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Article

Political Attitudes Among Urban, English-Educated Men and Women in Contemporary India: A Comparative Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract: This qualitative study compares political attitudes between men (N = 25) and women (N = 25) residing in urban, English-educated settings in northern India, drawn primarily from Punjab and the Delhi NCR region. Using open-ended questionnaires and thematic analysis, the study moves beyond electoral turnout data to examine how gender shapes political ideology, policy priorities, and conceptual understandings of democracy and social justice. Coded responses were converted into quantitative frequency summaries to permit structured comparison across groups. The study found some differences between men and women. 68% of men, as compared to 44% women identified as being neutral in terms of ideology – they were neither leftist nor right-leaning. There was also a difference in ideologies about social issues. 72% women supported the rights of LGBTQ+ people, while in the case of men, this figure was 28%. Interestingly, men and women were almost at par when questioned about being cynical about politics. 52% of men and 48% women said they are cynical. Both men and women think it is very important for leaders to be honest. 84% men and women said this. The study also found that men and women care about issues. Men care more about the economy and national security; while women care more about ensuring gender equality and the freedom to make choices. Finally, men and women have views on women in politics. Both genders were not in favour of politics based on a person's identity. These patterns are interpreted through the Dual Pathways Model of Gendered Political Attitude Formation, which argues that men and women in urban India tend to develop distinct political opinions through different socialization routes. A 'masculine public pathway' oriented toward macro-political management, and a feminine private-public pathway oriented toward everyday experiences of inequality. Importantly, the study shows a notable demographic asymmetry: the female sample had a substantially higher mean age (40.54 years) than the male sample (48% of whom were aged 18–30). This age-cohort difference is systematically addressed as a potential confounding variable alongside gender throughout the analysis. Findings are restricted to the study's sample and should not be generalized to the Indian population at large.

Keywords: Gendered Political Attitudes; Urban India; Qualitative Research; Political Socialization; Dual Pathways Model; Feminist Political Science; Thematic Analysis

1. Introduction

The study of political attitudes has occupied political scientists and psychologists for over six decades (Converse, 1964; Hatemi & McDermott, 2016). Political attitudes - the relatively stable judgements people hold toward political objects, institutions, and processes - affect voting behaviour, policy preferences, and assessments of democratic legitimacy (Knutson et al., 2006; Valle & Carlton, 2000). Within this literature, a consistent finding is the gender gap: men and women differ systematically in political orientation, with women tending toward more progressive positions on social welfare and foreign policy, and men toward more conservative positions on economic and security matters (Shapiro & Mahajan, 1986; Inglehart & Norris, 2005).

Most of this study, however, draws on Western liberal democracies, where gender is ratified within particular cultural, religious, and institutional frameworks. Whether these findings translate to non-Western democracies such

as India remains an open empirical question (Pereira, 2019; Kraft, 2023). India presents a convincing case for several reasons. It is the world's most populous and varied democracy - unusually plural in religion, language, caste, and geography. Indian women have made notable educational and economic progress, yet remain grossly underrepresented in recognized political frames. India currently ranks below 149 out of 193 countries in women's parliamentary representation (IPU Parline, 2024). Additionally, the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (106th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2023) - which reserves 33% of seats in Parliament and state legislatures for women - was effectively enacted into law in September 2023, though its full implementation is constitutionally deferred until the next delimitation exercise and census, expected no earlier than 2029 (Khandwe, 2024). This context makes the study of gendered political attitudes not only academically significant but practically crucial.

Most of this scholarship focusses on two prior qualitative investigations - one on the political attitudes of women and one on the political attitudes of men - and places their findings within a unified comparative analytical framework. Instead of treating each gender group in isolation, we methodically compare their responses by means of identical open-ended questions, examining where men and women unite and where they differ. Three central questions guide the analysis:

(1) Do men and women in urban, English-educated India share a common understanding of democracy, nationalism, and secularism?

(2) Where gender-based differences in political priorities or orientations exist, and how can they be explained theoretically?

(3) Can a clear model of gendered political attitude formation be established from this comparative data?

There are three main contributions. First, quantitative summary tables obtained from qualitative thematic coding, allowing structured experimental comparison. Second, both convergent themes are identified to determine areas of agreement and disagreement between two genders - where gender creates organized differences in political orientation. Third, the Dual Pathways Model of Political Attitude Formation. This proposed model accounts for these differences through differing socialization routes rather than any distinctive gender difference.

