, Zoom, August 2022)

My findings also suggest that the women with criminal cases might be considered credible candidates due to their prior experience in contesting sub-national elections. For example, Krishna Raj served as a member of the Uttar Pradesh legislative assembly from 1996 until her nomination

to a reserved seat for the national elections in both 2009 and 2014 (*The Economic Times* 2016). Similarly, women candidates like Jyoti Dhurve, Meera Kanwariya, Neelam Sonkar, Savitri Bai Foole, etc. were also nominated across the national elections of 2009 and 2014 for their criminal cases, financial credibility, popularity, and incumbency advantage.

5.2.8. Influence of higher education on the selection of women candidates within the parties

As discussed in chapter 4, an existing study on nomination patterns of candidates by parties highlights that a candidate with a post-graduate degree (i.e., a university degree) is more likely to be renominated to contest national elections in India as compared to a candidate without one (Sircar 2018a). My findings show that the women candidates nominated by both the major parties are likely to be as highly-educated as the men in the reserved seats. Table 25-5 shows the proportion of candidates with university degrees, based on their gender, nominated by the INC in the reserved seats. Additionally, table 26-5 shows the proportion of candidates with university degrees, based on their gender, nominated by the BJP in the reserved seats.

Table 25-5: Proportion of candidates with university degrees based on their gender nominated by INC in reserved seats

Year	Total men candidates	Men candidates with university degrees (%)	Total women candidates	Women candidates with university degrees (%)	Z-values (Difference in proportion)
2004	56	39 (70%)	14	12 (86%)	-1.21
2009	89	66 (74%)	9	8 (89%)	-0.98
2014	97	82 (84%)	15	12 (80%)	0.45
2019	86	72 (83%)	18	15 (83%)	0.04

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

Table 26-5: Proportion of candidates with university degrees based on their gender nominated by BJP in reserved seats

Year	Total men candidates	Men candidates with university degrees (%)	Total women candidates	Women candidates with university degrees (%)	Z-values (Difference in proportion)
2004	58	41 (70%)	3	3 (100%)	-1.10
2009	85	57 (67%)	10	7 (70%)	-0.19
2014	89	61 (68%)	9	7 (78%)	-0.57
2019	93	64 (69%)	11	8 (73%)	-0.27

Source: My analysis based on data compiled from ADR at www.myneta.info

My findings in both the INC and BJP show that there is no statistically significant difference between the observed proportions of men and women candidates with university degrees in the reserved seats in all the national elections. My findings suggest that both the parties tend to prefer women candidates who are likely to be as highly educated as the men in the reserved seats. Parties

prioritize candidates who can win elections and in reserved seats where competition can be less intense, despite the reduced pool of candidates, parties tend to favour candidates who have better educational qualifications irrespective of their gender. Voters often perceive highly educated candidates as more competent, trustworthy, and capable of effective governance in India (Sircar 2018a). By nominating almost similar proportions of both women and men candidates with university degrees, in the seats, both the parties tend to appeal to voters who prioritize these qualities in their representatives. However, in India, even in the presence of affirmative policies for minorities in education and politics, existing studies show that women in both the "reserved" communities have low and highly unequal educational attainments compared to men (Agrawal 2014; Mosse 2018; Raghavendra R. H. 2020). This disparity means that the pool of highly educated women available for nomination by the major parties tends to be smaller than that of men, which eventually results in the overall underrepresentation of women in reserved seats.

5.3. Implications of informal selection criteria on women candidates in reserved seats

My analysis provides a comprehensive analysis of the complex dynamics constraining the selection of women candidates by the two major parties in reserved seats in Indian national elections. My findings indicate that the preferred informal selection criteria for women of the two major parties tend to significantly marginalize "reserved" women from active participation in electoral politics. Both the parties have nominated a limited number of women candidates compared to men in reserved seats across the national elections held between 2004 and 2019. The INC tends to prefer women candidates who are wealthy, have dynastic ties, and are highly educated, suggesting an inclination towards those women who are already established, politically connected, and affluent. In contrast, the BJP tends to prefer women candidates who are wealthy, have criminal cases, and are highly educated, which further narrows the pool of potential women candidates for reserved seats.

The emphasis on wealth for the selection of candidates in reserved seats by both the parties reinforces the stereotype that women need substantial financial backing to be considered as viable electoral candidates. Women from the "reserved" communities, on average, have less access to financial resources and inheritance rights compared to men due to historical and systemic economic disparities (A. Deshpande 2006; Agrawal 2014). This economic disparity tends to translate into fewer women being able to meet the financial criteria that both the parties often prioritize in the reserved seats, thereby reducing their overall representation. Moreover, in the INC the focus on women with dynastic ties, even in the reserved seats, tends to significantly narrow the pool of eligible women candidates. In the reserved seats, women dynasts nominated by the INC tend to be preferred not just for their political legacy, which translates into their loyal voters, but also for their inherited wealth. Since the SC and ST communities have fewer established political dynasties compared to the "general" category, it limits the number of women who can be selected based on family connections in the INC. This preference often excludes competent and capable women leaders within the INC who might not have dynastic ties but possess strong leadership skills. Furthermore, one significant factor that tends to explain why the BJP nominated a sizeable

number of women candidates with criminal cases in reserved seats during the national elections of 2009 and 2014 is the limited supply of dynastic women candidates within the party. Additionally, women candidates with criminal charges within the BJP like Krishna Raj, Jyoti Dhurve, Meera Kanwariya, Neelam Sonkar etc. perhaps were viewed as assertive and willing to challenge authority, potentially positioning themselves as strong leaders, and advocates for their communities.

