

**WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
IN FEDERAL NEPAL**
Achievements and Challenges



**WOMEN'S POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION
IN FEDERAL NEPAL
ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES**

ANBIKA GIRI

**DEMOCRACY
RESOURCE CENTER**

**Democracy Resource Center Nepal
Lalitpur**

Women's Political Participation in Federal Nepal Achievements and Challenges

by Anbika Giri

Published Year 2024

Publisher

Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN)

Bakhundole, Lalitpur

Phone: 01-5902286

Email: info@democracyresource.org

www.democracyresource.org

Cover Illustration by Anamika Gautam

Layout & Design: Kishor Pradhan

DRCN Periodic Report - 25

All rights reserved © DRCN

Printed in Kathmandu, Nepal

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	v
List of Acronyms	vii
Introduction	1
Research Objectives	3
Research Methodology	4
Limitations	8
Historical Overview of Constitutional and	
Legal Provisions on Women’s Participation in Politics	9
Right to Vote and Candidacy Rights	9
Women’s Participation During Partyless Panchayat	10
Reservation for Women Under Multiparty Democracy	12
Women’s Political Participation Under the New Republic	14
Women’s Political Participation in the Decade since 2015	15
Analysis of Findings	18
Implementation of Constitutional and Legal Provisions	18
Constitution of Nepal	19
Electoral and Other Legal Provisions	22
Implementation of Party Statute and Manifesto	26

Party Statute on Women Participation	26
Party Manifesto on Women Participation	28
Entry, Continuity and Advancement of Women in Politics	30
Women's Entry in Politics	30
Continuity and Advancement in Politics	34
Role of Reservation	34
Challenges of Breaking through	
Leadership Positions	37
Socio-economic and Political Background	40
Family Support	44
Economic Challenges	46
Potential of Continuity in Politics	48
Capacity Development	50
Challenges	52
Systemic Barrier	52
Acceptance of Women Leaders	56
Caste-based Discrimination	58
Government Employee Perceptions of Women Leaders	61
Issues Faced by Women in Campaigning	63
Violence and Harassment	67
Individual Choices and Societal Pressure	68
Candidate Nominations and Selection	73
Pressure to Excel at Home and in Public	77
Lack of Investment in Women	78
Excessive Emphasis on Electoral Politics	80
Conclusion and Recommendations	83

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) extends its gratitude to all the participants of this study which comprised elected members and candidates for the House of Representatives, the Provincial Assembly, and at the local level; representatives of political parties, women's rights activists, political analysts, and media persons. We are particularly thankful to Indu Tharu, Usha Raut, Kunti Kumari Shahi, Kala Swarnakar, Kalpana Miyan, Pushpa Thakur, Binu Subedi, Manju Yadav, and Lakshmi Pariyar for their valuable advice and suggestions during this study.

The questions, suggestions, and comments from participants of the stakeholder sessions held in Surkhet (Karnali Province), Kathmandu (Bagmati Province), and Janakpurdham (Madhesh Province) on the draft of this report were instrumental in shaping the final report. DRCN would also like to thank Kunsang for her assistance in every steps of research: field visits and stakeholder sessions.

With the financial and technical support of The Asia Foundation, parallel studies on women's participation in politics were conducted in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal. This report is based on the Nepali context. All findings and analysis herein are drawn from DRCN's research and do not necessarily reflect the views of its partner organizations.

Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN)
Bakhundol, Lallipur

LIST OF ACRONYMS

BSP	Bibeksheel Sajha Party
CA	Constitutional Assembly
CPN (Maoist Centre)	Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre)
CPN (UML)	Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist)
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ECN	Election Commission of Nepal
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FPTP	First-Past-The-Post
HoR	House of Representatives
JSP	Janata Samajwadi Party
KII	Key Informant Interview
NA	National Assembly
NC	Nepali Congress
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NWA	Nepal Woman Association
PR	Proportional Representation
RPP	Rashtriya Prajatantra Party
RSP	Rashtriya Swatantra Party
VDC	Village Development Committee

INTRODUCTION

The space for citizens to engage in democratic politics opened for the first time in Nepal with the fall of the autocratic Rana regime in 1951.¹ While women had been both active and indirect participants in prior political movements, their formal participation in the political mainstream also began during the same time. After entering the formal electoral and party politics since the dawn of democracy, women have become increasingly active participants in Nepal's political life, marking significant achievement towards political empowerment.

The historic people's movement of 2006 resulted in the promulgation of the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 which ensured a 33 percent participation of women in the proposed constituent assembly – a national parliament that would be tasked with writing a new constitution. The mandatory provision greatly increased opportunities for women aspiring to join national politics. The Constitution of Nepal, adopted in 2015, further

¹ In 1947, the citizens of Kathmandu City in Nepal were provided with the unprecedented opportunity to choose their representatives through an election, a historical event noted in Nepal's election history book published by the Election Commission. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that women were excluded from exercising their right to vote or run as candidates in this significant election, organized under the leadership of Rana Prime Minister Padma Shamsher.

consolidated gender inclusion across all three tiers of government.² The current federal parliament consists of the National Assembly (NA) with 59 members and the House of Representatives (HoR) with 275 members. The seven provincial assemblies consist of a total of 550 members, while the 753 local governments are represented by 35,221 directly elected representatives.

Nepal's Constitution and existing legal provisions ensure at least one-third women's participation in political party working committees, both chambers of the federal parliament, and the provincial assemblies. At the local level, at least 40 percent of the ward-level candidates – two out of five – are required to be women. Candidates for one of the two key executive positions – either Mayor or Deputy-Mayor in urban municipalities, and Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson in rural municipalities – are also protected for women. As a result of mandatory provisions, Nepal has seen a remarkable increase in women's representation across all tiers of government, most notably at local levels.

Despite notable developments toward inclusive participatory spaces for women within a complex political and socio-cultural setting, women's participation in politics remains hindered by deep-seated gender norms, unfair questions on capabilities, and prejudices based on political ideologies, caste, ethnicity, religion, and class. Contemporary discourse has revolved around the intersectionality of women in politics, their representation, and their leadership roles. It is evident that marginalized ethnic and minority groups like Dalit, Madheshi, Janajati and Muslim women continue to face disproportional underrepresentation.

Women also face specific challenges within political parties, including various barriers to entry, opaque nomination and decision-making processes dominated by men, and a discriminatory hyper-masculine culture.³ Despite

² The Constitution of Nepal established a three-tier federal structure comprising a federal, provincial (seven provinces), and 753 local governments (urban municipalities and rural municipalities) with all 77 districts kept under the local government structure.

³ Brechenmacher, Saskia and Caroline Hubbard. 2020. Breaking the Cycle of Gender Exclusion in Political Party Development. Working Paper, March. Carnegie Endowment

an increased representation of women in politics, men continue to hold leadership and decision-making roles and often put barriers to women's greater participation and advancement.

It is in this context that this study examines the effects of legislative measures, the commitments made by political parties, and the continuing obstacles faced by women in politics, including those aspiring to enter politics in the first place – and highlighting different measures taken to advance a more gender-representative political domain.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this research is to assess the participation of women in Nepali politics, with a particular focus on electoral politics—from the candidacy nomination process and election campaign to post-election activities. This study evaluates the laws and policies governing women's political engagement and examines how these policies have translated into practice over the past decade, particularly since Nepal's adoption of a new federal constitution in 2015. The study seeks to identify best practices, success and learnings to help address some challenges faced by women political leaders and to promote greater participation of Nepali women in politics.

This study aims to achieve the following specific goals:

- To examine the enforcement of provisions regarding women's participation in politics within Nepal's constitution over the last decade.

for International Peace and National Democratic Institute, Washington D.C. Available at: https://carnegie-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/static/files/202003-Brechenmacher_Hubbard_final.pdf, accessed on February 20, 2024.

