

Forewords

Women have often been portrayed as weak, fragile, and unfit to lead, especially in politics. This perception has carried over into the present day, resulting in society's assessment of women's character as weak when leading. In some parts of the world, there is still a belief that 'educating women is not important because they will return to the kitchen, and women should not lead men.' Consequently, women's participation in politics or public affairs is indeed limited or inhibited by the patriarchal structures of society. However, the present monograph provides an in-depth analysis of women's participation in politics across history and different territories, foregrounding the significance of the theme in a globalised, rapidly changing environment. As women's representation in politics and other fields has been a long-standing issue, the monograph highlights contemporary women's vital role in building the capacities of policymakers. It addresses the challenges and opportunities presented as policies aimed at empowering women's role and their participation in political processes have become fully integrated in several state's agendas and in governments' social, economic, and organisational planning. The monograph focuses on gender equality and the empowerment of women in politics, emphasising cultural and social expectations as important factors for participating in politics. It addresses certain stereotypes and expectations which persist in several postmodern societies, the barriers preventing women's entry into politics, balancing family obligations with political ambitions, and the strategies and challenges involved. Additionally, it explores the influence on youth, the role of education and media representation in women's active political participation, and the strategies and campaigns of women's rights organisations that encourage women's political participation. In doing so, it includes not only 12 exclusive articles but also the implementation of several recommendations, promotions, and encouragements.

The monograph raises a number of central themes under each priority area, setting objectives and making recommendations linked to each theme. It is essentially an exceptional quality academic work intended to assist countries, policymakers and especially women – regardless of their level of development – in achieving an inclusive society

for all. In such a society, women could participate as active policymakers fully and without discrimination in all social subsystems.

Therefore, policymakers, policy experts, educators, managers, researchers and university staff, journalists, practitioners involved in women's political participation and leadership, and university and college students should be identified as the target audience for educating the global society to overcome persistent stereotypes and the male-centric political scene. These factors include social structures, such as social and political systems, as well as the power dynamics that can exert pressure, such as excessive authority in the family, media environment, and political market conditions that are a source of income.

The monograph calls for the readiness to consider and accept new initiatives, explore new approaches, to traverse hitherto untrodden paths. This resolve is something for which not only India and Slovenia but also the global community will remain thankful. It also calls for constitutional reforms that transition from government to governance and from governance to civil society to build social capital and effective institutions. This includes promoting women's independent political participation, fostering a preference amongst politicians and citizens for relative equality instead of vertical structures, and encouraging a willingness among political leaders and citizens to compromise. Additionally, it emphasises the importance of not just blind trust but the ability to predict that the behaviour of women will be law-abiding and based on reciprocity, established habits of order, and mutual confidence in many countries around the world.

Finding a correlation between the presence and absence of these qualities and the success or failure of societal institutions adds an instrumental aspect to the normative demand for equality and participation by all, regardless of gender. Thus, the question to be asked is whether the new (desired) forms of women's role in politics and political cultures are likely to meet such expectations and enable new approaches to flourish. These considerations are highly relevant. The monograph as a whole systematically addresses these issues as they affect women.

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It is indeed an honour to be invited to write the foreword for this monograph, *Empowering Women's Political Participation: Historical Contexts, Contemporary Trends, and Challenges*. I am grateful to Dr Suzana Košir of the University of Maribor, Slovenia, for this opportunity. Through its chapters, this book examines the position of women in seats of power, particularly in politics. It explores how authority is gendered, the tools that can help change the gender equation, and the successes in breaking the stonewall. The contributors have achieved this with robust data and with the help of pre-test and post-test results.

From ancient times, the societal framework has been men-dominated, as exemplified by the position given to women in major world religions. It is an uphill task to dislodge convictions founded on faith. So, change is slow, but hearteningly, that change is happening. This book addresses the urgent need to increase women's representation in the political space. It is the skewed gender balance among policymakers that entrenches the status quo, and this imbalance needs to be addressed. Education is a crucial tool in levelling the ground, but another important factor is societal expectations. Women are often expected to bear the burden of family obligations while parallelly addressing professional demands. Recently, I heard a prominent woman sportsperson in India discuss the trolling she faced when she and her partner decided to undergo fertility treatment. It was poignant. Her partner, also a prominent sportsperson, shared the same desire for children, yet the world accused her of abandoning her sports career. This anecdote is just an example of the uneven terrain women navigate socially, economically, politically, and in the personal space.

Media, literature, and even language constantly embed stereotypical content and portrayals, transferring the imbalances to the next generation and making the struggle even more difficult. The default mode tends to favour men, necessitating a concerted effort to change this. 'Articulating a woman's standpoint is a political activity,' said an Intellectual Property scholar. This book seeks to do that very effectively and with clarity.

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As the Head of an all-women institution of higher education, I was delighted to learn that faculty members of Stella Maris and those from the University of Maribor, Slovenia, have collaborated in organising a conference and have brought out a monograph entitled *Empowering Women's Political Participation: Historical Contexts, Contemporary Trends, and Challenges*. The publication offers in-depth analyses of women's participation in politics across history and territories, foregrounding the significance of the theme in a globalised environment.

The studies, based on systematically collected and analysed data, reveal many interesting findings on the role and activism of women in various communities across the spectrum of women's political activism and involvement in multiple political and geographical contexts. With its particular focus on women and the socio-economic and political contexts of their lived experiences that form the backgrounds of the analyses, the treatise offers an excellent source of information for researchers and scholars in related and interdisciplinary fields of study.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, in its report titled 'Women's Political Participation and Leadership,' observes that 'Women's leadership in political spheres is shown to be socially beneficial (World Economic Forum, 2017), and is a matter of women's right to equal opportunity and access.' (No. 2019/03, Social Development Policy Briefs). The articles presented in the monograph testify to the beneficial impact of women's participation and the transformative forces at work in the social order.

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