

Constructing Women's Empowerment in Electoral Politics: A Comparative Analysis of Tamil Nadu Political Parties Manifestos

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Abstract

Women's empowerment has emerged as a significant issue in the politics of Tamil Nadu. This study investigates the depiction of women's empowerment in the 2026 Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly election manifestos of major political parties. The study is based on the women's empowerment concept suggested by Malhotra, Schuler and Boender (2002). The manifesto documents were analysed using a three-phase analytical approach comprising thematic analysis, content analysis and framing analysis.

The research identified eight primary topics of women's empowerment (economic empowerment, welfare, safety and security, education, health, social empowerment, political empowerment and inclusive empowerment). The most debated subjects among them were economic empowerment and welfare. Political parties have promised different schemes for financial assistance, entrepreneurship, self-help organisations, education, healthcare and women's protection.

The study also found women are mainly portrayed as welfare recipients, economic contributors, caregivers and people in need of protection. Less focus is paid to women's leadership and participation in political decision-making. The results indicate that while

women's empowerment is an important electoral issue, political parties still emphasise welfare and development-oriented methods rather than political empowerment. The present study adds to the understanding of gender and political communication by studying the presentation of women's issues in election manifestos. The findings may be valuable for political parties, policy-makers and researchers interested in women's empowerment and electoral politics.

KEYWORDS: *WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT, ELECTION, MANIFESTO, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION*

1. Introduction

In the Indian political scenario, we cannot cut off election manifestos from women's empowerment schemes. The Indian Constitution guaranteed women's development and equality strongly after independence. According to the Indian Constitution, specifically Articles 83 and 172, the Election Commission of India (ECI) conducts elections every five years. Political parties build their identity through manifestos (Kenneth Janda et al., 2007). A good manifesto should address the people's problems like education, tax and social reforms (Singh, 2019). In contemporary times, political parties place greater emphasis on their manifestos. Political heroes try to fulfil their promises in the first six months of their regime (Brouard et al., 2018). They attempt to sustain the tempo to accomplish huge commitments without falling into impractical commitments. India is the leading country in South Asia, but the issue of women's empowerment remains controversial. Women encountered many obstacles in the past because of society's beliefs and detrimental practices like female feticide, dowry and the Sati system. However, the government enacted many schemes to mitigate the consequences (Kumari & Siotra, 2023). Conservatism is a major challenge in India, resulting in unequal treatment of women compared to men (Sarkar, 2019). Even in contemporary times, the empowerment of women remains questionable.

The central and state governments are collaborating on women's empowerment. After independence, whoever ruled India implemented many welfare schemes and policies for women's empowerment (Khatik, 2005). But implementation is a significant challenge. India has a vast disparity in women's progress depending on the state. Some states pay more attention to women's financial stability, while others focus on education. Studies have shown that the progress of women in India is not the same everywhere; some areas have improved, while others still face big problems. For example, some states perform outstandingly, such as Punjab and Sikkim, in women's empowerment; ironically, larger states like UP, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan do not enact adequate schemes for women (Kumar & Mondal, 2024). Tamil Nadu

performs exceptionally well in various sectors compared to other states in India. From the 1952 election held after independence to the recently concluded 2026 election, electoral promises have played a pivotal role. According to Tamil Nadu, an election manifesto is not only for accumulating votes. It's slightly different from other states. This is because the schemes are directly beneficial to the people (Kumar,2025).