- To assess how political parties have implemented their statute and manifestos in the most recent two elections.
- To explore the participation, sustainability, and advancement of women in politics.
- To identify the obstacles encountered by women in the political sphere.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research primarily adopted a qualitative approach, utilizing Key Informant Interview (KII) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) conducted across six local units (Table 1) in Madhesh, Gandaki and Karnali provinces between February and June 2024 and covered respondents from federal, provincial and local levels. An additional survey was also conducted with relevant stakeholders and political party leaders at the local level.

Review of Legal Provisions, Political Party Statutes, and Manifestos

The study was conducted in two phases. The first phase involved a comprehensive review of the constitutional and legal provisions, statutes and party documents of nine political parties, as well as the manifestos from the last two general elections. The nine political parties were selected based on their current political influence and historical dominance, along with newly formed parties. The Nepali Congress, Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) [CPN (UML)], Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) [CPN (Maoist Centre)], and Janata Samajwadi Party (JSP) were chosen due to their significant influence on Nepali politics over two decades. The Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) represented a traditional political force advocating for the restoration of monarchy. Rashtriya Swatantra Party (RSP), Janamat Party and Nagarik Unmukti Party (NUP)

were selected as new entrants in the political scene that performed well in the 2022 national elections. The Bibeksheel Sajha Party (BSP) was selected as it was led by a woman.

Field Research

The second phase involved field visits and interviews at the federal level, in three provinces and six local units (See Table 1).

Table 1: Field locations selected for the study

Field Location		
Federal Level	Province	Local Level
	Madhesh	Surunga Municipality
		Maulapur Municipality
	Karnali	Birendranagar Municipality
		Bhairabi Rural Municipality
	Gandaki	Pokhara Metropolitan City
		Kaligandaki Rural Municipality

The selection of provinces and local units was purposive. Madhesh Province was chosen for the highest representation of elected women leaders and the presence of political parties showing electoral strength at the provincial level, while Karnali Province represented a region with the lowest representation, and a remote hill context.⁴ Gandaki Province was selected due to its representation of women leaders from multiple ethnic communities.

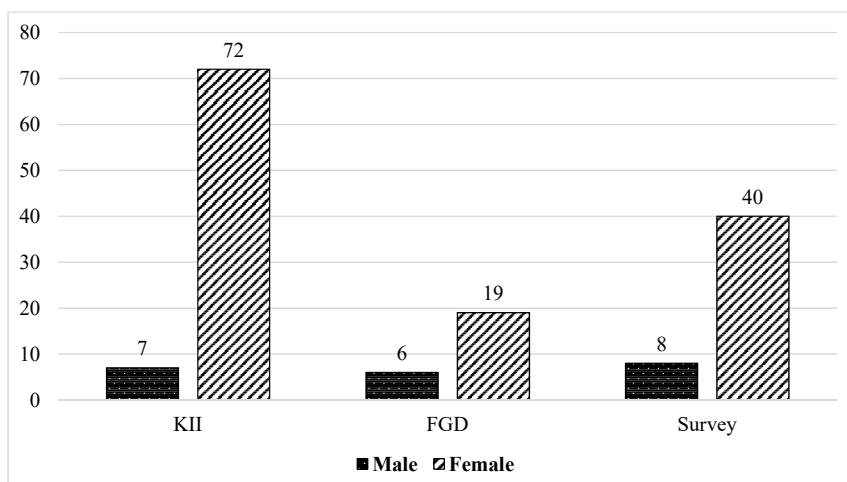
⁴ Himalkhabar. 2022. 14402 Women Were Elected at the Local Level, the Highest in Madhesh Province. May 26. Available at: <https://www.himalkhabar.com/news/130235>, accessed on August 20, 2024. (In Nepali)

Table 2: Number of participants in KIIs across all levels

Category	Number of KIIs
Political Party Leaders	10
Elected Women Leaders	26
Women Candidates: Unelected	16
Leader From Sister Wing	2
Student Union Leaders	3
Expert/CSOs	7
Organization Promoting Women in Politics	6
Women Leaders With Capacity Building Training	9
Total	79

Three FGDs involving representatives from civil society, journalists, and various social organizations were conducted in Surunga Municipality, Birendranagar Municipality, and Pokhara Metropolitan City.

Graph 1: Gender breakdown of KII, FGD and survey respondents



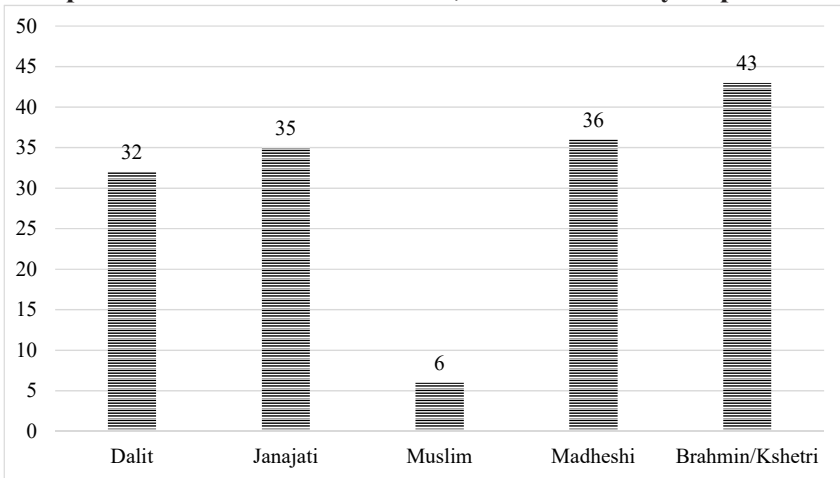
A survey was conducted among 48 individual respondents at the local level, using a questionnaire to explore women’s skills, abilities, and support mechanisms within the political sphere. The survey was not statistically

representative but was purposively selected to corroborate findings from the qualitative interviews.

Data collected from KIIs and FGDs were analyzed using qualitative methods, while the survey results were subjected to quantitative analysis.

During the KIIs, respondents were asked about their socio-economic backgrounds, reasons and motivations for entering politics, political journeys, election experiences, challenges, and future plans. Political party leaders were questioned about the status of implementation of laws and manifesto, internal party policies and programs to increase women’s participation. Area experts and civil society members discussed challenges, opportunities, and public perceptions of women leaders. Dalit women were asked about caste discrimination and its effect on politics.

Graph 2: Ethnic breakdown of KII, FGD and survey respondents



The three FGDs focused on the acceptance of women leaders in society, their performance, the obstacles faced, positive aspects of the laws, available support systems, their skills, and opportunities in politics. The local-level survey included 20 objective questions about skills,

effectiveness, support from government employees, training, educational needs, and family support for women leaders.

LIMITATIONS

This study was conducted among a limited number of purposively selected respondents within a relatively short time frame. The shifting political dynamics and alliances in Nepal affected the study. Following the shift in the ruling coalition at the federal level in March 2024, coalitions in the provinces were also affected, limiting study's access to provincial leaders.⁵ As a result, the study could not reach more influential male leaders who shape party policies. The study also faced difficulties in connecting with women leaders who lost the most recent provincial and local elections, particularly Dalit women ward members. Due to limited time in the field, the study was not able to go deeper into the experiences of Dalit women leaders at the local level. The study covered only six out of 753 local levels, three out of seven provinces, and nine out of 104 political parties registered at the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) as of September 18, 2024.

DRCN previously conducted a study on women candidacies in Nepal's First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) electoral system, analyzing the HoR and Provincial Assembly elections for two electoral cycles (2017 and 2022).⁶ This study, on the other hand, reviewed the Constitution, legal provisions, party statutes, and manifestos to provide further analysis on the achievements and challenges women face in electoral and party politics over the passed decade.

⁵ Nepali Congress left the coalition with CPN (Maoist Centre) on March 3, 2024. The CPN (UML) and CPN (Maoist Centre) formed the new coalition but the coalition did not last long. The CPN (UML) and Nepali Congress formed the new coalition in July 2024.