Additionally, both the parties tend to prefer women candidates who are likely to be as highly educated as the men in the reserved seats. Despite affirmative policies aimed at promoting education among "reserved" groups, studies indicate that women from "reserved" communities continue to experience lower educational attainment compared to their male counterparts (Agrawal 2014; Mosse 2018; Raghavendra R. H. 2020). The gender-wise literacy rates among "reserved" women are notably lower than the "reserved" men, further exacerbating the educational inequality (Raghavendra R. H. 2020). Given these disparities, the preference for highly educated women candidates in both the parties, further limits their pool as electoral candidates from the reserved seats. This preference inadvertently perpetuates systemic barriers to political representation for women from marginalized backgrounds, reinforcing existing inequalities in Indian politics.

My findings also indicate the differing nomination patterns of women candidates in reserved versus general seats between the INC and BJP reflecting their distinct ideological stances. While the INC has shown a proportional increase in the nomination of women candidates in reserved seats during the national elections of 2004 and 2019, aligning with its inclusive and social justice-focused ideology, the BJP has not indicated a similar trend. This discrepancy within the INC appears in reserved seats but not in general ones, potentially because competitive pressures are weaker in reserved seats, allowing the INC to "afford" to adhere more closely to its ideological principles. The BJP's focus on political loyalty, organizational strength, and traditional right-wing nationalist ideology suggests a different set of priorities that do not emphasize on increasing women's nominations in reserved seats. My findings tend to challenge Jensenius's (2016) assertion that all major Indian parties have consistently increased the nominations of women candidates in reserved seats compared to general seats, as they reveal that the BJP's strategic priorities and the INC's selective adherence to ideology result in varying approaches to women's political representation in these contexts. My findings reveal that informal selection criteria perpetuate gender bias in selecting women candidates for reserved seats within both the INC and the BJP. This pattern mirrors broader societal dynamics and power structures that favour only women with political backgrounds, financial resources, higher education, and in some cases with criminal cases, thereby shaping the candidate selection processes within the parties, and perpetuating existing underlying gender biases within it. As a result, this informal selection pattern not only limits the diversity of women candidates eligible for nomination in reserved seats but also reinforces a narrow definition of what constitutes a viable women candidate, further constraining the overall supply of women in electoral politics.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

This dissertation examines the institutional dynamics contributing to the persistent underrepresentation of women in Indian national politics, with a specific focus on the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). Through an institutionalist lens, I have attempted to unravel the formal and informal dimensions of candidate selection processes within these major political parties. By examining formal methods, informal party practices, and selection criteria, my study uncovers the complex interplay of factors that influence the parties' decisions regarding women candidates. Given the centrality of political parties as gatekeepers of electoral democracies, analyzing their candidate selection processes is deemed crucial for understanding the mechanisms behind women's exclusion from national politics in India. By exploring the mechanisms through which parties select their candidates, including the extent to which they prioritize women candidates, my study sheds light on the barriers and opportunities for women in Indian national politics.

This chapter is organized in three sections: the first section summarizes the key findings and implications of my study. The second section discusses the generalizability of my findings and turns to issues that needs further research. Lastly, the third section recommends solutions to increase the descriptive representation of women in Indian national politics.

6.2. Summary of findings

My study suggests that the centralized formal selectorate, lack of gender-inclusiveness in the selectorate, and the informal preferences of the party elites in candidate selection processes constrains the opportunities of women as electoral candidates in Indian national elections. My study also indicates how the barriers within the party structures push party elites to rely on informal criteria to select women candidates, which eventually limits their opportunities as electoral candidates in Indian national elections.

6.2.1. Role of the formal selectorate and its impact on limiting women's candidacy

Chapter 3 examines the role of the formal selectorate as the principal gatekeeper for evaluating candidate selection methods in national elections within the two major Indian political parties namely the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). My analysis sheds light on the underlying institutional gender bias prevalent among party elites in both the major Indian political parties, which might significantly constrain the opportunities available to women as electoral candidates in national elections.

My evidence indicates that the centralization of formal selectorate processes and candidate selection methods can create institutional barriers that disproportionately impede the selection of women candidates in both the major parties, as these mechanisms often concentrate decision-making authority among male party elites who might not prioritize gender diversity. Furthermore,

the limited influence of affiliated women's organizations in the candidate selection processes of both parties might restrict women's ability to advocate for their nominations in national elections. The limited role of subsidiary women's organizations in both the parties in candidate selection processes might reinforce patriarchal norms that view political leadership and decision-making as male domains. The underlying gender bias might be evident in the higher prevalence of male leaders in powerful party positions and the limited opportunities for women to influence critical decisions. This practice reflects and perpetuates societal views that question women's capabilities in leadership roles. When subsidiary women's organizations in both the parties are sidelined and have limited influence in the candidate selection processes, it discourages women's political participation and leadership within the party. Women within the party might feel that their contributions are undervalued, leading to disengagement and a lack of motivation to pursue higher political ambitions, and this dynamic perpetuates the gender imbalances in political representation and leadership. By limiting the role of subsidiary women's organizations in the candidate selection processes both the parties fail to fully leverage their potential to advocate for gender equality and promote women's candidacy in national elections. Additionally, women's underrepresentation in top decision-making positions in both the major parties might restrict their role in candidate selection, further hindering their chances of nomination in national elections. When women do not see themselves represented well in the decision-making structures of their party, they are less inclined to engage in party politics or pursue leadership positions themselves.

Despite the ideological differences between the INC and BJP, both the parties have nominated a limited number of women candidates in the national elections held between 2004 and 2019. Indian society's deep-rooted patriarchal norms of keeping women outside of public affairs influences the parties and their attitudes towards women in leadership roles (Dagar 2011). Thus, operating within this societal framework might often hamper women's advancement within the two major Indian political parties. Both the parties prioritize winning elections which has led them to nominate candidates they believe are most likely to secure votes. This pragmatic approach often overshadows the INC's ideological commitments to gender equality, resulting in a limited number of women candidates during national elections.