During the first election in Tamil Nadu in 1952, the assurances played a profound role, such as anti-corruption and Food scarcity (Hindu,2026). In every election, the politicians' assurances are engraved in the audience's mind. They invigorate their brand image through schemes that help win the election. Those schemes distinguish the leader's image throughout the generation. Therefore, many welfare schemes come under the leader's name. Specifically, Tamil Nadu predominantly ruled parties like DMK and AIADMK introduced a plethora of welfare schemes named AMMA grinders, Kalaingar TV, whose name recalls their identity (kumar, 2025). In the last election, the DMK govt announced the Kalaingar Magalir Urimai Thogai scheme, which was very beneficial for women. Afterwards, many states incorporated these programs into their states. Many distinguished economists stated that this is not only a welfare scheme, but it has built financial stability for the women. Multitudinous research scholars highlighted that when govt focus more on women's empowerment that would be more impactful on society. In the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the Tamil Nadu government has set aside a large amount of money for women Rs. 14,412 crores have been given for the *Kalaingar Magalir Urimai Thogai Scheme*. Other schemes like *Pudhumai Penn Scheme* got Rs. 512 crore, Dr Muthulakshmi Reddy Maternity Benefit Scheme got Rs. 1,092 crore, and the Women Entrepreneurs Development Scheme got Rs. 225 crore to help women live better lives. Many regional parties in India focus on women's empowerment and give importance to women's education, health, and basic needs in every election (the Guardian, 7 May 2024) . In Kerala, former Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan recently launched the *Sthree Suraksha scheme*, which provides Rs. 1,000 monthly to over 10 lakh women. In early February, the West Bengal government increased the amount allocated under the *Lakshmi Bhandar scheme* by Rs. 500 for approximately 2.4 lakh women in the state. The government firmly believes these welfare schemes enhance vote banks.

According to the latest electoral commission data, Tamil Nadu has 3.24 crore women voters; therefore, Tamil Nadu political parties like DMK, AIADMK, NTK and TVK, all the regional parties, focus on accumulating women voters. The central government has introduced various schemes, such as Mahila Shakti Kendra, Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, National Rural Livelihood Mission, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, and National Mission for Empowerment of

Women. These schemes positively impact women's development (Ms. Nikita Srivastava, 2025). Furthermore, the study contributes to the existing literature in several ways. The present study examines the concern of regional parties for the empowerment of women. What schemes do they propose in the manifesto? How do state political parties get involved with women's schemes? How do parties construct and depict women in their manifestos? This study obtained the manifestos of the five main political parties from their official page. The study findings have been obtained by content analysis, thematic and framing analysis.

2. Literature Review

2.1 What is a Political Manifesto

Political manifestos are the official documents produced by political parties prior to elections during which they communicate their policy priorities, ideological stances, and electoral pledges to voters (Denis, 2024). Political manifestos are important tools in democratic systems in which parties can present their vision and seek electoral support. Scholars argue that manifestos enhance political accountability, as voters can potentially evaluate parties based on their promise fulfillment once in power (Budge & Hofferbert, 1990). Political manifestos have become more detailed and comprehensive over time, mirroring changing voter expectations and the growing complexity of governance (Volkens et al., 2021). The timing of manifesto publication is also considered strategically important as it can influence campaign narratives and voter perceptions (Dolezal et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, research shows that a large part of the population does not read the manifestos themselves but learns about the core promises through the media and other communication channels (Merz, 2017; Norris, 2000). Thus, the media has an important influence on how the public understands the manifesto promises. Overall, political manifestos remain an essential tool for policy communication, voter mobilisation, and democratic accountability.

2.2 What is women's empowerment

Scholars view empowerment as a multidimensional concept encompassing education, economic independence, political participation and decision-making power (Malhotra, Schuler and Boender, 2002). Similarly, economic empowerment strengthens women's autonomy and control over resources while political empowerment increases their participation in governance

and public decision - making (Duflo, 2012). In the Indian context, women's empowerment remains an important policy objective despite persistent challenges related to gender inequality and social norms. Consequently, governments and political parties increasingly emphasise women's development and participation through various welfare and empowerment initiatives (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015)

2.3 Women's Empowerment in Political Manifestos

Political manifestos have increasingly become important instruments through which political parties communicate their commitment to women's empowerment and gender equality. Research indicates that women voters formed an important electoral constituency, prompting political parties to incorporate gender-focused policies in their election manifestos (Banua, 2026). Scholars contend that manifestos are not only a reflection of party ideology but also an expression of policy priorities on women's welfare, education, employment, health, and political participation (Dolezal et al., 2018).

Further studies show that women's issues are increasingly included in political manifestos but the implementation of the promised initiatives is still lacking (Banua, 2026; Kumar and Mondal, 2024). Mullins et al. (2024) revealed that women's health issues remain underrepresented in political agendas, indicating a gap between policy promises and tangible outcomes. Researchers have also found that policies targeting the empowerment of women tend to focus on welfare provisions with comparatively less attention on addressing structural inequalities and improving the political representation (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015).