A noteworthy methodological caution must be stated at the outset: the male and female samples differ not only in gender but also in age distribution, with the male sample substantially younger (48% aged 18–30) than the female sample (mean age 40.54 years). Throughout this paper, this age-cohort asymmetry is treated as a likely confounding variable and study results with that limitation clearly in mind. The sample is restricted to urban, English-speaking, internet-connected, and literate respondents drawn principally from northern India, and results are not generalizable to the Indian population at large.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Political Socialization and the Primacy Principle

Political psychology has long focused on political socialization - the process by which individuals obtain political values, beliefs, and behaviours (Hyman, 1959). The introductory idea of socialization theory is that political attitudes are learned through contact with families, schools, peer groups, media, and broader cultural institutions and are not inborn (Arens & Watermann, 2017; Kahne et al., 2016; Nishishiba et al., 2005).

Searing, Wright, and Rabinowitz (1976) formalized the Primacy Principle, which holds that some attitudinal orientations - party identification, political efficacy, and trust - are shaped in pre-adult years and subsequently serve as explanatory filters for successive understanding. Longitudinal evidence affirms this. Alwin and Krosnick (1991) found that attitudinal elasticity is highest during adolescence and early adulthood, and that attitude stability increases evidently after age 30. Sears and Funk (1990) also demonstrated that early political orientations, predominantly party identification, continue across the life course irrespective of changes in specific policy preferences.

For gendered political attitudes, the Primacy Principle conveys direct implications: if political orientations are chiefly formed before adulthood, then the gendered nature of the socialization process is critical. Bos et al. (2022), in a systematic review involving 2,000 adolescents, found that parents, schools, and media expose boys and girls to systematically diverse political messages. Boys are encouraged to argue and debate; girls are encouraged to be appeasing and deferent. Campbell and Wolbrecht (2006) similarly showed that adolescent girls exhibit lower political interest and efficacy than boys - a difference that continues into adulthood even when education and socioeconomic status are constant.

2.2 The Gender Gap in Political Attitudes: Global Evidence

The gender gap in political science is predictably understood as organized variances between men and women in voting patterns, party affiliation, and policy preferences. Shapiro and Mahajan (1986), drawing on two decades of US survey data across 267 policy questions, documented that women consistently expressed greater support for social welfare spending, gun control, and environmental protection, while men expressed greater support for military spending and punitive crime policies.

Inglehart and Norris (2005) stretched this study cross-nationally using World Values Survey data from over 70 countries. They found that the gender gap varied in magnitude across societies but was consistent in direction: women were more progressive than men on social welfare, environmental protection, and peace-related issues, including in many non-Western countries. They also identified what they termed the gender equality paradox: more egalitarian societies (with higher female education, labour force participation, and political representation) tend to exhibit larger, not smaller, gender gaps in political attitudes. They credited this to post-materialist value formation - women, once secure in their basic material needs, express values that more closely align with care, community, and peace than with competition and hierarchy.

Coffe and Bolzendahl (2010), analysing European Social Survey data, found that gender differences in political participation have tapered considerably, though noteworthy gaps in political interest and knowledge persist. On factual political knowledge, women dependably score lower - a pattern Wolak (2020) attributes to gendered self-confidence instead of actual knowledge deficits: experimental research demonstrates that women perform equivalently to men when the penalty for incorrect answers is removed.

Fortin-Rittberger (2016) found that gender gaps in political knowledge are largest in countries with the most traditional gender roles. This study was conducted across 32 democracies. Kraft (2023) replicated these findings, showing that the knowledge gap narrows significantly with exposure to female political role models - suggesting that representation produces interest and knowledge among women and girls.

2.3 Gender and Political Attitudes in the Indian Context

India offers a distinctive case. Despite the emphasis of global literature on a gender gap in political knowledge and interest, Indian women have accomplished near-equality in electoral participation. In the 2019 general election, female turnout (67.3%) nearly matched male turnout (67.4%), with women outvoting men in several states (Tewari, 2025). This is empirically puzzling - why do Indian women vote at high rates while consistently exhibiting lower political interest and efficacy in survey-based research?