Similarly, the BJP's conservative and nationalist ideology emphasizes traditional roles for women, and when combined with electoral pragmatism, it leads to fewer women being nominated during the national elections. My findings indicate that power structures in both the parties are dominated by male leaders who might be less inclined to promote women candidates. The potential women candidates can often lack the same level of support, resources, and mentorship as their male counterparts, making it more challenging for them to ascend to party ranks and secure nomination in national elections. Thus, the limited nomination of women candidates by both the INC and BJP, despite their ideological differences, suggests the influence of deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and the prioritization of electoral pragmatism over gender equality.

My findings indicate that, despite Sonia Gandhi's long tenure as president of the INC, the party has consistently nominated relatively few women candidates in national elections, revealing a

contradiction between its pro-women rhetoric and its actual candidate selection practices. Over the past two decades, the INC's commitment to enhancing women's representation has been minimal, with few meaningful efforts to increase the number of women candidates in national elections. Similarly, the BJP has never appointed a woman as a party president, emphasizing a lack of political will to create equitable leadership opportunities for women within its ranks. Both parties engage in tokenism by nominating a small number of high-profile women candidates to project a commitment to gender equality while making only slight changes to the overall nomination of women candidates in national elections. This strategy enables them to appear progressive while maintaining the existing gender-exclusive status quo. Despite their differing ideological backgrounds, the nomination patterns in both the INC and BJP are shaped by practical factors such as electoral strategy, internal party dynamics, and societal norms, which have contributed to the limited nomination of women candidates in national elections between 2004 and 2019. By shedding light on the institutional challenges and barriers faced by women in the parties, chapter 3 lays the groundwork for understanding the broader dynamics shaping gender disparities in electoral representation in India.

6.2.2. Significance of informal selection criteria in limiting women's candidacy in general seats

My findings in chapter 4 offer a nuanced analysis of the complex dynamics surrounding the selection of women candidates by India's two major political parties i.e. INC and the BJP in "general" seats during national elections held between 2004 and 2019. The chapter suggests that the informal selection criteria preferred by these parties significantly constrain the participation of "general" women in party politics. Both the parties tend to prefer a limited number of women candidates who meet informal criteria such as wealth, dynastic ties, criminality, and higher-education for general seats. Women, on average, possess fewer financial assets than men in India due to persistent gender pay gaps and limited inheritance rights (Agrawal 2014; Mazumdar and Chaudhary 2022). This economic disparity means that fewer women can meet the financial criteria often prioritized by both the parties in general seats, thereby reducing their representation.

The INC tends to prefer women candidates with dynastic connections, leveraging their name-recognition and inherited patronage networks for general seats. On the other hand, the BJP tends to prefer women candidates with dynastic ties who have access to inherited wealth for general seats. Despite their strategic differences, both the parties tend to exhibit a substantial demand for women dynasts in the general seats, which restricts the pool of women candidates to those with either name-recognition or inherited wealth, limiting broader women's representation in national politics. Furthermore, both the parties have nominated a considerable number of women candidates with criminal cases in the general seats over the past two decades, limiting opportunities for women who are less likely to have such criminal cases. Additionally, both the parties tend to prefer women candidates who are as highly educated as their male counterparts in the general seats. As of 2021, around half of the "general" male population aged between 15 to 49 had at least 10 years of schooling, compared to only 41 per cent of their "general" female counterparts (Kanwal

2022). The gender gap in education is even more pronounced in rural areas, with only one out of three women receiving at least 10 years of schooling (Kanwal 2022). Women also perform poorly in post-graduation and technical education courses across sixteen states in India (S. Ghosh and Kundu 2021). Despite this educational disparity, both the major parties tend to prefer highly educated women candidates, as they view higher education as a way to mitigate the risk of their electability. This preference restricts the pool of potential women candidates, as fewer women have access to higher education compared to men in India.

Traditional gender norms prescribe specific roles and behaviors for men and women, often positioning women as less suitable for electoral politics. These norms suggest that women are inherently more nurturing and less competitive, traits that are traditionally seen as incompatible with political leadership. This gender bias is manifested through the informal selection criteria preferred by the party elites, undervaluing women's capabilities and fostering a perception that women must possess extraordinary qualities to be considered as viable electoral candidates. In candidate selection for general seats, these gender norms manifest in several ways as the parties tend to prefer wealthy women, assuming that they can handle the financial demands of electoral campaigns, reflecting a bias that equates financial capabilities with competence. Women from political dynasties tend to be perceived as more acceptable electoral candidates because they carry the legitimacy, influence of their family name, and inherited financial resources, countering skepticism about their individual capabilities. Moreover, the preference for women candidates with criminal cases can be linked to perceptions of strength and resilience, indicating toughness that counters stereotypes of women as weak and overly compassionate. Additionally, educational attainment tend to be used as a proxy for intelligence, and given the traditional beliefs about women's abilities, higher education becomes a critical factor in legitimizing women's candidacy. These informal selection criteria collectively create a narrow pathway for women to enter electoral politics in general seats in Indian national elections, where only those who meet these stringent, and often gender-biased expectations are considered for candidacy.

My findings indicate the preference for wealth, dynastic ties, criminality, and higher education as informal selection criteria that tend to limit the pool of potential women candidates in the general seats, thereby perpetuating gender imbalances in political representation. This selective approach not only discourages a broader range of women from participating in electoral politics, but also reinforces underlying traditional gender norms that question women's suitability for leadership roles. As a result, the supply of women candidates for general seats remains limited, deterring many qualified women from pursuing political opportunities and perpetuating the belief that only a select few can fulfill the "winnability" standards set by the male party elites.