⁶ Chalaune, Ankala and Chiran Manandhar. 2023. *Women Candidacy under Nepal's First-Past-the-Post System: An Analysis of Elections to the House of Representatives and Provincial Assemblies*. Kathmandu: Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN). Available at: <https://www.democracyresource.org/reports/women-candidacy-in-first-past-the-post-electoral-system-in-nepals-house-of-representatives-and-provincial-assembly/>

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL PROVISIONS ON WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

Constitutional and legal provisions have been central in shaping the historical trajectory of women’s political participation in Nepal since the first democratic election in 1959. Women have secured the right to vote and a minimum of 33 percent representation in politics over the years through continuous struggle. This section explores the legal provisions, including the Constitution, that have been instrumental in securing women’s political participation.

RIGHT TO VOTE AND CANDIDACY RIGHTS (1951–1960)

Nepali women fought in both organized and unorganized ways to secure the right to vote and run for office as their first political legal right through provisions in the Interim Government of Nepal Act 1951, which was also the first democratic constitution of Nepal.⁷ Although it did not contain specific provisions for women in government bodies like the legislature

⁷ Section 6, Article 70 of Interim Government of Nepal Act 1951 first guaranteed general voting rights, while Article 71 ensured adult voting rights. Article 70 prohibited discrimination based on religion, caste, or gender when making voter lists, and Article 71 granted the right to vote to all individuals 21 years of age and older unless otherwise prohibited by the Constitution.

or council of ministers, it included a directive principle of state policy prohibiting discrimination, and allowing for special arrangements for women and children. As a result, in 1954, Nepali women were able to run for office and vote in Kathmandu city elections for the first time.⁸

Part 3 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1959, guaranteed fundamental rights to all citizens. Article 7 ensured political freedom for everyone, including women, without any discrimination based on gender. It established a bicameral parliament consisting of the National Assembly and the House of Representatives (HoR), and also introduced the National Council. Notably, there was no mention of women's representation in any of these structures although they were granted the right to vote and run for office.

In the 1959 general election under the 1959 Constitution, Dwarikadevi Thakurani from the Nepali Congress party became the first woman elected to parliament, and went on to become the first woman in the council of ministers. Six other women had also contested those elections. Kamal Rana, nominated by King Mahendra, became the first woman Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly. Radhadevi, the only woman out of 18 candidates from the Nepali Congress, lost in the National Assembly race.⁹ Despite lacking special legal protections, and amid conservative societal norms, Nepali women demonstrated their interest in parliamentary politics by showing robust participation in voting, as well as by running for office.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION DURING PARTYLESS PANCHAYAT (1960–1990)

Less than two years after the first general election, King Mahendra dismissed the elected Prime Minister and initiated the 'partyless' Panchayat

⁸ Sadhana Devi Pradhan made history as first elected women representative in Nepal. She was elected from Kathmandu Municipality ward no. 8.

⁹ Sanghiya Sansad Sachiwalaya. 2075 BS. *Sansadma Mahila Sahabhagita (2015 BS – 2074 BS)*. Kathmandu: Sansadiya Adhyayan tatha Anusandhan Shakha, Sanghiya Sansad Sachiwalaya.

system, revoking the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1959, and adopting the Constitution of Nepal, 1962.¹⁰ While the new Constitution theoretically granted freedoms of speech, publication, association, and organization, sub-section 2(a) of Article 11 prohibited organizations inspired by political parties, effectively curtailing citizens' freedom to engage in independent political activities.¹¹

Four structures formed the foundation of the Panchayat System: the Royal Council, the Council of Ministers, local Panchayats, and the National Panchayat. The King could nominate one-fourth of the candidates to the National Panchayat from various social groups - officially referred to as 'class organizations' – including women.¹² Despite the Constitution guaranteeing women's reservation for the first time, women's participation in the National Panchayat, both elected and nominated, was limited to 4 and 5 percent during its two terms.¹³ The partyless system did not substantially enhance women's political participation. Instead, it curtailed their political freedom and hindered their advancement to decision-making roles. During the 30-year history of the Panchayat rule, only seven of the 24 governments had a single woman serving as a minister.¹⁴

Two notable events occurred during the Panchayat system. First, a woman was appointed to the Constitution Drafting Committee for the first time.¹⁵ Second, Nepal ratified the Convention on the Political Rights of

¹⁰After the first general election of 1959, the then president of the Nepali Congress Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala became the Prime Minister. He was the Prime Minister from May 27, 1959 to December 15, 1960.

¹¹ Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1959, Article 11

¹² Constitution of Nepal, Article 34 (2, b)

¹³ Sanghiya Sansad Sachiwalaya. 2075 BS. *Sansadma Mahila Sahabhagita (2015 BS – 2074 BS)*. Kathmandu: Sansadiya Adhyayan tatha Anusandhan Shakha, Sanghiya Sansad Sachiwalaya.

¹⁴ Baruah, Nandita, Sanjay Mahato, and Bimala Rai Paudyal. 2019. Women in public life in Nepal. In *The Politics of Change: Reflections on Contemporary Nepal*. Deepak Thapa, ed., pp. 54–82. Kathmandu: Himal Books.

¹⁵ Angur Baba Joshi was the only woman in the seven-member drafting committee of the Constitution of Nepal 1962.

Women on April 26, 1966. The Convention mandated women’s right to vote, right to hold public office, and gender equality in public positions.

RESERVATION FOR WOMEN UNDER MULTIPARTY DEMOCRACY (1990–2006)

The 30-year-old Panchayat system was ultimately overthrown by the first People’s Movement in 1990. The Nepali Congress and the Left Front opposed the Panchayat system from its inception, with some women leaders like Shailaja Acharya active in the resistance movement. The 1990 Movement was spearheaded by Ganeshman Singh from the Nepali Congress and Sahana Pradhan from the Left Front. In the interim government established following the successful Movement, Sahana Pradhan was the only woman in the 11-member cabinet.

Having been active participants in the 1990 Movement, women anticipated fairer treatment from political parties and the government under the subsequent multi-party democratic system. However, no women were included in the 1990 Constitution Drafting Committee.¹⁶ The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, issued in 1990, did provide for reserved seats for women candidates in elections, a first under the democratic system. Article 114 mandated that at least 5 percent of each party’s candidates must be women, but this provision did not guarantee women’s election in the HoR. Despite the constitutional provision, women lacked adequate constitutional and legal support for their political participation. While political parties implemented the 5 percent quota for female candidates in HoR elections, the highest percentage of both female candidates and elected women during the three elections from 1990 to 1999 was only 6 percent.

Article 46 of the 1990 Constitution outlined the formation and term limits for the National Assembly, stating that 35 of its members, with at least three

¹⁶ Pandey, Binda. 2021. Women in Political Movement: From the Battle of Nalapani to the Republic. *Himalkhabar*, March 9, Available at: <https://www.himalkhabar.com/news/122490>, accessed on March 2, 2024. (In Nepali)

women, would be elected by the HoR through a proportional representation system.¹⁷ This provision ensured that a minimum of three women would be represented among the 60 members of the National Assembly, comprising at least 1.1 percent of the total 265 members in the entire national legislature.

In the decade following the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990, elections to local bodies were held twice: in 1992 and 1997. The representation of women among the elected local representatives in the 1992 election was less than 1 percent overall.¹⁸ A reform in the legal framework for the 1997 elections mandated that one of the four ward members in municipalities and Village Development Committee (VDC) must be a woman.¹⁹ The legal provision had an immediate impact, bringing thousands of women from all parts of Nepal into the electoral and public sphere for the first time.²⁰ In 1992, no women were elected at the municipality wards, but by 1997, their number had increased to 806. During the same time, the number of women elected at the ward level across VDCs rose significantly to 36,014. In response to calls for increased women's participation, and to further institutionalize women's democratic representation, provisions were also established for women in city councils, village councils, and District Development Committee (DDC).