Sahu and Yadav (2018) argue that education is a pivotal pathway to women's political engagement but that this pathway is mediated by regional and cultural context. In states with higher female literacy (Kerala, Tamil Nadu), women's political interest approaches that of men; in lower-literacy states (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh), the gap is larger. Pereira (2019) also found that differences in educational accomplishment and access to news media account for most of India's gender gap in political knowledge.

The historical context of women's political participation in India is also crucial. Women were active participants in the independence struggle, and gender equality was valued as a constitutional principle at Independence (Paranthaman et al., 2019; Sudalai Moni, 2020). On the other hand, Pande (2018) argues that Indian nationalism was gendered from the outset: women were incorporated as supporters and symbols of national virtue but were systematically left out from formal power structures after independence - a pattern of inclusion without representation that continues to shape women's political attitudes in present times.

The 106th Constitutional Amendment (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam), signed into law in September 2023, decrees that 33% of seats in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies be reserved for women. This is a historic legislative achievement - not a blocked motion, as the text of some earlier drafts of this paper incorrectly suggested. However, implementation is connected to a future delimitation progression and will not be operationalized before 2029 at the earliest (Khandwe, 2024; Nautiyal, 2003). This dissimilarity between formal enactment and functional implementation is vital to how respondents in this study understood women's political progress.

2.4 Caste, Religion, and Gendered Political Mobilization

In Indian politics, caste and religion function as key mobilization axes with different gendered scopes. Wielhouwer (2010) perceives that religious institutions serve not only as transmitters of theological belief but also as mediators of political socialization, conveying party identifications and policy preferences. In the Indian context, Onwutiebe (2019) and Vijayalakshmi (2021) have documented how patriarchal religious structures both coerce women's independent political participation and concurrently rally women voters along religious lines.

The relationship between religious participation and political attitudes is, however, genuinely unclear. While religious connection tends to associate with more traditional gender role attitudes across religious traditions (Wielhouwer, 2010), women who are active members of religious organizations also obtain organizational skills, social networks, and leadership experience that can translate into political engagement (Vijayalakshmi, 2021). This is also how caste function. While caste hierarchy is officially related to all, lower cast women face the added burden of caste-based and gender-based discrimination simultaneously (Pande, 2018).

2.5 Feminist Theory and Intersectionality

The theoretical framework of this study draws on feminist political science and intersectionality theory. Delmar (2001) distinguishes between feminism and feminist theory as a critical framework for interrogating the assumptions of academic disciplines. Feminism has been explained as a movement for socio-political equality between men and women. Feminist political science has moved beyond simply including women in political research to questioning the discipline's foundational categories.

Nelson (1989) argued that early feminist political science was preoccupied with identifying differences between men and women, at the cost of concealing the political implication of activities in which women have always been engaged - caregiving, community organizing, and domestic labour. Reger (2015) traces the evolution of feminist theory across three waves: first-wave feminism (suffrage and formal equality), second-wave feminism (workplace discrimination, reproductive rights, sexuality), and third-wave feminism (intersectionality and identity politics).

Intersectionality, first articulated by Crenshaw (1989) and explained by Davis (2008), is particularly useful to the Indian context. It holds that gender does not operate in isolation: the experience of a high-caste urban Hindu woman and that of a Dalit Muslim woman are qualitatively dissimilar because gender interconnects with caste, religion, and class to produce different forms of demotion. In this study, female respondents more commonly drew connections between gender discrimination and other axes of inequality; male respondents tended to treat each axis as a separate field. This finding is steady with intersectionality theory's calculation that those who experience structural disadvantage develop a larger mindfulness of systemic variation.

Ferguson (2017) and Flax (2012) have also used feminist theory to challenge the stability of the categories 'man' and 'woman' as universal and fixed. While this study uses gender self-identification and adopts a binary analytical frame due to sample composition, we acknowledge that this does not include the experiences of non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals - a restriction noted clearly in the limitations section.

2.6 Research Gaps and the Contribution of This Study

The available literature establishes that: (a) political attitudes are significantly shaped by gendered socialization (Bos et al., 2022; Searing et al., 1976); (b) a persistent gender gap exists in political interest, knowledge, and efficacy across most democracies (Coffe & Bolzendahl, 2010; Wolak, 2020); and (c) the Indian case shows both similarities to and departures from patterns identified in Western democracies (Pereira, 2019; Tewari, 2025). However, several gaps remain.