Recent literature also highlights the significance of women's political participation in ensuring democratic governance. Political parties in different countries have undertaken initiatives such as gender quotas, reservations, and leadership positions to improve women's representation in decision-making bodies (Krook, 2010). In India, initiatives such as the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam and the promotion of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have garnered considerable attention for their role in advancing women's political and economic empowerment (Kumari and Siotra, 2023). Consequently, women's empowerment has become a prominent theme in contemporary political manifestos, reflecting both electoral considerations and larger commitments to gender-inclusive development.

2.4 Women's Empowerment in Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu is ranked among the top states in India in terms of women's empowerment and social development (Kumar and Mondal, 2024). Studies have shown that the state has made considerable progress in terms of women's education, economic participation, entrepreneurship and social welfare. The introduction of equal property rights to women in 1989 was a significant milestone in improving women's social and economic status. Studies have also shown that investments in women's education and health are critical to democratic development and social progress (Srivastava, 2025).

Social reform movements have been credited with contributing to the progress of women's rights in Tamil Nadu. The Dravidian movement, in particular, focused on social justice, women's empowerment and the eradication of caste-based discrimination (Vanitha, 2014). As a result, major Dravidian parties such as DMK and AIADMK have consistently included women-focused welfare initiatives in their political agendas. Schemes such as the Cradle Baby Scheme, All Women Police Stations, marriage assistance schemes, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and initiatives aimed at increasing women's representation have played a significant role in promoting women's socio-economic empowerment (Lindberg et al., 2011). These developments have made Tamil Nadu a crucial case study for understanding the relationship between political promises and women's empowerment.

2.5 Research Gap

Kumari & Siotra (2023) have studied state-level disparities in women's empowerment in India using geospatial techniques in areas such as education and government schemes. However, little attention has been paid to the effect of political manifestos. Most studies focus on the success of policies and programmes such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) and National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) (Srivastava & Kumar, 2025)

For example, the previous work has studied the ways in which political parties catch the voters' attention through their manifestos. (Younus et al., 2026) Conducted a comparative thematic and critical discourse analysis of manifestos of seven leading Pakistani political parties. Existing studies, however, are generally country-based and do not sufficiently examine how women's empowerment is articulated and prioritised in the manifestos of regional parties. The available research in the context of Tamil Nadu has mostly concentrated on social initiatives,

political communication, and party brand image techniques. But there is no comprehensive research on the extent, categories, and emphasis of women-related plans and policies in election manifestos. Against this background, the present study will examine the extent to which women's empowerment is prioritised by political parties in their manifestos, the areas of focus, and the relatively neglected areas. The research provides a contribution to policymakers and political actors by finding gaps in the guarantees of the manifesto, and also provides help for voters, especially women, to better grasp the nature of electoral promises and their implications for women's socio-economic growth

RQ1. TO identify and analyse key themes of women's empowerment in parties manifestos.

RQ2. To examine the types of policies and welfare schemes proposed for women.

RQ3. To analyse how women are represented in political discourse within the manifestos.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Type

This research utilised a qualitative content analysis method to explore the themes present in the manifestos of Tamil Nadu political parties for the 2026 legislative election. The reason for this choice is multi-fold. First, this approach allows for the breakdown of themes within the manifestos as well as a comprehensive understanding of their importance. The qualitative method enables the analysis of the latent meaning of the manifestos and the outlook of their ideas. The qualitative method explains how women's empowerment is reflected in the manifestos of political parties in Tamil Nadu. In conclusion, the qualitative methodology is directly related to the three research questions, making the interpretative analysis preferable to numerical methods.

3.2 Data Collection

The data of this study were obtained from two main sources. The literature review was conducted using Google Scholar and Scopus, searching for topics such as women's empowerment, electoral manifestos and Tamil Nadu politics. This review was limited to peer-reviewed studies and relevant newspaper articles published between 2011 and 2026. The

theoretical framework of this study was developed through an analysis of 30 relevant research articles. Additionally, the manifestos of the parties were acquired from the official websites of the political parties.

Table 1. Date of Manifesto release in the 2026 Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly elections

Political party	Announcement date	Announcement date before the election
DMK	29-March-2026	25 Days
ADMK	24-March-2026	31 Days
TVK	17- April-2026	6 Days
BJP	14-April-2026	9 Days
NTK	17-March-2026	38 Days

However, I cross-checked these references from various reputable news outlets. By analysing these manifestos, we could identify and classify more than 114 components into six groups, such as economic empowerment, political participation, welfare schemes and health and social empowerment. The details and titles of the manifestos are mentioned in Table 2, and the release dates of the manifestos before the election are given in Table 1.