6.2.3. Significance of informal selection criteria in limiting women's candidacy in reserved seats

My analysis in chapter 5 highlights the intricate dynamics influencing the selection of women candidates by India's two major political parties, i.e. INC and the BJP, in "reserved" seats during

national elections held between 2004 and 2019. My findings indicate that the informal selection criteria favoured by these parties significantly marginalizes the "reserved" women, thereby limiting their active participation in electoral politics. Both the parties have nominated a limited number of women candidates compared to men in the reserved seats across the national elections held between 2004 and 2019. The INC tends to favor women candidates who are wealthy, possess dynastic ties, and are highly-educated. This suggests an inclination towards women candidates who are already established, politically connected, and affluent in reserved seats. On the other hand, the BJP tends to prefer women candidates who are wealthy, have criminal cases, and are highly educated, further narrowing the pool of potential women candidates in reserved seats.

The emphasis on wealth in the selection of women candidates in reserved seats by both the parties reinforces the stereotype that women need substantial financial backing to be considered as viable electoral candidates. Women from "reserved" communities typically have less access to financial resources and inheritance rights compared to men due to historical and systemic economic disparities (A. Deshpande 2006; Agrawal 2014). This economic disparity results in fewer women meeting the financial criteria prioritized by both the parties, thereby reducing their representation in the reserved seats. The INC also tends to focus on women candidates with dynastic ties, even in the reserved seats, which further narrows the pool of potential women candidates. In the reserved seats, women dynasts nominated by the INC tend to be preferred not just for their political legacy which translates into their loyal voters, but also for their inherited wealth. Since the SC and ST communities have fewer established political dynasties compared to the "general" category, the number of women selected based on their family connections is also limited. This preference often excludes competent and capable women leaders within the INC who might not have dynastic ties but possess strong leadership skills.

On the other hand, in the BJP, a significant factor explaining the nomination of a sizeable number of women candidates with criminal cases in the national elections of 2009 and 2014 in reserved seats is the limited supply of dynastic women candidates within the party. Women candidates with criminal charges, such as Krishna Raj, Jyoti Dhurve, Meera Kanwariya and Neelam Sonkar, perhaps were viewed as assertive and willing to challenge authority, potentially positioning themselves as strong leaders, and advocates for their communities. Additionally, both the parties tend to prefer women candidates who are as highly educated as their male counterparts in reserved seats. Despite affirmative policies aimed at promoting education among "reserved" communities, women from these communities continue to experience lower educational attainment and literacy rates compared to their male counterparts (Agrawal 2014; Mosse 2018; Raghavendra R. H. 2020). The preference for highly-educated women candidates by both the parties tends to further limit their pool of potential women candidates from reserved seats, inadvertently perpetuating systemic barriers to political representation for women from marginalized backgrounds and reinforcing existing gender inequalities in Indian politics.

My findings also suggest the differing nomination patterns of women candidates in reserved versus general seats between the INC and the BJP reflecting their distinct ideological stances. While the

INC has shown a proportional increase in the nomination of women candidates in the reserved seats during the national elections of 2004 and 2019, aligning with its inclusive and social justice-focused ideology, the BJP has not indicated a similar trend. The discrepancy between my findings and Jensenius's (2016) work highlight that the INC's practice of nominating more women candidates in reserved seats compared to general seats was not consistent across all election cycles, but rather a strategic response to particular political contexts, such as the 2004 and 2019 elections. This selective increase in women's nominations suggest that the INC's approach to gender inclusivity in its candidate selection process was likely driven by electoral calculations and the lower competitiveness of reserved seats, rather than a sustained commitment to reducing gender disparities across all national elections. In contrast, the BJP did not increase its nomination of women candidates in reserved seats compared to general seats during the 2004–2019 national elections. This can be attributed to the party's traditional focus on conservative and right-wing values, which prioritize male leadership and maintain the status quo in reserved seats in comparison to general seats, limiting opportunities for women's political candidacies. The differing patterns in the INC and BJP's nomination of women reflect their broader ideological commitments and strategic priorities, particularly in the less competitive reserved seats. While the INC's emphasis on social inclusivity likely contributed to its proportional increase in women's nominations in 2004 and 2019, the BJP's commitment to traditional right-wing nationalist ideology led to a different approach, contradicting Jensenius's (2016) assertion that all major Indian parties increased the nomination of women candidates in reserved seats than in general seats.

My findings also suggest the underlying gender bias of party elites in selecting women candidates for reserved seats, indicating that the informal selection criteria reinforce these biases within the INC and the BJP. This pattern mirrors broader societal dynamics and power structures that only favour women candidates with political backgrounds, financial resources, higher education, and in some cases with criminal cases, thereby shaping the candidate selection processes within the parties, and perpetuating the existing gender biases. Consequently, this informal selection pattern not only restricts the diversity of women candidates eligible for nomination in reserved seats but also tends to solidify a limited understanding of who qualifies as a viable woman candidate, thereby further diminishing the overall supply of women in electoral politics.

6.2.4. Implications

Indeed, political parties play a crucial role as gatekeepers in electoral democracies, shaping the opportunities for women's political participation and representation. My research sheds light on the specific challenges faced by women in India due to the actions and structures of the two major political parties, the INC, and the BJP. My analysis tend to highlight that women encounter both formal and informal barriers to political participation within these parties. Formal barriers include opaque nomination procedures, centralized candidate selection processes, and lack of gender inclusive formal selectorate, all of which limit women's access to electoral opportunities in national elections. Informal barriers, such as gender bias among party elites and preferred informal

selection criteria for women candidates, further exacerbate the challenges faced by women seeking political representation in both general and reserved seats during national elections.