¹⁷ As per Article 46, the heads and deputy heads of local bodies within all five development regions, as well as the heads, deputy heads, and members of the district's local bodies, would vote to elect 15 individuals, three from each region, while the king would nominate 10 members.

¹⁸ In 1992, 217 women were elected out of 44,462 positions in 36 municipalities and 3,993 VDCs. Among them, 5 were municipal ward presidents, 7 were presidents, 15 were vice-presidents, and 190 were members in VDCs. This accounted for 0.48 percent of all the positions. Additionally, there was no position of ward members in the VDC at that time.

¹⁹ Section 7 of the Local Self-Governance Act, 1999 has the provision of the formation of Ward Committees of VDC, Section 8 for the formation of Village Councils, Section 75 for the formation of Municipal Ward Committees, Section 76 for the formation of City Councils and Section 176 for the formation of District Development Committees which mention the participation of women. This was the first legal protection for women's participation in local bodies.

²⁰ Baruah, Nandita, Sanjay Mahato, and Bimala Rai Paudyal. 2019. Women in Public Life in Nepal. In *The Politics of Change: Reflections on Contemporary Nepal*. Deepak Thapa, ed., p. 54–82. Kathmandu: Himal Books.

Nepal signed the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on April 22, 1991. Article 3 of CEDAW mandates that [political] parties take appropriate measures to promote women's development and advancement, especially in the political, social, economic, and cultural spheres. Another notable achievement during this period of multiparty democracy, despite the absence of reserved seats in the HoR, was the election of two women deputy speakers.²¹

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION UNDER THE NEW REPUBLIC (2006–2015)

The second People's Movement of 2006, which brought together the then Maoist rebels and the seven major political parties, paved the way for Nepal's transition from a monarchy to a republic. The Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2007, enacted in the aftermath of the 2006 Movement, included significant measures to enhance women's political participation. One such provision, Article 63(5), mandated that at least one-third of the Constituent Assembly members be women. This marked the first time women were guaranteed a major role in drafting the country's constitution.²² Prior to this, women had been compelled to protest for inclusion in the constitution drafting committees, despite their active involvement in the preceding political movements.²³

²¹ Lila Shrestha Subba in 1994 and Chitra Lekha Yadav in 1999 elected Deputy Speaker in the HoR. Yadav also conducted parliament in the street as Speaker when the then Speaker Taranath Ranabhat refused to join the movement against the monarchy.

²² Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD). 2064 BS. *Constituent Assembly and Women Participation*. (Publication No. 122). Kathmandu: FWLD. (In Nepali)

²³ Sushila Karki, Pushpa Bhusal, Chhatrakumari Gurung and Shanta Rai participated in the drafting committee of the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007. The 11-member drafting committee was made 16 members by adding 4 women and a man to address the participation issue of ethnicity and gender inclusion after the protest

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE DECADE SINCE 2015

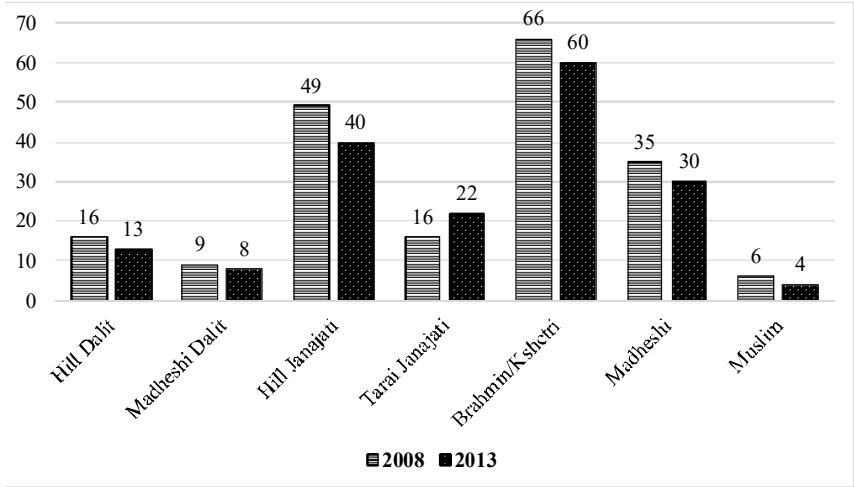
Over the past decade, Nepal began transitioning from a centralized unitary state to a federal republic. The federal Constitution of 2015 secured a minimum 40 percent representation of women at the local level, as well as 33 percent representation in both the HoR and the National Assembly in the federal parliament, as well as the provincial assemblies.

Given that the Constitution of Nepal is rooted in the Interim Constitution of 2007, it is crucial to examine women's participation in the Constituent Assembly. An important milestone was reached in the first Constituent Assembly of 2008, when women comprised one-third of its total members. This was a historic moment for women's representation in Nepal's political arena. Dalit women also made history by securing seats in the CA for the first time through both the FPTP and proportional election systems.

Graph 3 indicates a declining trend in ethnic representation, except for Tarai Janajati. Despite maintaining the mixed electoral system in the second Constituent Assembly of 2013, adjustments were made in the share of seats between FPTP and proportional representation. The requirement to nominate 50 percent of women candidates for proportional representation was revised to a range between 45 and 55 percent. Parties were also allowed to allocate up to one-third of their representation to women through proportional representation. As a result, the number of women

in the second constituent assembly decreased from 197 (33.2%) to 176 (29.9%). According to the official Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) data, women’s representation under FPTP was 4.9 percent and 2.9 percent respectively in 2008 and 2013.

Graph 3: Caste/Ethnic representation of women in the CA (2008 and 2013)



Source: Election Commission of Nepal

The constitutional requirements for women’s participation have been met in elections at all three levels over the past decade. However, from 2008 to 2022, there has been a steady increase in the allocation of one-third of seats for women in the HoR and provincial assemblies through the proportional representation system. Kamala Pant, a leader of the Nepali Congress, expressed concern over the declining number of women directly elected under the FPTP system. She emphasized the need for fairer representation to strengthen women’s political presence, stating, “Without

adequate representation in direct elections [FPTP], our political strength will remain compromised.”²⁴

Table 3: Women’s participation in past two elections across all levels

	Election	Male	Female	Total
2017	Local Level	20,688	14,353	35,041
	Provincial Assembly	361	189	550
	House of Representatives	185	90	275
	National Assembly	37	22	59
	President	-	1	1
	Vice-President	1	-	1
	Total	21,272	14,654	35,936
	Total percentage (%)		59.21%	40.79%
2022	Local Level	20,631	14,466	35,097
	Provincial Assembly	350	200	550
	House of Representatives	184	91	275
	National Assembly	37	22	59
	President	1	-	1
	Vice-President	1	-	1
	Total	21,204	14,779	35,983
	Total percentage (%)		58.92%	41.07%

Source: Election Commission of Nepal.

²⁴ Panta shared her opinion at a discussion program organized by Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) on August 2, 2024, in Lalitpur.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The numeric representation of women across different state bodies has been one of the core political debates since Nepal adopted the 2015 Constitution. But, has this been implemented in the true sense of equal participation? Are the legal provisions merely numerical targets, or do they align with the constitutional spirit of proportional inclusion? And, how do political party statutes and election manifestos translate into practice? This study aims to respond to these broad questions and analyze the dimensions of women's entry, continuity, and historical progress in politics. The findings of the study also highlight the main challenges women face in politics under the federal system.

IMPLEMENTATION OF CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL PROVISIONS

Nepali women have historically sought legal protections to ensure their participation in politics. Notable examples include the provision of 5 percent candidacy for the HoR elections (Article 114 of The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1990), being nominated for the National Assembly (Article 46 of The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1990), and ensuring at least one ward member in local bodies (Local Self-Governance Act, 1999) elections. Women continued to push for greater

representation after the second People’s Movement in 2006, leading to the Interim Constitution of Nepal in 2007, which provided for one-third participation of women in the Constituent Assembly.

