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India Elects First Woman to Be President

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW DELHI, July 21 (AP) — [India](#) selected its first female president on Saturday, winning a vote seen as a symbolic victory for women contending with widespread discrimination.

[Pratibha Patil](#), 72, won almost two-thirds of the votes cast by national lawmakers and state legislators. She had the support of the governing Congress Party and its political allies, and had been widely expected to win. The election of a woman to the office, which is mostly ceremonial, continues an Indian tradition of using the presidency to give a high-profile voice to disadvantaged groups.

“This is a victory of the principles of which our Indian people uphold,” Ms. Patil said in a brief statement to reporters, flashing the victory sign to her supporters.

While India has had several women in positions of power — most notably Indira Gandhi, who was elected to the more powerful position of prime minister in 1966, and her daughter-in-law, [Sonia Gandhi](#), who is the chairwoman of the Congress Party — women still face rampant discrimination here.

Many Indian families regard daughters as a liability due to a tradition requiring a bride’s family to pay a large dowry of cash and gifts. Consequently, their education and overall health is often neglected.

International groups estimate that 10 million female fetuses have been aborted here in the last two decades.

Ms. Patil defeated Vice President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, the candidate of the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party, in a race dogged by unprecedented mudslinging.

She will be sworn in as India’s 13th president on Wednesday.

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