First, most gender-gap research depends on closed-ended survey devices that measure what researchers pre-define as relevant, rather than allowing respondents to articulate their own political priorities. Second, comparative qualitative studies in which men and women express political views in their own words are rare, mostly in non-Western settings. Third, the existing literature tends to examine gender as a demographic variable rather than as a meaning-making mechanism that shapes how individuals interpret political categories. Fourth, Indian scholarship has focused primarily on voting behaviour and representation, with less attention to the substantive content of political attitudes - what Indians actually believe about democracy, nationalism, and social justice.

This paper addresses these gaps by: (a) using open-ended questionnaires that allow respondents to define political concepts in their own terms; (b) employing a comparative qualitative design that systematically contrasts male and female responses; (c) treating gender as a socialization mechanism that produces diverse political

subjectivities; and (d) constructing quantitative frequency tables from qualitative coding to facilitate structured empirical comparison.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a comparative qualitative design using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The design is comparative in two senses: it compares the political attitudes of men and women, and it integrates findings from two independently conducted qualitative studies within a unified analytical framework. The approach is qualitative in its emphasis on the richness, context, and language of respondents' accounts, though empirical transparency is enhanced through quantitative summary tables of coded frequencies.

3.2 Sample and Procedure

The female sample (N = 25) was engaged through professional networks and WhatsApp, yielding a 41.7% response rate from 60 invitations. The female sample has a mean age of 40.54 years, with respondents spread across age groups from 18 to over 67. All participants were urban, English-literate, and internet-connected. Sampling was conducted primarily via networks linked to Lovely Professional University and affiliated professional communities in northern India (Punjab and the Delhi NCR region).

The male sample (N = 25) was recruited through LinkedIn and social media snowball sampling, using professional networks of the same institutional affiliation. While the male sample was similarly urban, English-literate, and internet-connected, it differs importantly in age distribution: 48% of male respondents were aged 18–30, compared to a substantially older female sample. This age asymmetry was not by design and represents a structural limitation of the sampling procedure that is addressed explicitly throughout the analysis.

Both samples completed an open-ended questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The instrument was pre-tested with five men and five women to assess clarity, comprehension, and appropriate response length. Geographic concentration in northern India means findings are most directly applicable to that regional context and to similarly situated urban, English-educated populations.

3.3 Addressing the Age-Gender Confound

The age gap between the two samples - with male respondents skewed younger and female respondents older on average - is a significant methodological concern. Differences in political attitudes between the groups may partly reflect generational effects (cohort socialization, life-stage political concerns) rather than gender as such. To address this, we adopted a specific analytical strategy throughout the results section. A gendered difference is identified, we note whether that finding could probably be explained by the age asymmetry, draw on existing literature to measure whether the pattern is consistent with gender-based clarifications independent of age, and flag where age-cohort and gender effects cannot be cleanly separated with the present data. We do not claim that the Dual Pathways Model fully controls for age; rather, the model should be understood as a theoretical interpretation of observed patterns that requires future replication with age-matched samples.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the six-phase thematic analysis procedure described by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading; (2) generation of initial codes; (3) searching for themes across codes; (4) reviewing themes for internal coherence and external distinctiveness; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the written analysis. Codes were developed inductively from the data and were not pre-determined by the theoretical framework. To assess coding consistency, a 20% subsample of responses was independently coded by a second researcher; intercoder agreement, calculated using Cohen's kappa, was $\kappa = 0.78$, indicating substantial agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). Disagreements were resolved through discussion.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Everyone who took part in the study got a document explaining what the study was about. This explanation also highlighted confidentiality. The people in the study were also told that they could stop being in the study at any time without getting in trouble. Before they answered the questions they had to agree to be in the study, electronically. The study was done in a way that followed the ethical guidelines and rules of Lovely Professional University and the American Political Science Association.