Constitution of Nepal

Since its adoption in 2015, the Constitution of Nepal has institutionalized women’s participation at various levels of political structures and political parties. The preamble of the Constitution explicitly states its commitment to eradicating gender discrimination and promoting equality and equity within the Nepali society. It states under the fundamental rights that there will be no discrimination on the basis of gender in the right to freedom, equality, employment, and social security while Article 38 specifies that women will have the right to participate in all state bodies based on the principle of proportional inclusion.

The table below outlines the legal provisions that have significantly impacted the numerical representation of women:

Table 4: Provisions in the Constitution of Nepal, 2015 regarding women’s political participation

Article	Provisions
70	President and Vice-President to be from different sex or community
84	At least one third of members of federal parliament should be women
86	At least three women from each province and at least one woman among the three nominated by the President on the recommendation of the Government of Nepal in NA
91	At least one among the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives should be a woman.
92	At least one among the President and Vice-President of the National Assembly should be a woman.

176	At least one third of members of the Province Assembly should be women
182	At least one out of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker of the Provincial Assembly should be a woman.
215	At least four members of Village Executive Committee to be women
216	At least five members of the Municipal Executives to be women
220	At least three members of District Coordination Committee to be women
222	At least two women including one Dalit woman should be represented in each ward in the Village Assembly.
223	At least two women including one Dalit woman should be represented in each ward in the Municipal Assembly.

The more explicit constitutional provisions for women’s participation, such as the one-third representation in the federal parliament and provincial assemblies and the guaranteed gender balance in the Speaker and Deputy Speaker positions, were effectively implemented. In addition to the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the HoR, National Assembly, and provincial assemblies being of different genders, clearer constitutional provisions ensuring women participation at the local level also appeared to be enforced through necessary legislation. However, many study respondents argued that these provisions were being implemented in a manner that assigned women second-tier or “deputy” roles. For example, all deputy speakers in provincial assemblies were women, and both houses at the federal parliament had women as deputy speakers and vice-presidents. This trend is mirrored at the local level, where women are nominated primarily as deputy mayors or vice-chairs.

Due to a lack of clarity in the phrasing of the constitutional provision mandating gender and ethnic diversity between the President and Vice-President, parties have interpreted “different communities” to mean any combination of different genders or communities. Another example is the provision of proportionally inclusive representation in the council

of ministers. Women’s participation in the executive body since the Constitution’s promulgation has been poor. At the federal level, in the past 10 years, the maximum representation of women in the cabinet was 13.6 percent under KP Sharma Oli, 18 percent under Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda,’ and 22.7 percent under Sher Bahadur Deuba.²⁵

At the provincial level, the implementation of the proportionally inclusive representation of women followed a similar pattern. The table below illustrates women’s participation in various positions at the province:

Table 5: Women’s participation in provincial positions in 2022

Province	Provincial Assembly Committee Chair	Total Provincial Assembly Committee	Chief of Province	Council of Ministers	Speaker	Deputy Speaker
Koshi	2	7		2*		1
Madhesh	3	7	1	1		1
Bagmati	1	6		2		1
Gandaki	1	5		0		1
Lumbini	2	7		1		1
Karnali	1	4		1	1	1
Sudurpa-shchim	1	7		2		1

**State Minister only. Source: Website of respective province government and assembly.*

In one notable observation, political parties appeared to perceive one of two positions required to be held by a woman as less significant. For

²⁵ Women’s participation in the federal cabinet has been observed since the first election in 2017 following the enactment of the Constitution. The CPN (UML) and CPN (Maoist Centre) merged after the 2017 elections, forming the CPN government with KP Oli as the leader from February 2018 until June 2021. Sher Bahadur Deuba took over as the head of the government from July 2021 to December 2022, followed by Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’ as Prime Minister from January 2023 to July 2024.

example, either the Speaker or Deputy Speaker of the HoR must be a woman, with similar provisions applying to the National Assembly and provincial assemblies. Parties mostly selected women for roles with lesser chances of success. Recent example was the Nepali Congress nominating a female candidate for Speaker of HoR knowing well that the UML candidate would win due to the clear majority of the CPN (UML) and the CPN (Maoist Centre) coalition. In the absence of specific provisions, parties have used the proportional representation system to fulfill the 33 percent requirement for women’s seats, as illustrated by their dismal records at candidate selections under the FPTP system (See Table 6).

Table 6: Male and Female Candidate under the FPTP System for HoR

Political Parties	2017		2022	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Nepali Congress	149	9	86	5
CPN (UML)	98	5	130	11
CPN (Maoist Centre)	55	4	38	8
Janata Samajwadi Party	102	0	72	7
Rashtriya Prajatantra Party	6	0	132	8
Rashtriya Swatantra Party	-	-	119	12
Janamat Party	-	-	52	2
Nagarik Unmukti Party	-	-	22	2
Bibeksheel Sajha Party	-	-	7	0

Source: Election Commission of Nepal.

Electoral and Other Legal Provisions

Key electoral laws including The House of Representatives Member Election Act 2016, The National Assembly Member Election Act 2016, The Provincial Assembly Member Election Act 2016, The Local Level Election Act 2016, and the Political Party Act 2016 were reviewed and enacted in accordance with the Constitution.

At the time of this study, one-third of women were represented in the HoR, National Assembly, and provincial assemblies. The Deputy Speaker in the HoR, Vice-President in the National Assembly, and deputy speakers in provincial assemblies were women. However, the rule requiring one-third of parliamentary committee chairpersons to be women, as outlined in Chapter 21, Rule 176 (13) of the HoR Rules, was not enforced. Out of the ten thematic parliamentary committees, only two were chaired by women. While a provision existed in Rule 257 for a women's coordination committee, it was not formed. Sita Gurung, a member of the HoR from Nepali Congress, stated, "We have been waiting for green signals from party leaders." She also admitted that adequate effort was lacking from the women leaders themselves. CPN (UML) standing committee member Binda Pandey stressed that women needed to unite and stand strongly to push for the committee formation as the right of women members in the HoR.

Women's representation at the local level had evolved from a single woman in 1954 to 14,402 in 2022, due to mandatory provisions which were crucial in guaranteeing women's increased participation. One-third representation of women in the local executive, municipal assemblies, and district coordination committees was ensured. The representation of two women, including one Dalit woman from each ward in the municipal assemblies, is mandated by the Constitution.²⁶ While political parties and state bodies enforced these provisions, the number of women elected for executive positions decreased in 2022 due to political coalitions. The requirement for political parties to nominate candidates for both mayor/ deputy mayor or chairperson/vice-chairperson would ensure 50 percent women's representation in executive roles. But, the provision lacked clarity on ensuring women's election in executive positions if a party nominated candidates for only one of the two positions. Consequently, women's representation in local executive positions declined from 47 percent in 2017 to 39 percent in 2022.

26 Constitution of Nepal, Part 17(215-223)



Sunita Mestar, 35, never imagined a career in politics. Married at 15 with six children, her education stopped early. Unaware of Nepal's political transition to a federal democratic republic, she was surprised when a local leader from the Loktantrik Samajwadi Party urged her to run as a Dalit

woman member in the 2017 elections. Until then, she had lived behind a veil, disconnected from politics. Mestar accepted the opportunity, campaigned for votes, and was elected as a Dalit women member in Janakpurdham Sub-Metropolitan City-3. Initially unsure of her role, she received capacity-building training from NGOs, learning about Madheshi Dalits' legal rights and her duties.

During her term, Mestar gradually took on more responsibilities, even visiting the mayor's office on behalf of her community. In 2022, she ran for ward chairperson, with the party believing in her growth in the previous term. She was defeated, which she said was due to caste-based discrimination and resource challenges. Mestar remained active after the defeat, resumed her education, and supported party candidates in provincial and federal elections. Her party later nominated her as a central committee member, and she plans to run again in 2027, advocating for greater resource and capacity support for women in politics.