My analysis conducted in the preceding chapters explains that the formal candidate selection methods, selectorate, and informal selection criteria within the two major political parties in India contribute to the persistent underrepresentation of women in national politics. The formal selectorate and candidate selection methods within both the parties perpetuate underlying gender bias, where decision-making remains predominantly in the hands of the male party elites. This bias discourages broader women's political participation as electoral candidates and leadership within the parties. The emphasis on informal criteria such as wealth, dynastic ties, criminal cases, and higher education for the selection of women within both the parties reinforces the perception that women need extraordinary qualifications to be considered as viable electoral candidates. This perpetuates societal norms that question women's capabilities in leadership roles.

My findings suggest that political parties in India are falling short in their representative functions, particularly concerning the equal participation and representation of women and men in positions of power and decision-making within their formal structures. This underrepresentation reinforces existing underlying gender disparities in political leadership and perpetuates women's underrepresentation in national politics. Addressing these barriers requires concerted efforts from political parties to reform their internal processes, promote gender equality, and actively support the inclusion of women in political decision-making. By dismantling institutionalized sexism, increasing transparency in candidate selection, and implementing affirmative measures to support women's political representation, parties can help create a more inclusive and representative democracy in India.

Looking ahead, the recent passage of the "Women's Reservation Bill" in September 2023, that will allocate 33 per cent of seats in the Lok Sabha and sub-national state assemblies for women from 2029 (Ganapathy 2023), presents a significant opportunity for enhancing women's representation in Indian national politics. However, my findings indicate that systemic biases within the political parties can continue to shape the nomination process for women candidates in national politics. As India move towards implementing the "Women's Reservation Bill" in 2029, it will be important to monitor how both the parties navigate the selection of women candidates for national elections.

This development is likely to significantly influence both inter-party and intra-party dynamics in the candidate selection processes of the INC and the BJP. From an inter-party perspective, the bill might intensify competition between the two parties to secure and promote women candidates, as they seek to showcase their commitment to gender equality in response to the new legislative mandate. This could lead to a strategic recalibration in how each party approaches women's nominations, potentially prompting the INC to bolster its efforts in this area to reclaim its image as a progressive party. Conversely, the BJP might be motivated to enhance its support for women candidates to align with the objectives of the bill, potentially challenging its historical emphasis

on patriarchal norms and conservative values, especially following its unanimous passage of the "Women's Reservation Bill" in parliament in September 2023.

Intra-party dynamics will also be affected, as party elites will need to reassess their informal selection criteria and processes to ensure compliance with the new requirements. This could open up space for women within party structures, allowing affiliated women's organizations to exert more influence over candidate nominations. However, if systemic biases remain unaddressed, there is a risk that parties might engage in tokenistic practices, nominating women primarily to meet the quota without fundamentally altering the underlying power dynamics. The implications of these changes for future research are substantial. My future work will need to consider how the implementation of the "Women's Reservation Bill" reshapes the candidate selection processes both formally and informally and whether it effectively increases the number of women candidates nominated by both the parties. My future research intends to explore and examine the extent to which the bill alters underlying entrenched biases and informal practices within the parties, as well as how women's political participation in both national and sub-national politics evolve in the context of these new legislative frameworks. Additionally, investigating the experiences of women candidates in navigating the new political landscape created by the bill will provide valuable insights into its effectiveness and impact on women's descriptive representation in Indian politics. Thus, by addressing the institutional barriers identified in my dissertation, parties can contribute to creating a more inclusive and representative political framework in India. The next section discusses the generalizability of my findings and turn to issues that need further research.

6.3. Generalizability of my findings and avenues for future research

One pertinent issue arises from studies that focus on one country is whether the findings will be applicable beyond the case in question. The validity of the findings rests on the fact that institutional gender bias in parties exists in most electoral democracies (Paxton, Hughes, and Painter 2010; Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Moreover, the formal and informal dimensions of candidate selection in parties provide sufficient basis for party elites to prefer certain types of women in party politics (Cheng and Tavits 2011; Bjarnegård and Kenny 2015).

In the context of India, firstly, the presence of weak rule-of-law gives party elites a considerable discretion in choosing their electoral candidates during national elections (Sircar 2018b; Auerbach et al. 2021). Secondly, in countries where there is weak rule of law, candidates use informal routes to access the contours of national politics through party channels, as they face only limited legal consequences (A. A. Khan 2020; Lorch 2021; Mukti and Rodiyah 2020). There are examples of electoral democracies, other than India, where formal and informal dimensions of candidate selection in parties can have an impact on the descriptive representation of women in national politics. While there are several possible cases to consider, this section briefly discusses only two cases.

One case is Bangladesh, another populous, multi-ethnic, electoral democracy in South Asia, where women continue to remain underrepresented in national politics even after the introduction of

gender quotas in politics. Several scholars point out that the number of women politicians elected directly to the general seats in Bangladesh's national parliament is abysmally low due to lack of women nominated by the parties to contest the elections (A. A. Khan 2020; Md. M. R. Khan and Ara 2023; Panday 2008). Most studies addresses the underrepresentation of women in Bangladesh's national politics based on the supply-and demand model (A. A. Khan 2020; Md. M. R. Khan and Ara 2023). The existing literature indicates that the patriarchal socio-political culture, dynastic politics, campaign funding, violence, reserved seats, and formal electoral rules affect the underrepresentation of women in Bangladesh's national politics (Panday 2008; A. A. Khan 2020; Md. M. R. Khan and Ara 2023). There is an urgent need to investigate if the formal and informal dimensions of candidate selection in the major parties discriminate against women aspiring to get nominated in the general seats to contest national elections in Bangladesh.