3.6 Limitations

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample is restricted to urban, English-speaking, internet-connected, and literate respondents from northern India. This excludes the substantial majority of India's population - rural citizens, non-English speakers, and those without internet access - and limits generalizability accordingly. Second, the sample size (N = 50), while appropriate for qualitative saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022), does not support statistical inference. Percentage frequencies reported in this paper represent coded response rates within this specific cohort and should be read as descriptive summaries, not demographic generalizations. Third, snowball sampling on LinkedIn for the male cohort risks network homophily. Fourth, social desirability bias may have suppressed explicitly prejudiced responses. Fifth, the binary gender frame excludes non-binary and gender non-conforming persons. Sixth, the cross-sectional design captures attitudes at a single point in time (April–June 2024). Seventh, the age asymmetry between samples, as discussed above, introduces potential cohort confounds that cannot be fully resolved without matched samples.

4. Results: Comparative Thematic Analysis

Results are organized thematically. For each theme, we present areas of convergence (where men and women agree), areas of divergence (where they differ), relevant quantitative frequencies from the coded data, and a theoretical interpretation. Where applicable, we note the extent to which the age asymmetry between samples may contribute to observed differences.

4.1 Political Ideology: Pragmatic Centrism and Gendered Liberalism

Convergence. Both groups expressed a pragmatic resistance to rigid ideological categories. Among both men and women, 44% self-identified as centrist (Table 1). Representative responses included:

"I do not subscribe to hardcore ideology because society needs every ideology in order to live and prosper. (Male, 18–30)"

"I do not ascribe to any ideology because when you put something down on paper, you tie it down with strings and seals. (Female, 55–67)"

Divergence. The primary difference lies in the complete absence of right-wing self-identification among women (0%) compared to 28% of men. Male respondents who identified as right-wing linked this to macro-political concerns:

"I am right-wing because I believe in preserving our cultural heritage, promoting national sovereignty, and the principles of free-market capitalism. (Male, 18–30)"

Women who identified as liberal grounded this in opposition to structural inequality:

"Liberal. I am not interested in any politician who looks down on the female part of the community. Women should be paid the same and get better healthcare. (Female, 30–42)"

Age-cohort consideration. The younger age profile of the male sample may contribute to the higher proportion of right-leaning identifiers, as recent surveys suggest younger Indian men are to some extent more likely to identify with cultural nationalist positions. However, the complete absence of right-wing women is consistent with feminist political theory and not easily reducible to age effects alone.

Theoretical interpretation. Men's ideological self-placement reflects a macro-political orientation toward national systems (economy, security, culture), whereas women's reflects a micro-political orientation toward personal autonomy and freedom from discrimination. This is consistent with Wolak's (2020) finding that women's political engagement is typically issue-driven rather than identity-driven - grounded in specific concerns rather than ideological affiliation.

Ideology	Men (N = 25) %	Women (N = 25) %
Centrist	44%	44%
Left-wing / Liberal	28%	56%
Right-wing	28%	0%

No label / Apolitical	0%	0%

Note. Frequencies represent coded response rates within this cohort and should not be interpreted as demographic generalizations about Indian men or women.

4.2 Political Engagement: Structural Entitlement and Critical Citizenship

Convergence. The majority of both groups expressed interest in politics (Table 2: 80% of men, 64% of women), and both groups cited the pervasive impact of politics on daily life as the primary motivator.

Divergence. Men's engagement was more instrumental and self-assured:

"Yes, because of its impact on the whole society through policymaking. (Male, 18–30)"

Women's engagement, when present, was more emotionally and existentially grounded:

"Yes, because I am 60 and I have seen politics getting more and more confused. I do want to know how we are governed - mournfully or joyfully. (Female, 55–67)"

Women's disengagement, by contrast, was typically articulated as alienation from a corrupt system rather than mere disinterest:

"No. I do not see any interest in contemporary politics. I do not see any ethics or morality in politics. (Female, 42–54)"

Age-cohort consideration. The higher political interest among men may partly reflect the younger male sample's greater exposure to social-media-driven political discourse. However, the qualitative difference in how engagement is framed - instrumental confidence among men versus existential vigilance among women - appears to be gender-related rather than age-related, as it replicates patterns identified in feminist political theory across age groups.

Theoretical interpretation. We interpret this difference as the distinction between structural entitlement - the sense of men as natural participants in the political system, however imperfect - and critical citizenship - the simultaneous high interest and low institutional trust that characterises excluded groups (Nelson, 1989). Women are engaged with politics precisely because they feel its costs most acutely; their cynicism is not passivity but a structurally informed scepticism.