Table 2. Data collection of political party Manifestos (Legislative Assembly elections, Tamil Nadu, 2026).

Political party	Document title	Year	Scope
DMK	Dravidian Model 2.0	2026	State Autonomy, Social Justice, Secularism, Inclusive Growth, Prosperity of Tamil Nadu
ADMK			Protection of Minorities, Safety

	Let us save the peoples – Safety Let us retrieve Tamil Nadu	2026	State Autonomy and Employment
TVK	People's Election Manifesto	2026	Women's welfare, Prosperity of Tamil Nadu Caste Census, Ban on NEET, Farmer's Welfare
BJP	Thamarai (Lotus) Manifesto	2026	Job opportunities, Economic growth, Strengthen agriculture, improve Infrastructure
NTK	Naam Tamilar Governance Action Plan	2026	The administrative capital, Priority of Tamil people's Reserved

3.3 Analytical Framework

This study is based on a three-phase analytical methodology to analyse the representation of women's empowerment in the 2026 Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly election manifestos. The paradigm integrates thematic, content and framing analysis to gain a full understanding of women-related commitments and representations in the manifestos. The study draws upon the multidimensional understanding of empowerment proposed by (Malhotra, Schuler, & Boender, 2002). The framework helped in identifying dimensions related to empowerment, such as economic, political, social, educational, and health empowerment, but the thematic analysis was data-driven. So, other themes such as welfare, safety, security, and inclusive empowerment

were added to the manifesto data and incorporated into the analytical framework.

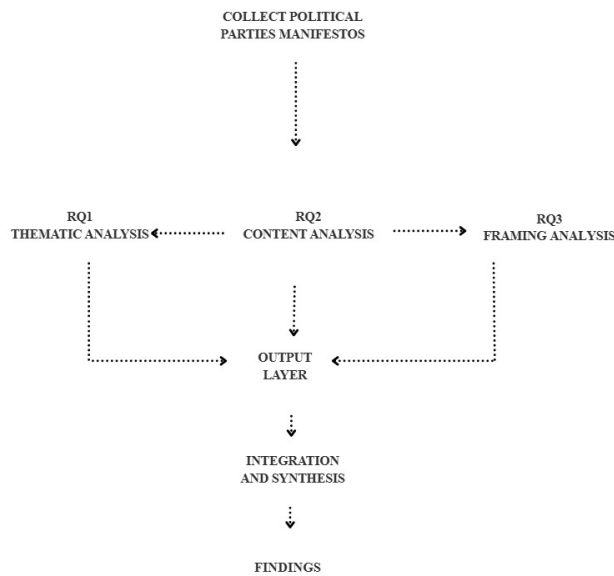


Figure 2. Manifesto Analysis Framework

Source: Adapted from (Younus et al., 2026)

Phase 1

We employed the thematic analysis method proposed by (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The manifesto was meticulously reviewed three to four times. Subsequently, we coded the principal themes presented by the parties. We found lending schemes, educational support, and reservation and safety schemes, and segregated the manifestos into thematic code groups for better segregation.

Phase 2

The second phase employed directed qualitative content analysis following (Hsieh, 2005). Here, all manifesto commitments concerning women, identified through thematic analysis, were systematically categorised by policy type. Each pledge was analysed in terms of its primary policy objective and categorised into five categories: welfare relief, financial aid, legal reform, institutional support, and representation measures. For example, commitments related

to direct monetary benefits were categorised as welfare assistance; loans for entrepreneurship as financial support; laws designed to protect women as legal reforms; setting up women-centric institutions as institutional support; and commitments on reservations as representation measures. This helped in comparing the different ways in which political parties approached women's empowerment.

Phase 3

In the third phase, framing analysis (Entman, 1993) was used to analyse the representation of women in the manifesto rhetoric. At this stage, the language and structure of manifesto pledges were analysed to identify the dominant representational frames used by political parties. Each commitment related to women was analysed to find out whether they were represented as welfare recipients, political actors, economic agents, vulnerable groups in need of protection, or agents of social reform. For example, women were represented as welfare recipients through commitments of financial assistance, as political actors through commitments to leadership and representation, as economic agents through commitments to entrepreneurship, and as vulnerable groups in need of protection through commitments to safety measures. This analysis was used to explore the broader political discourses in which the empowerment of women was constructed and represented in party manifestos.