Women, Dalits, members of minority communities, and economically disadvantaged individuals running for election under the FPTP system at all levels receive a 50 percent deposit waiver. Women leaders in this

study acknowledged benefiting from this provision but also called for a complete waiver.

The Political Party Act 2016 introduced a 33 percent reservation for women in working committees, the first time women were granted such a legal mandate within political parties. Although parties had not fully met the requirements, the table below highlights progress made:

**Table 7: Women Representation in Political Party
Central Committees**

Political Parties	Committee	Total	Women	Women in Percent
Nepali Congress	Central Committee	166	54	32.5
CPN (UML)	Central Committee	345	117	33.91
CPN (Maoist Centre)	Central Committee	409	135	33
Janata Samajwadi Party	Central Committee	325	73	34
Rashtriya Prajantra Party	Central Committee	345	80	23
Rashtriya Swatantra Party	Central Committee	61	22	36
Nagarik Unmukti Party	Central Officials	25	6	24
Janamat Party	Central Committee	216	45	20.8
Bibeksheel Sajha Party	Central Committee	37	11	30

Source: Political Parties Website and Media Reports as of September 2024

The Act requires parties to submit the membership details of their federal and province-level committees to the ECN, and authorizes the ECN to enforce whether the formation of such committees comply with the Act. But there was no record of ECN regulating or enforcing any of these breaches.²⁷ The Act lacks specific provisions for overseeing women’s participation. Consequently, even when political parties failed to ensure one-third women representation in their committees, the ECN failed to warn or take any action. It also allows political parties to determine their

²⁷ Political Party Act 2016 Section 16(4)

own qualifications for membership in the committees, enabling parties to set ad-hoc requirements for women members at both federal and lower-level committees. The Act mandates that political parties work towards ending discrimination and promoting equality, as outlined in their manifesto, but it lacks specific consequences for parties that fail to adhere to these commitments themselves.²⁸

IMPLEMENTATION OF PARTY STATUTE AND MANIFESTO

The principles, policies, and programs of political parties were guided by their official statutes, with their election manifestos influencing their actions if they assumed executive power. The study found that political parties did not perceive their manifestos as legally or morally binding. They also found loopholes to disregard even the mandatory provisions related to women participation.

Party Statute on Women Participation

As mandated by the Political Parties Act 2016 and the Constitution, parties amended their statutes to ensure one-third representation of women in working committees at all levels following the Constitution's promulgation. But in practice, political parties were far from meeting these requirements.

Despite their commitment to ensure 35 percent women in their committees, the CPN (Maoist Centre) barely met the 33 percent requirement set by the Political Parties Act as of July 2023. Five out of nine parties included in the study complied with the 33 percent requirement of women membership in the committees (Table 7). "Parties often meet the initial 33 percent requirement by including enough women in their initial registration or newly elected committees," Pemba Lama, Vice-President

²⁸ Political Party Act 2016 Section 20

of the All Nepal Women's Association (ANWA), observed. "But, they tend to nominate more men later on, which often disrupts the gender balance. The ECN too doesn't regulate the extended committee."²⁹

The RPP, despite having provision of reservation for women in key positions such as vice-president, general secretary, and joint secretary from ward level committees, failed to meet the legal requirement with only 23 percent female members in their 345-member central committee.³⁰ The Janata Samajwadi Party, while having a policy of zero levies for Dalit women and women with no income, had yet to implement specific programs to organize Dalit women within the party.³¹ Despite mandating one woman for every three elected official positions, the party's Central Executive Committee of 25 members had only one woman, even though there were three vice-president and secretary positions available at the federal and provincial levels.³² Parties appeared to use the nomination provision stated in their statutes to fulfill the 33 percent of women's participation requirement in working committees.³³ The Nagarik Unmukti Party implemented a policy of reduced membership fees for women, requiring them to pay only half the amount charged to male central members for a single term.³⁴

The study also noted that when parties like the CPN (UML), CPN (Maoist Centre), and Janata Samajwadi Party set shorter term limits, it appeared to make women's claims of membership in higher committees easier. Political parties often left some provisions vague, allowing room

²⁹ Lama shared this view at a discussion program organized by Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) on August 2, 2024, in Lalitpur.

³⁰ According to the list provided by the Deputy-spokesperson of the party.

³¹ The statute of Janata Samajwadi Party, Section 5, Article 14.

³² Janata Samajwadi Party. 2022. JaSaPa Re-formation: 466 Central Committee Members, 151 Political Committee Members. August 5. Kathmandu: JaSaPa. Available at: <https://peoplesocialist.org/?p=506>, accessed on March 2, 2024. (In Nepali)

³³ All political parties have the provision of nominating women, Dalit and minorities communities.

³⁴ The provision is included in Section 6, Article 45 (A)

for varied interpretations. For example, parties promised to make women’s participation in ward and village committees inclusive proportional to the number of party members,³⁵ The Bibeksheel Sajha Party, being led by a woman, had reserved one of the three vice-president or secretary positions on its federal committee for a woman. The party had also adopted the policy of “one person, one committee, and only one tenure”.³⁶

Disciplinary Committees, Accounting Committees, and Ticket Distribution Committees were specified in all political parties’ statutes. But there was no clear mandate on the number of women to be included in these committees. According to political analyst Tula Narayan Shah, women were often included only as members but rarely in leadership positions when it came to important committees. He further stated, “The parties are yet to implement a practice of ensuring automatic representation of women in leadership roles without explicit provision in the constitution. The political parties have crafted their statutes cleverly.”

Party Manifesto and Women Participation

After the 2015 Constitution, Nepal held elections in 2017 and 2022 across all levels. While the political party manifestos did not explicitly focus on enhancing women’s political participation, they indirectly acknowledged the importance of greater inclusion.

All political parties made some common commitments, such as implementing inclusive policies and making law enforcement more effective against violence against women and other forms of gender-based discrimination. But many commitments remained as mere electoral slogans. For instance, the Nepali Congress in 2017 and JSP in 2022 pledged

³⁵ The statute of CPN (UML): Part 4(46), The statute of Nepali Congress: Part 3(5), The statute of Janata Samajwadi Party: Part 11(76,80), The statute of CPN (Maoist Centre): Part 5(11)

³⁶ The statute of Bibeksheel Sajha Party, 2022. Section 8.

to ensure women's rights over property and ancestral property, but they did not take any action. Rekha Yadav, a Central Committee Member of the JSP, remarked, "I don't think our party leaders ever revisited the manifesto. We haven't even had inter-party circulation [of the manifesto], let alone mass awareness on it." Usha Raut, National President of the Nepal Woman Association (NWA), concurred, stating, "If we start questioning the election promises, we'll be labeled as fools. The party wasn't serious and had no plan when the manifesto drafting committee wrote those lofty promises." The Nepali Congress also pledged to urgently table amendments for gender-discriminatory laws, but the HoR Secretariat had no record of such action.

The CPN in 2017 committed to meaningful women's participation, empowerment through safety, capacity development, and opportunities, and equality and inclusiveness in all sectors. But the party failed to meet the mandatory 33 percent women's participation in the federal working committee until the party dissolved. Similarly, despite promising a fully proportional and inclusive electoral system with 35 percent women representation, the CPN (Maoist Centre) only achieved 33 percent women in the federal working committee, 17.4 percent in the HoR, and eight percent in provincial assemblies. Kalpana Dhamala, a Central Committee member of the party, said, "We have been trying hard. Our party made those promises seriously, but it seems we are still not doing well, but we will keep trying."

The JSP promised in its 2017 manifesto to amend the Constitution to ensure the President and Vice-President were of different genders, but in 2022, the party not only voted for male candidates for both positions, but it also nominated a male candidate for Vice-President. The ECN had to remind political parties that they could not field both male candidates for the President and Vice-President. Following this reminder, the Janamat Party, CPN (UML), and JSP nominated women candidates.