In addition to Bangladesh, Indonesia is another electoral democracy in Southeast Asia that exhibits similar socio-political culture like both India and Bangladesh. Existing literature points out that political dynasties have become an important determinant for democratic-backsliding in the post-Suharto period of Indonesia (Aspinall and Mietzner 2010; Purdey, Aspinall, and As'ad 2016; Mukti and Rodiyah 2020). Moreover, some existing work argues that the legal candidate quota is allowing some women to enter electoral process but very gradually (Hillman 2018; Perdana and Hillman 2020). The women candidates will need more support from political parties if they are aspiring to win and retain more seats in Indonesia's national legislature (Perdana and Hillman 2020; Hillman 2017; 2018). Furthermore, the most recent work on women in national politics provides evidence suggesting that almost half (44 per cent) of women candidates elected to Indonesia's parliament in 2019 belonged to political dynasties (Wardani and Subekti 2021). Despite introducing gender quotas, parties are increasingly inclined to nominate women with dynastic affiliations in national elections. The existing research shows that the growing numbers of dynastic women politicians is not eliminating gender bias within the formal structures of the party, instead, it is marginalizing many qualified women candidates, including incumbents in Indonesian politics (Wardani and Subekti 2021). It will be useful to examine the formal and informal dimensions of candidate selection in the major parties that affect the descriptive representation of women in Indonesian national politics.

By assessing the transferability of my findings, my dissertation contributes to the scholarly discourse on women's political representation across diverse political contexts. Moreover, there are some aspects of the analysis that also open avenues for future research. One obvious question, which my analysis does not resolve, is that how do the elected women candidates perform as legislators when they are voted to power? How does women candidates in both types of seats deliberate once they are elected to national office? How does their behavior differ substantively compared to their counterparts? For instance, do the presence of women candidates in the national parliament have a measurable impact on public policy outcomes? Does the descriptive representation of women in the national parliament also ensure their substantive representation and result in more women-friendly policies? One of the major challenges in designing an empirical

and theoretical exploration of this question is to find appropriate data on a policy outcome that is both measurable and how on that women politicians have an impact.

To date, there are few research studies that explore the substantive representation of women politicians in the Indian context. Using a randomized control trial on 165 village councils in a sub-national state in India, some scholars show that women village council heads invest more in infrastructure that is directly relevant to the needs of rural women (water, fuel, and roads), while men invest more in education (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2001). Moreover, women are more likely to participate in the policy-making process if the leader of their village council is a woman (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2001). These are the few research that uses political reservation for women in local bodies in India to study the impact of women's leadership on policy decisions (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2001; Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004).

The only other work apart from the ones mentioned, also uses a randomized natural experiment in India, where some scholars show that women's leadership influences an adolescent girl's career aspirations and educational achievements (Beaman et al. 2012). The study uses 8453 surveys of adolescents aged 11 to 15 and their parents in 495 villages, and finds that, relative to villages where positions are never reserved for women, the gender gap in adolescent educational achievements is eliminated, and girls spend less time on household chores, where there is a woman as the village council head (Beaman et al. 2012). The existing literature focuses on local level elections, and the effects of gender quotas introduced at the local level of governance in India in 1993 (Beaman et al. 2012). There is an urgent need to focus on the substantive representation of elected women politicians upon sub-national and national policy outcomes in India. Moving forward, the last section of this chapter recommends solutions for increasing the descriptive representation of women in Indian national politics.

6.4. Recommendations for addressing gender inequality in parties

The party nominations or ticket distribution is a highly non-transparent and a "secret garden" in Indian national party politics. The party elites control the highest decision-making processes and levers of policy-making, and there is little incentive for the larger pool of party members to get involved in formal candidate selection. In such a scenario, promoting transparency and accountability within political parties is crucial for ensuring fair and inclusive candidate selection processes. By empowering a broader base of party members especially active women party workers to participate in decision-making, parties can mitigate the influence of elites and promote merit-based selection of candidates. Enacting formal laws like mandating party quotas for women can ensure their equitable representation within political institutions. These party quotas for women, enforceable by independent bodies like the Election Commission of India (ECI) or the Supreme Court, will serve as a proactive measure to address gender disparities in politics. Additionally, reforming the electoral system to create more opportunities for women candidates within political parties would further enhance their representation in national politics.

It is also essential to create avenues for outside funding for electoral campaigns through transparent mechanisms like campaign financing lobbying, which can provide women candidates with the resources needed to compete effectively. This will reduce the dependency on dynastic networks for women candidates and promote a level playing field for all candidates. Furthermore, it will be useful to conduct gender audits of political parties and implement mentorship programs for women politicians, which can facilitate their upward mobility within party structures. These initiatives will provide support, guidance, and skill development opportunities for women to navigate party politics effectively in India. Furthermore, social and cultural change can be promoted through education and awareness campaigns that challenge societal perceptions about women and encourage families to support women in politics, as well as, by highlighting successful women politicians as role models. Thus, creating supportive networks, like women's political forums and partnerships with NGOs in parties, can provide the necessary resources and solidarity to women who show interest in electoral politics.

Overall, my recommendations emphasize the importance of addressing institutional barriers to promote gender equity and equality in Indian national politics. Implementing these measures can create a more inclusive and representative political landscape where women have equal opportunities to participate and lead. Implementing these reforms will require concerted efforts from various stakeholders, including political parties, government institutions, civil society organizations, and the broader public. The long-term benefits of increased gender equity and equality in politics are well worth the investment, as they contribute to stronger democracies and more effective governance.

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Appendix 1

Coding procedure of informal selection criteria of candidates

One of the major empirical contributions of my dissertation is the creation of a unique database of electoral affidavits of all candidates who contested the past four national elections (2004-2019) from the two major national parties of India i.e., Indian National Congress (INC) and Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in both general and reserved seats. To be precise, this database takes a fresh look at the issue of candidate selection based on evidence from the data of 3282 electoral candidates. This data is translated in English and organized by the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR), a civil society organization based in New Delhi, India.