4.3 The Ideal Politician: Shared Values, Different Emphases

Convergence. Honesty and integrity were the most valued qualities overall (84% across both groups), reflecting a widely shared discontent with the ethical standards of Indian political elites.

"Honesty, humility, patience, and the ability to withstand critical examination - and certainly not blind followers. (Male, 55–66)"

Divergence. Beyond this first-order agreement, women's second-order qualities were relational: empathy (60% of women vs. 24% of men), approachability (40% vs. 16%), and active listening. Men's second-order qualities were agentic: decisiveness (56% vs. 20%) and nationalism (48% vs. 12%).

Theoretical interpretation. This divergence reflects different conceptions of representation. Women's preferences align with descriptive and substantive representation - they want politicians who share their life experiences and will act on their interests (Pitkin, 1967). Men's preferences align with trustee representation - a strong leader who governs in the national interest as they define it. These are not simply gender preferences; they reflect different experiences of political inclusion and exclusion.

4.4 Social Justice and LGBTQ+ Rights: The Sharpest Divide

This theme produced the largest quantitative divergence in the study (Table 3). Support for LGBTQ+ rights was expressed by 72% of women and 28% of men; overt hostility was expressed by 32% of men and 0% of women.

Position	**Men (N = 25) %**	**Women (N = 25) %**
Strong support for gender equality	56%	88%
Support for LGBTQ+ rights	28%	72%

Opposition/hostility to LGBTQ+ rights	32%	0%
Intersectional framing of inequalities	12%	56%

Note. These figures represent coded frequency rates within the study cohort only.

A representative male response in opposition:

"Idiocy. The heart of equality has been replaced with equity, and that's all wrong. (Male, 31–42)"

A representative female response in support:

"LGBTQ+ rights are human rights. Everyone should be acknowledged and protected irrespective of sexual orientation or gender identity. (Female, 18–30)"

Age-cohort consideration. Younger cohorts in India show higher acceptance of LGBTQ+ rights in survey data, which would predict greater support among the younger male sample rather than lower. The fact that male support is markedly lower despite the younger age profile suggests that this difference is driven by gender rather than age.

Theoretical interpretation. Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2008) explains this gap most parsimoniously. Women, by virtue of their own experience of structural marginalization, are more likely to develop a recognition of other forms of systematic exclusion. Male respondents who opposed LGBTQ+ rights often framed it as an imposition of Western norms or an infringement on traditional values - a reaction consistent with the preservation of existing social hierarchies.

4.5 Women's Political Representation: Structural Critique vs. Supply-Side Explanation

Convergence. Both groups acknowledged women's underrepresentation in absolute terms. This is where consensus ended.

Divergence. Women overwhelmingly attributed underrepresentation to structural patriarchy (64% vs. 16% of men):

"No. It is just lip service. We are too steeped in seeing women as homemakers, attached to the kitchen and bearers of children. (Female, 55–66)"

Men more frequently offered supply-side explanations - implying that capable women would naturally be selected by the system (20% of men):

"Yes, because women who have the ability will be represented by the system. There is no need for reservations. (Male, 43–54)"

Women also more frequently noted the phenomenon of tokenism (48% vs. 12% of men):

"Half the quota of women is filled with women who may not even be present at any discussion. (Female, 30–42)"

Theoretical interpretation. Fox and Lawless (2014) demonstrate that political ambition is socially constructed rather than innate; women are not underrepresented because they lack ambition or ability but because they are systematically not recruited and encouraged. The supply-side framing among male respondents invisibilizes structural barriers by treating political access as meritocratic. Women's structural framing is, by contrast, empirically better supported by the political science evidence.

4.6 Religion, Caste, and Secularism: The False Consensus

Convergence. Explicit rejection of religion- and caste-based politics was near-universal in both groups (92% oppose religion-based politics; 88% oppose caste-based politics). This apparent convergence conceals an important underlying divergence.

Divergence. A minority of male respondents (16%) implicitly endorsed Hindu majoritarian positions or expressed distrust of secularism as a principle, while simultaneously affirming the abstract norm of secular politics:

"A concept of a fraud being propagated by Abrahamic cults to seek additional rights. (Male, 55–66)"

No female respondents offered analogous statements. Men were also more likely to express fatalistic acceptance of identity politics as inevitable: 'Can't be helped - people seek their own kind.'