The party manifestos appeared to suggest that they were not taking women's participation in politics seriously. As they aren't legally binding, parties felt less accountable to enforcing them. Journalist Binu Subedi noted that parties often forgot manifesto promises after elections, mentioning women solely for popularity and votes, rather than addressing genuine issues.³⁷

ENTRY, CONTINUITY AND ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

Women's equal participation in position of influence and decision-making is part of a fundamental right and central to gender equality and women's empowerment.³⁸ Analyzing the factors affecting women's participation in politics in Nepal, the government appeared to be making some progress toward achieving the goal of 40 percent women in federal parliaments and provincial assemblies and 42 percent at the local level by 2030.³⁹ While legal protections had facilitated women getting involved in politics, challenges persisted in social, economic, and cultural areas.

Women's Entry in Politics

Women's entry into politics was primarily facilitated through political movements and opportunities provided by legal protections. The women leaders in this study entered politics through movements against the

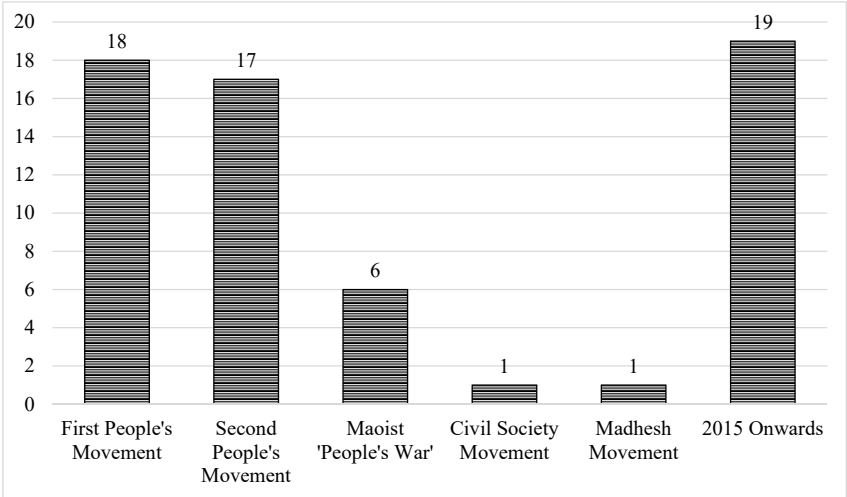
³⁷ Subedi shared her opinion at a discussion program organized by Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) on April 22, 2024, in Lalitpur.

³⁸ United Nations. 2019. Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls. Available at: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>, accessed on August 26, 2024.

³⁹ National Planning Commission (NPC). 2017. *Nepal Sustainable Development Goals: Current Situation and Future Roadmap, 2016-2030*, p. 60. Kathmandu: NPC, Government of Nepal. (In Nepali)

Panchayat, student movements, the Maoist Movement, the second People’s Movement of 2006, the Madhesh Movement, and various civil society movements. Out of 62 respondents, five at the federal level began their political careers in the movement against the Panchayat system, two as student leaders during the second People’s Movement, one in civil society movements, one during the Maoist insurgency, and one after the promulgation of the federal Constitution. At the provincial level, in the Madhesh Province, one woman entered politics during the Maoist insurgency, three during the first People’s Movement in 1990, one during the Madhesh Movement in 2008, and ten after 2015. In Karnali Province, four women became politically active during the Maoist insurgency, seven during and after the second People’s Movement in 2006, two during the first People’s Movement in 1990, and four since 2015. Eight women leaders entered politics during the first People’s Movement in 1990, six during the second People’s Movement in 2006, and four after the constitution was promulgated in 2015 in Gandaki Province.

Graph 4: Women’s entry points in politics



The Graph 4 demonstrates the significant role of legal provisions in promoting women's entry in politics. The mandatory provision for a woman member at the ward level in the 1997 local elections played a key role in facilitating women's active political engagement. Nanda Gurung, the Speaker of the Karnali Provincial Assembly, became active in politics through this very provision. After an ordinance was introduced mandating at least one woman member in every ward, which was later incorporated into the Local Self-Governance Act of 1999, both her party and family encouraged her to become politically active. But her previous entry into politics came during the movement against the Panchayat system in 1990. Rina Sah, the Mayor of Maulapur Municipality, became involved in underground politics during the Maoist insurgency. She recalled, "I was pregnant. We had to keep changing shelters. It was tough, but I was committed."



Nanda Gurung is the only female Speaker among Nepal's seven provincial assemblies. While her father was active in the Nepali Congress movement against the Panchayat system, Gurung joined the student wing of the CPN (UML). In 1997, an ordinance requiring a woman member in every ward opened a

political opportunity for her, and she was elected from Birendranagar Municipality-2. That same year, her husband's death exposed her to the discrimination faced by widows.

After years of party involvement, she was elected to the Karnali Provincial Assembly in 2022 through the proportional representation system. She believes that women rarely receive opportunities without

asserting themselves. Initially, she was not aspiring to be the Speaker, but her party proposed her for the role, making her the first woman Speaker in Karnali. Gurung believes that legal provisions have made it easier for women to participate in politics, although the role of Speaker had traditionally been viewed as reserved for men. She resumed her education in 2008, convinced that educated women are regarded differently in politics, and has always been determined to be a leader rather than a follower.

The space secured in politics across all levels by the Constitution of Nepal also attracted women to enter politics, especially at the local level, as reflected by this study. Sunita Mestar had never considered entering politics until the local elections were announced in 2017. The provision for electing one Dalit woman ward member in all wards of the 753 local levels opened the door for Mestar. She said, “The party requested me to file a nomination, and the party’s candidate for ward chair helped me win. I did not realize it was because of the Constitution of Nepal at first, but later I understood the provision.” Parwati Tamang, a Gandaki Province Assembly Member of Nepali Congress, echoed a similar experience. Tamang said, “I got the opportunity to be a provincial assembly member because the constitution guarantees 33 percent representation of women in the provincial assembly and also women from different [ethnic] clusters. Otherwise, it would have been difficult to imagine representation from our [Tamang] community.”

The research found that women leaders entered politics because they believed only politics could end discrimination based on gender, class, caste, and ethnicity. While their entry may have been through mass movements, they decided to join politics to ultimately achieve an equal society. Sita Kumari Sundas, a Gandaki Province Assembly Member, entered politics through CPN (UML)’s student wing and contributed to the movement to end the Panchayat era. She said, “No one in my family

was in politics, but I was aware of the discrimination prevalent in society. I joined politics because I thought only politics could bring new laws, policies, and programs for an equal society.”

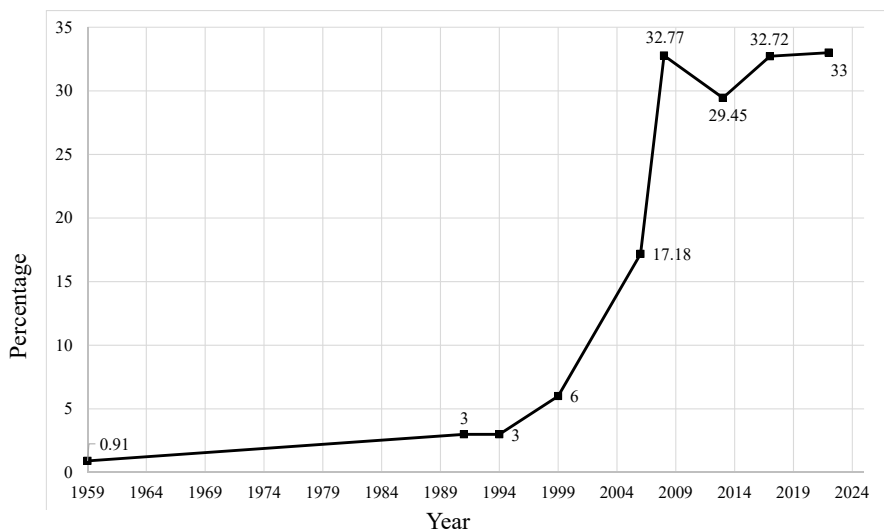
Continuity and Advancement in Politics

Women’s entry in politics is vital, but so is their continuous growth and advancement. The study showed that current laws promoted women in some leadership positions at the local level; but, their advancement to higher levels was still lacking. To ensure women’s progress, opportunities for advancement and pro-women social, economic, and cultural environments were essential.