The database containing candidates' affidavits is publicly accessible through the National Election Watch (NEW) campaign initiated by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). Recently, ADR had established an online repository of affidavits, accessible at http://myneta.info. These electoral affidavits provide a comprehensive record of candidates' socio-demographic attributes, including gender, wealth (assets and liabilities), educational qualifications, criminal records, party affiliations, and the type of seat they contested, indicating its competitiveness - whether it was "reserved" for SC/ST candidates or a general/unreserved seat. Given that ADR systematically compiles and translates these records into a standardized format, extracting details about a candidate's gender, wealth, educational background, and any criminal cases was a straightforward process.

The coding procedure for categorizing data from the electoral affidavits of all candidates available through the official website of ADR involved several steps. Firstly, gender of the candidate is identified through the provided field in the affidavit, with "M" denoting male candidates and "F" denoting female candidates. The coding of wealth data from the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) reports in India typically involves examining the self-declared financial details of political candidates, as provided in their election affidavits. These affidavits include information such as movable and immovable assets, liabilities, income, and other financial disclosures specifically of the electoral candidates. The wealth calculation involves subtracting liabilities from assets, with both clearly listed and differentiated within the affidavits. Monetary values are standardized if necessary, and any discrepancies or missing values are addressed appropriately. The criminal cases are coded based on declarations within the affidavit, noting the presence or absence of such cases between the two normative gender categories. The educational qualifications are extracted and coded, with the highest level attained categorized using a standardized classification system (primary, secondary, tertiary). Tertiary education refers to any level of education pursued after completing secondary school, including undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, as well as vocational and technical training. It is often synonymous with higher education and represents the final stage of formal learning in my coding procedure. Finally, the type of seat contested by candidates is determined, indicating whether it is reserved for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), or general/unreserved, with standardized codes applied ("SC", "ST", "GEN"). The data entry was done into a structured database in excel allowing for easy retrieval and analysis.

Additionally, the dynastic ties of all the candidates nominated to the "general" and "reserved" seats by the two parties are manually coded based on secondary sources. A candidate is coded as "dynastic" if he or she is preceded by a family member who was active in Indian politics (Chandra 2016). The term "active in politics" is meant as someone 1) who held office in any elected political organisation, or 2) was nominated by a party as a candidate for election to any political institution, or 3) held a formal position in the party organisation (e.g. General Secretary, District President, Vice-President). By "elected political organisation" this study refers to an organisation which is directly or indirectly elected, including either house of the national parliament (Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha), either house of the sub-national state legislature (Vidhan Sabha, Vidhan Parishad) or any elected body of local government (Gram Panchayat or Municipal Corporation).

My research defines a family as a set of individuals bound by ties based on blood or marriage. This is consistent with the definitions used in the existing literature, such as (Smith 2012), who defines a "legacy candidate" as any candidate for national office who is related by blood or marriage (e.g. child, grandchild, sibling, spouse, son-in-law, or other such close relative) to a politician formerly or currently also holding national office, and (Querubin 2010), and (Bó, Bó, and Snyder 2009), who code for family ties based on relatives, broadly defined. For coding the dynastic ties of candidates in India, the candidate's father, mother, and spouse are identified using the Lok Sabha Who's Who, available online at https://loksabha.nic.in/. Moreover, information on any political offices held by these three family members as well as other relatives by blood or marriage who are not the candidate's father, mother, or spouse are also identified. These relatives are not named in the Lok Sabha Who's Who at https://loksabha.nic.in/ but might have also preceded the family members in electoral politics.

Since there was no opportunity for a field trip to India amidst the pandemic, the coding of dynastic ties of candidates was done manually based on online secondary sources. The online secondary sources that are used included the following: Election returns made available by the ECI, which report the names of all previous candidates nominated to the general and reserved seats across national elections: English language newspapers (both national and regional), including the Times of India, the Hindu, the Hindustan Times, the Deccan Chronicle, Deccan Herald, the Indian Express, the Economic Times, the Business Standard, the Statesman, Telegraph, and so on; and the Factiva and Lexis-Nexis news digests. Some web-based news media sources are also used like the Quint, the Wire, the Scroll.in, the Print, etc.

The manual coding procedure for dynastic ties of candidates may have missed locating information about some candidates from the parties whose family members are "active in politics", it is likely to be an underestimate. However, since the criteria employed for coding in my dissertation is transparent, systematic, and available on open web and news sources, it should be easy to locate and correct any errors. Or at least estimate the likely scale and the direction of selection bias they introduce, if any at all, to the data compilation and analysis. Taken together this compilation serves to be one of the most comprehensive dataset on the individual socio-demographic attributes of candidates contesting in both general and reserved seats from the two major national parties (INC and BJP) in the national elections of India held in 2004, 2009, 2014, and 2019. It took me approximately twelve months, from May 2021 to May 2022, to organize, clean, categorize, code,

and analyze my original candidate data. Additionally, I spent around seven months methodically recruiting participants, conducting interviews, and transcribing my qualitative interview data. I recruited my elite interviewees online through their emails in party websites and their official LinkedIn profiles, conducted the interviews virtually via platforms such as Zoom and MS Teams, as approved by McMaster Research Ethics Board, between May 2022 and September 2022.