We interpret this as a false consensus: both groups accept the abstract constitutional principle that religion and caste should not determine political outcomes, but they differ on whether the current political situation violates that principle. Social desirability bias may be driving the high rate of explicit rejection; the implicit divergences visible in the qualitative data suggest that the abstract consensus does not map cleanly onto lived political choices. Subsequent research using implicit association methodologies would be valuable here.

Theoretical interpretation. This finding connects to a broader literature on the tension between stated ideals and underlying attitudes. Men who support Hindu majoritarian politics may genuinely perceive themselves as guardians of culture rather than violators of secularism. Women's threat assessments are different: any politicization of religion is experienced as a risk to their security as gendered citizens, which explains the absence of implicit majoritarian endorsement among female respondents.

4.7 Nationalism and Democracy: Confidence and Democratic Vigilance

Convergence. Both groups defined nationalism in terms of patriotism and democratic belonging, and both explicitly rejected jingoistic nationalism.

"Nationalism is the feeling of the people towards the country - respect for the flag and the anthem. But forcing others to stand during the national anthem is not nationalism. (Male, 55–66)"

Divergence. Women expressed significantly higher concern about democratic erosion (44% vs. 24% of men) and media capture by the government (32% vs. 20%):

"The current government has captured all the media agencies. So, what democracy? (Female, 42–54)"

Male respondents were more likely to express confidence in democratic institutions despite criticizing specific policies. A minority view among male respondents - that Indian democracy is stable and improving - was held by approximately 24% of male respondents. [Note: In an earlier draft of this paper, a quotation expressing confidence in Indian democracy was mistakenly attributed to a female respondent. This has been corrected: the quotation 'Democracy is well defined in India and it is not changing' was expressed by a male respondent and represents a minority male position, not a cross-gender view.]

Theoretical interpretation. Women's heightened concern about democratic erosion is consistent with their more vulnerable position: in democracies, rights are legally protected; under authoritarian governance, they may be revoked. Men, as the structurally dominant gender, have less to fear from democratic backsliding because authoritarian arrangements tend to reinforce rather than undermine traditional gender hierarchies (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

4.8 Economic Attitudes: Macro-Optimism and Lived-Reality Scepticism

Convergence. Economic concerns were salient for both groups, with unemployment and inflation ranked as the top two issues. Both groups also expressed concern about concentrated wealth and crony capitalism.

Divergence. Men expressed more positive assessments of the economy (48% positive vs. 32% of women) and were more likely to use macro-level indicators (GDP growth rates, fiscal policy). Women were more likely to characterize economic conditions as adverse or anti-people (32% vs. 16% of men) and to draw on lived economic experience:

"We do not know whether the figures are real. If all media is government-controlled, who knows what the real inflation or GDP figures are? (Female, 30–42)"

Theoretical interpretation. Men's relative economic optimism is consistent with their position in a labour market that continues to advantage male workers through higher average wages and greater employment security. Women who experience the gender pay gap, the double burden of paid work and unpaid domestic labour, and greater job precarity have both more exposure to economic insecurity and greater reason to be skeptical of official growth narratives.

5. Discussion: The Dual Pathways Model of Gendered Political Attitude Formation

Drawing on the comparative thematic analysis above, we propose the Dual Pathways Model of Political Attitude Formation in gendered context. This model holds that urban Indian men and women, on average, develop

distinct political subjectivities not because of innate gender differences but because they navigate different socialization environments and accumulate different structural experiences.

Pathway 1: The Masculine Public Pathway

Primary socialization agents: peer networks, formal education, media consumption (newspapers, social media), and workplace hierarchies.

Cognitive frame: Politics as a competition over macro-level resources (economy, borders, culture); nationalism as collective self-defence.

Political expression: Pragmatic and ideologically positioned (right/centrist/left as relatively fixed positions), high political efficacy, and broad trust in the fairness of the system even when specific policies are criticized.

Structural vulnerabilities: Greater susceptibility to nationalist populism that attributes economic grievances to external enemies; lower recognition of structural inequality; less receptivity to intersectional political demands.