3.4 Coding procedure

The process of coding was carried out in three systematic stages. First, all selected manifesto materials were carefully examined for commitments related to women. Then, descriptive codes were assigned to each relevant segment of text, representing the core content of the text, such as financial support, legal protection, political involvement, educational aid and health services. Finally, similar codes were clustered into broader themes, consistent with the underlying analysis. The coded data were then categorised into policy areas and subjected to framing analysis to explore the trends in representation within the party manifestos.

4. Findings and Results

4.1 Themes on Women's Empowerment in Political Party Manifestos

The selected political party manifestos undergo thematic analysis to address the first research question. The study identified eight major themes of women's empowerment, including

Economic Empowerment, Welfare, Safety and Security, Educational Empowerment, Health Empowerment, Social Empowerment, Political Empowerment, and Inclusive Empowerment.



Figure 3: Thematic Map on Women's Empowerment

Source: Developed by the author based on a thematic analysis of party manifestos

The Thematic Map shows the main areas of women's empowerment mentioned by the Political Parties in Tamil Nadu. The results indicate the most frequently mentioned themes are Economic Empowerment and Welfare. Most of the parties suggested financial assistance, entrepreneurship, self-help group development, employment opportunities and livelihood programmes for women.

Safety and security were another important theme. Several parties promised CCTV surveillance, fast-track courts, women police units, mobile safety applications and other measures to improve women's safety. Scholarships, facilities of hostel, support for higher education and skill development programmes were provided by educational empowerment. The health-related pledges included maternity benefits, vaccination schemes, cancer screening,

nutrition support and menstrual hygiene initiatives. The analysis discovered Inclusive Empowerment through schemes for widows, transgender women, minority women, tribal women and differently abled women. In comparison to other themes, Political Empowerment was less discussed.

4.2 Types of Policies and Welfare Schemes Suggested for Women

The second research question is addressed by systematically classifying the women-related policy commitments identified in the five party manifestos into five different policy types: welfare relief, financial aid, legal reform, institutional support and representation measures.

Welfare Relief Schemes were the biggest category in all party manifestos. The DMK manifesto confirmed its commitment to the Kalaigalar Magalir Urimai Thogai scheme, under which women-headed households would receive direct monthly financial transfers. The AIADMK announced marriage assistance schemes, social security pensions for widows and poor women and nutrition support programmes. The BJP manifesto had open support for women under centrally sponsored schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana. These welfare commitments are based on a predominantly recipient-oriented approach to women's empowerment.

Financial Aid and Economic Schemes. Most parties suggested interest-free or low-interest loans for women entrepreneurs, expansion of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and seed capital for women-led micro enterprises. TVK specifically focused on women's participation in industrial employment and schemes to support women in emerging sectors. NTK's economic agenda for women included equal pay and workplace protections.

Legal Reform and Safety Measures was an important policy domain across several manifestos. The commitments included strengthening the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, creation of fast-track courts for crimes against women, enhancement of the number of All Women Police Stations and introducing emergency helpline applications. Both the AIADMK and DMK pointed to the expansion of CCTV surveillance in public areas as a measure to improve women's safety. TVK proposed a dedicated women's safety force called Singa Pen special task force that ensures women's safety in public spaces. The move is part of TVK's overall focus on women's safety - with an emphasis on technology and institutional safety mechanisms.

Institutional Support Schemes proposed the establishment of women's skill development centres, upgrading the facilities of existing government hostels for working women and students, creation of dedicated women's entrepreneurship parks and enhancing the Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women. *Pudhumai Penn Thittam (DMK)* and scholarships for girl students were also put under this category as educational schemes.

Representation Measures: While a few manifestos did talk about increasing reservations for women in local body governance and jobs in government, they did not have detailed commitments on women's political leadership at the legislative level. This finding is consistent with the under-representation of women in political empowerment themes found in RQ1.