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Appendix 2

Elite Interview Questions

McMaster University
Department of Political Science

General Questions

1. To begin with how do you identify your gender?
2. Which religion do you practice?
3. Which type of seat "general" or "reserved" have you contested for in the past four national elections?
4. Have your family members contested elections in India at the national, state, or local level of governance in the past before you joined national politics? Do they hold formal party positions like President or Vice-President of a State Unit within a political party in India? If yes, then how are you related to them by blood or marriage?
5. What motivated you to contest national elections in India? Which national elections did you contest for in the past i.e., 2004, 2009, 2014, or 2019?
6. To what extent does equality of opportunity exist in elections for national office in India?
7. In your opinion, do women have the same rights as men in India?
8. Do you think women have equal opportunities to join political parties and run as a candidate for the national parliament as much as men?
9. Are women able to openly discuss political issues in private homes and in public spaces?
10. Do women enjoy equal, secure, and effective access to justice?
11. Do you think women can make meaningful decisions in key areas of their lives?
12. In your opinion, do women feel politically empowered?
13. Do you agree with the following statements?
    a) Women should not be involved in politics as much as men.
    b) When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women.
    c) If a woman earns more money than her husband, it's almost certain to cause problems.
    d) Having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person.
    e) Overall, men make better political leaders than women do.

Specific Questions on Candidate Selection in Political Parties in India

1. How many years have you been a member of XX party?
2. What motivated you to join XX Party?
3. Did you run for any elections from your party? When did you first run for elections?
4. Why did you participate in elections as election campaigner or in any other capacity?
5. How many years were you a party member before contesting a seat for election?
6. Did you have years of community or grassroots experience prior to contesting for election?
7. In your view, do you think the internal party rules and procedures used in the selection of candidates for the general elections in the past in XX were democratic and fair?

8. To what extent did your party's leader/Central Executive Committee/local party leaders play an important role in the candidate selection process?
9. Does your party have a primary election (internal election) for candidates?
10. Did the party rank and file have any influence over the selection process of candidates?
11. What role does the subsidiary organizations like the student's wing or the women's wing in your party play in the candidate selection processes during national elections?
12. What kind of candidates (e.g., gender, dynastic backgrounds, educational backgrounds, wealthy, with criminal records) do you think your party prefers?
13. Where does your party typically recruit their candidates from like active party workers or from members of the community or family members of the party leaders?
14. Do you think your party promotes strong relationships between party leaders and members?
15. Do you think there should be more women candidates? What deters political parties from nominating more women candidates to the national elections?
16. How does personal wealth impact a candidate's chances of getting nominated in national elections by the parties? Do you think wealthy candidates have an advantage? If so, why?
17. Parties try to maximize their chances at winning seats by fielding candidates that ensure their victory, therefore do you think that locally being a dynast or having connections with a politician becomes more of an asset than a liability while contesting national elections? If yes, then why do you think that dynastic connections are an asset in Indian politics?
18. What role does criminal records play in a candidate's chances of getting nominated by the parties? Do candidates with criminal backgrounds have an advantage or disadvantage? Why?
19. Does having a higher education degree affect a candidate's chances of getting nominated by the parties? Do you think highly educated candidates have an advantage? If yes, why?
20. I have heard that more women are now interested in getting nominations from political parties. What is the way for women to seek a party nomination for a general or reserved seat? How does it differ from men seeking a general or reserved seat? Are there any gender specific routes to nominations before national elections?
21. The data from the current Lok Sabha elections show that female MPs are more "dynastic" than male MPs, does your party tend to select their female candidates from within existing political families as they still perceive that fielding female candidates constitutes a risk? Does name-recognition among dynastic female candidates make them a safer candidate compared to someone who has no dynastic association? Why are parties' risk averse while making their nominations of female candidates?
22. In your opinion, what factors determines why a woman or a man in the national parliament is active? Does political activism have anything to do with their gender? Does it help party leaders in nominating candidates during national elections?
23. Do you wish to re-consider whether to keep your responses anonymous or do you want me to include your name attached to your responses/data? Thank you for your time and patience.

Appendix 3

List of elite interviewees for the dissertation

1. Chandra Kumar Bose. 2022. Ex-Vice President of BJP, West Bengal unit. Interview with the author, recorded, 25th May.
2. Sanjay Jha. 2022. Ex-Spokesperson of the INC, New Delhi unit. Interview with the author, recorded, 4th June.
3. Rajeev Gowda. 2022. Ex- Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) and Manifesto head of INC. Interview with the author, recorded, 26th July.
4. Anila Singh. 2022. Spokesperson of the BJP, Uttar Pradesh unit. Interview with the author, recorded, 4th August.
5. Kandadai Partha Sarathy. 2022. Member of BJP Youth Wing, Karnataka unit. Interview with the author, recorded, 28th July.
6. Abhimanyu Bharti. 2022. Election campaign and poll strategist at Jarvis Consulting Group and I-PAC. Interview with the author, recorded, 22nd July.
7. Diggaj Mogra. 2022. Poll strategist and election campaign specialist at Jarvis Consulting Group. Interview with the author, recorded, 2nd August.
8. Praveen Rai. 2022. Author and political analyst at CSDS, New Delhi, India. Interview with the author, recorded, 25th July.
9. Kanksshi Agarwal. 2022. Poll strategist and founder of Netri Foundation, India. Interview with the author, recorded, 27th July.
10. Adnan Farooqui. 2022. Author and Assistant Professor, Jamia Milia Islamia University, New Delhi, India. Interview with the author, recorded, 11th August.
11. Albeena Shakil. 2022. Professor and Associate Dean, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat, NCR, India. Interview with the author, recorded, 5th August.
12. Sudha Pai. 2022. Author, columnist, and ex-Professor of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. Interview with the author, recorded, 3rd August.
13. K.K. Kailash. 2022. Professor, University of Hyderabad, India. Conversation, unrecorded, 27th September.
14. Manuka Khanna. 2022. Professor, University of Lucknow, India. Conversation, unrecorded, 10th December.
15. Akshi Chawla. 2022. Author, columnist, and founder of Womenlead.org. Interview with the author, recorded, 11th August.
16. Sandip Ghose. 2022. Author and columnist in Indian newspapers. Interview with the author, recorded, 14th September.
17. Shivam Shankar Singh. 2022. Researcher and author of 'How to win an Indian election'. Interview with the author, recorded, 6th August.