Pathway 2: The Feminine Private-Public Pathway

Primary socialization agents: family (parental gender-role modelling), gendered domestic labour (childcare, household management), and direct institutional encounters with discrimination (in employment, public space, and political life).

Cognitive frame: Politics as the management of power relations in everyday life; the personal is political; nationalism as collective belonging rather than territorial defense.

Political expression: Issue-driven rather than ideologically positioned, lower political efficacy ('nothing will change'), higher moral clarity on justice issues, and critical citizenship - high engagement combined with low institutional trust.

Structural vulnerabilities: Political alienation driven by under-representation, cynicism and withdrawal from formal political processes, and the risk of burnout from sustaining vigilance against exclusion.

5.1 Why Do These Pathways Persist?

The Dual Pathways Model does not assert that men and women are inherently different in their political capacities or dispositions. Rather, it asserts that gendered social structures produce systematically different political subjectivities. Political attitudes formed during childhood and adolescence are durable (Searing et al., 1976) and are continuously reinforced by institutions - schools, workplaces, media - that continue to treat men and women differently. The pathways will converge as substantive gender equality is achieved, not merely formal equality. Their continued divergence is not evidence of natural difference but of ongoing structural inequality.

Crucially, the model must be interpreted with the age-cohort caveat in mind. Some of the differences identified in this study - particularly those related to ideological positioning and economic optimism - may partly reflect generational rather than exclusively gender-based effects. Future research with age-matched samples will be necessary to determine the independent contribution of gender after cohort effects are controlled.

5.2 Implications for Indian Democracy

The Dual Pathways Model carries several implications for policymakers, political parties, and civil society organizations.

First, political communication requires gender-differentiated approaches. Male voters in this sample responded to appeals organized around economic growth, national security, and cultural preservation. Female voters responded to appeals organized around safety, representation, and policies that address the double burden of paid employment and domestic responsibility.

Second, the 106th Constitutional Amendment's women's reservation policy must be accompanied by structural reforms to overcome the institutional barriers women identified: inadequate childcare provision in political spaces, political violence against women candidates, and the risk of tokenism. Without these accompanying reforms, the quota risks becoming what one respondent called 'a cover-up' - formal representation without substantive power.

Third, the gender gap in political efficacy will not close through representation alone but requires gendered civic education that exposes girls to female political role models, creates space for girls to deliberate about politics, and challenges the cultural equation of politics with corrupt male behaviour.

Fourth, the marked gender polarization on LGBTQ+ rights suggests that Indian politics may be approaching a structural culture-war dynamic. How political parties navigate the trade-off between male and female voter coalitions on this axis may significantly shape electoral outcomes over the next decade.

6. Conclusion

This comparative qualitative study of 50 urban, English-educated Indian respondents demonstrates that gender is not merely a demographic correlate of political views but a constitutive mechanism that shapes the very content of political categories. Men and women in this sample inhabit different political realities: men debate the rate of economic growth; women question whose growth it is. Men emphasize national security; women demand personal security - safety in public transport, freedom from harassment, economic independence. Men tend to treat social justice claims as zero-sum challenges to tradition; women experience them as fundamental demands for dignity.

These differences are not natural or inevitable. They are produced by gendered socialization, reinforced by structural inequalities, and perpetuated by a political system that has historically incorporated women as voters while excluding them as representatives. The 106th Constitutional Amendment is a historic legislative achievement, but legal instruments alone cannot transform political culture. Sustainable change requires sustained institutional reform: childcare in political spaces, safety guarantees for women in public life, and political communication that addresses women's substantive concerns rather than treating them as a homogeneous voting bloc.

The study identifies several priorities for future research. Longitudinal designs tracking how life events - marriage, parenthood, career transitions - shift political attitudes would provide further insight into the mechanisms of gendered political socialization. Comparative research across Indian states at different stages of gender development (Kerala versus Bihar, for instance) would test the structural hypothesis directly. Age-matched samples of men and women would allow cleaner separation of gender and cohort effects. And qualitative research centred on non-binary and gender non-conforming persons would extend beyond the binary frame this study necessarily adopts.

The vitality of Indian democracy depends not only on formal inclusion - quotas and elections - but on substantive responsiveness: policies and political rhetoric that engage the full diversity of gendered experiences. This study documents how far that ideal remains from present reality, and points toward what a more equitable political culture might require.

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