Overall, the analysis shows that welfare relief and financial aid are the most prominent in the policy landscape of all five parties, while legal reform and representation measures are relatively less prominent. This pattern indicates that Tamil Nadu's political parties still tend to think about women's empowerment mostly in the terms of an economic and welfare paradigm not a rights based or political agency framework.

4.2.1 Comparative Study of Women's Empowerment Themes

The comparative study shows that all political parties were interested in women's empowerment, but their priorities were different. The AIADMK and DMK focused on welfare and economic assistance measures. TVK spoke about entrepreneurship, safety protocols, healthcare, and the advancement of women in industrial jobs. NTK focused on women's rights, legal reforms, equality in the workplace and job opportunities. The BJP has combined humanitarian assistance, entrepreneurial efforts, women leadership programmes and safety measures.

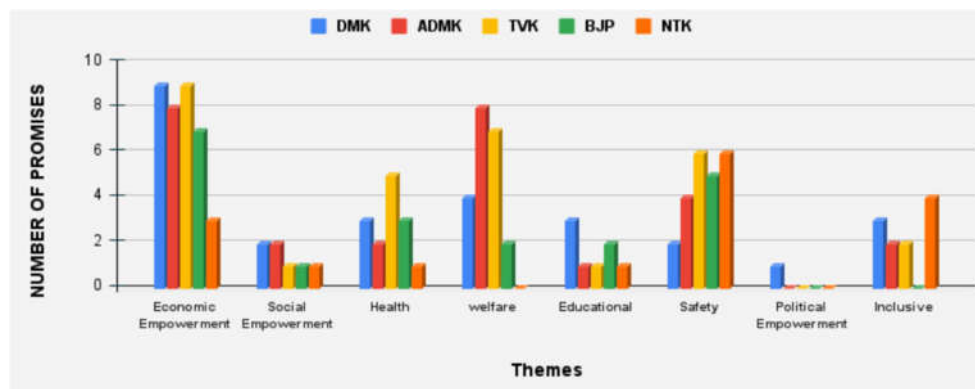


Figure 4. Distribution of Themes in the Manifestos of Major Political Parties in Tamil Nadu – Comparison

All parties focused on economic empowerment in their manifestos, although they differed in their tactics.

Theme	DMK	ADMK	TVK	BJP	NTK
Economic Empowerment	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
Social Empowerment	HIGH	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM
Healthy welfare	HIGH	LOW	HIGH	MEDIUM	MEDIUM
Educational	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	MEDIUM	HIGH
Safety	MEDIUM	LOW	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM
Political Empowerment	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
Inclusive	LOW	LOW	LOW	LOW	LOW
	LOW	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	HIGH

Figure 5: Heat map of women's empowerment prioritisation across Tamil Nadu political parties (2026 manifestos)

Source: Framework adopted by (Younus et al., 2026)

The heatmap displays the importance of women's empowerment topics by different parties. Darker regions indicate greater focus on a particular issue, and lighter regions less focus. From the heatmap, it is fairly obvious that most of the parties focused their attention more on Economic Empowerment and Welfare. On the other hand, Political Empowerment was largely ignored.

4.3 Representation of Women in Political Discourse

The third research question about the representation of women in political party manifestos was analysed by means of framing analysis. The results show that women are primarily depicted as welfare recipients, economic actors, caregivers and objects of protection. There are many manifesto commitments on financial help, welfare programmes, social security and home support. The women are also being progressively portrayed as entrepreneurs, workers and contributors to economic progress through self-help organisations, employment schemes and business assistance programmes. Safety-related commitments produce women as a social category that needs to be protected from violence and bias.

The manifestos depict women as crucial to the welfare of the home, to social progress and economic development. But a little fewer commitments highlight women's political leadership and active participation in decision-making processes.

5. Discussion

The study was focused on the representation of women's empowerment in the manifestos of the 2026 Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly election. The results confirm the multidimensional concept of women's empowerment proposed by Malhotra, Schuler, & Boender (2002), such as Economic empowerment, Health empowerment, Social Empowerment, Educational Empowerment, Political empowerment and the study finds that new dimensions such as safety, welfare and inclusive empowerment are part of modern political discourse. The findings showed that Economic Empowerment was the dominant theme in the selected party manifestos. Various political parties supported financial aid initiatives, entrepreneurship support, formation of self-help groups, employment opportunities and livelihood enhancement programs. That means that political parties are starting to acknowledge the importance of women in economic progress and household well-being. The focus on business and jobs points to an increasing recognition of the value of economic independence as a means of empowerment.

Another of the prominent subjects throughout the manifestos was welfare. The introduction of direct cash transfers, social security pensions, marriage aid schemes, maternity benefits and home support programmes was suggested by various actors. The role of welfare obligations is indicative of the presence of a welfare-oriented political culture in Tamil Nadu. These programs provide women and families with immediate assistance, but such programs do indicate that women continue to be seen as recipients of government aid. The investigation revealed significant focus on women's safety and security. The fact that governments are committing themselves to CCTV surveillance, women police units, fast-track courts, emergency applications, safety gadgets and secure hostels shows that gender-based violence and public safety are important political issues. Political parties are increasingly aware that safety is a precondition for women's participation in education, employment and public life. Manifestos featured major commitments on education and health. Scholarship schemes, accommodation facilities, skill development projects, maternity benefits, vaccination drives, cancer screening initiatives and menstrual hygiene support are evidence that stakeholders are

aware of the importance of education and health in uplifting women's quality of life. These initiatives reflect a holistic understanding of empowerment that is not just economic support.

The party analysis shows important methodological differences. The AIADMK focused on welfare and economic assistance through cash assistance, self-help groups, marriage schemes and social security schemes. DMK advanced an inclusive development model integrating economic empowerment with education, health care and social protection measures for vulnerable sections. TVK focused on women entrepreneurship, technology-driven safety measures, healthcare support and infrastructure for women. NTK adopted a rights-based approach with emphasis on legal reforms, fair employment opportunities, workplace protections and gender justice. The BJP combined social assistance with entrepreneurship promotion, leadership programmes and women-oriented development programmes. The framing study identified women primarily as recipients of welfare and agents of economic activity. Women are mostly shown as recipients of social welfare programs and financial assistance. Entrepreneurship and job creation programs also portrayed women as active participants in economic development. However, only a handful of commitments focus on women in political leadership and decision-making roles.

Of the manifestos, Political Empowerment was rated as one of the least prioritised issues. While some political actors called for leadership positions and increased participation in governance, most of the commitments in the manifesto focused more on welfare and development than on political representation. This study finds that women's empowerment in the electoral discourse is often conceptualised as economic and social support, rather than political agency and decision-making power. The results confirm the multidimensional concept of women's empowerment proposed by (Malhotra, Schuler, & Boender, 2002). Yet, the study finds that new dimensions such as safety, welfare and inclusive empowerment are part of modern political discourse. Thus, women's empowerment in the political manifestos of Tamil Nadu is discussed as a multi-dimensional idea that is driven by economic development, social welfare, public safety, health, education and inclusion. The study finds that women's empowerment has emerged as a major election issue in Tamil Nadu. Much of the language of the Manifesto remains welfare-oriented, but there is a growing recognition of the importance of women's economic engagement, entrepreneurship and social growth. However, more attention to political leadership and inclusive decision-making would improve a more holistic and transformative approach to women's empowerment.

6. Theoretical Implications

This study explores women-related promises in political party manifestos in Tamil Nadu from different perspectives, thus contributing to the literature on women's rights, political communication and manifesto studies. (Malhotra, Schuler & Boender, 2002) provide a framework of women's empowerment that is used here to demonstrate that empowerment is not one policy area but many interrelated ones. The results show that the concept of women's empowerment is a multi-part idea, including economic, social, educational, health and political aspects. The manifestos place a strong emphasis on economic empowerment, which supports research that access to resources, financial freedom and jobs are all key elements of empowerment. The existence of commitments to educational, health and social benefits is also an example of the interconnectedness of empowerment processes.

What the study adds to the academic understanding of women's empowerment is new information about aspects that are particularly important in today's election politics. Aid, safety, security and empowering everyone were important themes in the manifesto debate. These are not the aspects that are directly highlighted in the traditional models of empowerment, but these are the aspects that are becoming increasingly significant in the representation of women in Indian politics.

The frame analysis also adds to the field of political communication theory by showing how election platforms frame representations of women. The results show that women are mostly seen as people who need help, people who contribute to the economy, people who care, and people who need protection. The images in political discourse redefine empowerment and demonstrate how manifestos can alter the way of thinking about gender issues. The study adds to manifesto research by using a single analytical approach that combines thematic analysis, content analysis and framing analysis. This view helps us to understand better what policies parties stand for and how they try to represent people. The approach may be applied in future studies on how gender is discussed in election platforms in different political and cultural contexts.

In conclusion, the study shows that women's empowerment in contemporary political debate is no longer limited to traditional theoretical aspects but increasingly concerns welfare, safety and inclusive development issues. The finding contributes to the body of research that is still being done on women's empowerment theory in the context of democracy and elections.

7. Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide an insight into the political discourses of women's empowerment in the contemporary electoral politics of Tamil Nadu. The study shows that political parties put a lot of weight on projects that help people get ahead financially, help those on welfare, improve safety, education and health. These results could assist political parties to better understand how the wants and needs of women voters are changing as they draft their future platform promises.

The study also points to some shortcomings in the debate about manifestos. Economic and welfare problems get a lot of attention, but issues of women's political participation and leadership are not seen as much. That means lawmakers need to work on getting more women in leadership positions and into the decision-making process. The findings could also help government agencies, women's committees and non-government groups working for equal rights between men and women. These groups can check whether the promises made in elections are being delivered by looking at the key ideas and policy goals that parties set out in their manifestos and tracking the implementation of policies that benefit women.

The study is also useful for advocacy groups that want to push for a more open and gender sensitive government. The findings show that there is a need to address more than just economic issues. And we need to look at safety, health, education and the needs of women who are disabled, widows, transgender women and women belonging to minority groups. Finally, the analytical framework developed in this study might be useful to policy analysts and researchers who are interested in party platforms in other states or election contexts. Thematic analysis, content analysis and framing analysis in combination provide a structured approach to explore the discourse of political speech on women's empowerment. Overall, the study shows that women's empowerment has become a major issue in the elections of Tamil Nadu. The results could contribute to more open and flexible policies to advance women's social, economic and political position.

8. Limitations of the Study

The study has its own limitations, which should be taken into account in generalising the findings. The study is limited to the manifestos of selected political parties that contested in the 2026 Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly election. The results are, therefore, the findings reflect the specific electoral context of Tamil Nadu and may not apply to political discourse in other states or elections. Another limitation is that the study is based on the promises made in the manifestos and not their implementation. Political manifestos are important policy documents which communicate a party's intentions and priorities; however, they do not necessarily indicate how far these commitments are translated into practice after elections. The analysis is based on thematic analysis, content analysis and framing analysis of the manifesto texts. The coding process was systematic, but the interpretation of themes and frames is a qualitative exercise that may influence the analysis to some degree.

Furthermore, the study only looks at the content of the election manifestos that is related to women. This research did not include other forms of political communication such as campaign speeches, social media campaigns, advertisements and voter responses. These sources would contribute to a more complete understanding of how women's empowerment is communicated during election campaigns. Nevertheless, the study offers an important insight into the manner in which women's empowerment is articulated in the contemporary Tamil Nadu electoral politics and lays a foundation for further research in the field of gender, political communication and manifesto studies.

9. Conclusion

The present study examined the portrayal of women's empowerment in the 2026 Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly election manifestos of major political parties. The study used thematic analysis, content analysis, and framing analysis to describe the essential elements of women's empowerment, including economic empowerment, welfare, safety and security, education, health, social empowerment, political empowerment, and inclusive empowerment.

The findings suggest that the language of the manifesto is dominated by economic empowerment and welfare obligations, highlighting that women remain an important electoral constituency. Parties had a broad range of proposals on financial assistance, business, education, health and security. The analysis shows that women are mostly represented as recipients of welfare programs and as contributors to economic development, and far less attention is focused on their roles as political leaders and decision-makers.

The study reveals that the issue of women's empowerment has become a major issue in the electoral politics of Tamil Nadu. This study adds to the understanding of how political parties address women's issues through manifesto rhetoric by investigating policy commitments and political representations. The findings highlight the need for a more equitable approach combining social assistance with increased opportunities for women's leadership, participation and sustained empowerment.

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Appendix

- Political parties' manifestos URL

<https://www.dmk.in/en/resources/manifesto/>

<https://aiadmk.com/aiadmk-manifesto-2026/>

<https://makkalarasu.in/>