Role of Reservation

Before the Interim Constitution of 2007, in absence of mandatory constitutional provisions, women’s participation in the HoR was only 6 percent. The 2015 Constitution expanded mandatory provisions with 33 percent reservation guaranteed at the federal and provincial levels. A minimum of 40 percent of positions (two out of five) are reserved for women candidates at the ward level, and one of the two key positions (mayor/deputy mayor in or chair/vice-chair in rural municipalities) if nomination filed by the same party must be a woman candidate. Almost all participants in this study agreed that without these mandatory constitutional and legal provisions on gender quotas, the current level of women’s inclusion in politics would have been difficult to achieve.

Graph 5: Impact of reservation in HoR



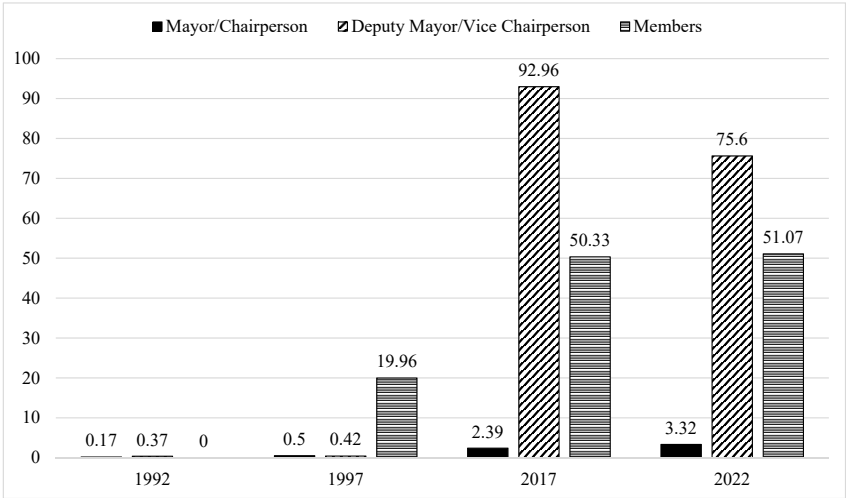
In the interim parliament of 2007, women constituted 17.18 percent of the total members. Transitioning from a decade-long armed insurgency to mainstream politics, the CPN (Maoist Centre) allocated 37 percent of its parliamentary seats to women, marking the highest representation of women by any political party in Nepal’s parliamentary history.

In 1997, the total participation of women in key positions like mayor/ deputy mayor and chair/vice-chair was less than 1 percent at the local level. Kunti Shahi, General Secretary of RPP, stated that such a meteoric increase from one percent to 40 percent would have been impossible without mandatory legal provisions. She noted how, in absence of mandatory provisions, political parties still failed to nominate even 10 percent of women candidates under the FPTP system at the federal and provincial levels.

Despite making historic progress in promoting gender equality through mandatory legal measures ensuring women’s representation, the study noted serious concerns about the need for explicit legal provisions to

secure leadership positions. Women leaders expressed skepticism that existing political status-quo would promote women to leadership positions without legal mandates. Surita Sah, a member of the Madhesh Province Assembly, emphasized the need for legal frameworks that mandate women’s participation more specifically. Despite being elected through the FPTP electoral system in 2017, she was denied a nomination in 2022 in the name of coalition-building. She also suggested guaranteeing women’s constituencies by law to prevent backsliding.

Graph 6: Women Representation in Local Bodies (1992 - 2022)



The study also showed that women lost their hold on executive positions due to coalition politics and the lack of specific legal provisions at the local level. As discussed in previous sections, women’s representation in executive positions dropped from 47 percent to 39 percent between 2017 and 2022 elections. Gita Chaudhary, Mayor of Surgunga Municipality, said, “We should be very cautious because we have just seen how male-dominated leadership can exploit the loopholes in legal provisions. That is why we are demanding specific legal provisions for women.”

Challenges of Breaking through Leadership Positions

While the decade following the adoption of a federal Constitution saw notable advancements in women's participation, women leaders expressed their desire in elevating their membership to influential leadership positions across federal, provincial, and local levels. Most women leaders in this study expressed their intention to actively seek advancement to higher roles. This challenged the stereotypical notion that women were uninterested in assuming responsibilities within the public sphere. Devi Bhandari, Vice-Chair of Bhairabi Rural Municipality, considered running for the chair or vice-chair position of the rural municipality during the final year of her tenure as ward chair. She was nominated for vice-chair in 2022 and was serving in that role. She said, "My tenure as ward chair was largely successful. I felt ready for the higher position." She seemed open about seeking a nomination at the provincial level in upcoming elections.



Rina Kumari Sah of Maulapur Municipality is the first woman mayor in Madhesh Province. In 2004, she went underground with her husband, Prabhu Sah, due to the state's tough measures against the Maoist insurgency. Pregnant at the time, Rina recalls facing constant fear of police raids,

often going hungry and moving from shelter to shelter. After the Second People's Movement in 2006, while her husband became active in mainstream politics, Rina focused on her family, though her political aspirations remained intact.

In the 2017 local elections, the CPN (Maoist Centre) offered her the Deputy Mayor nomination, but she insisted on running for Mayor. Despite initial hesitation from the party, she eventually secured her nomination and became the first female mayor among 136 local levels in Madhesh Province. Re-elected in 2022 with an even stronger mandate, Rina criticizes the tendency to restrict women to deputy mayor or vice-chair roles, asserting that women are fully capable of leading. Today, there are three female mayors in Madhesh Province, a success Rina believes her leadership has helped inspire. She remains committed to furthering women's representation and plans to continue her political career.

In 2017, Mohan Maya Dhakal was elected as the Deputy Mayor of Birendranagar Municipality and later as Mayor in 2022. She explained how she had to persist with senior male leadership to secure her candidacy until the final moments before official nominations. Reflecting on her five years as a Deputy Mayor, she expressed her desire to contest either for provincial assembly member or municipality mayor. She eventually succeeded in securing the mayoral candidacy. Although she did not disclose the particular challenges, the number of votes she received indicated a lack of popular acceptance. The Deputy Mayor, a male from the same party as Dhakal, received 4,026 more votes than her - unusual for same party tickets.

Women aspiring for leadership roles acknowledged that their path to positions of influence was fraught with challenges. Across political parties, most women leaders cited issues such as a lack of trust from male-dominated leadership, limited financial resources, pressures of traditional gender roles, and a lack of public acceptance of women in leadership. Ranju Darshana, General Secretary of the BSP, highlighted the prevalence of physical and mental violence, including unwanted gestures, inappropriate physical contact, demands for sexual favors in exchange for promotion, online trolling, and unsolicited messages from male colleagues.

She also emphasized that women leaders were not given the same level of support for failures as their male counterparts, with any misstep unfairly generalized to reflect negatively on all women.

The study found that male leaders competing for similar positions often displayed unsupportive behavior toward women leaders, feeling threatened by the possibility of losing their influence to them. Women leaders expressed that when women held subordinate positions, male leaders tended to be more supportive but often used their power and influence to exclude female leaders from senior roles. A Nepali Congress leader explained that her decision to run for municipality mayor led to unsupportive behavior from male colleagues, including one contesting as an ‘independent’ candidate against her. While she was still elected, she felt she had not been fully accepted by her colleagues, as evidenced by the low number of visitors in her office—a stark contrast to the crowded environment she believed would exist if she were male.

Despite these challenges, most of the women interviewed for this study expressed their determination to compete for senior and executive leadership positions in future elections. For instance, Radhika Kumari Shahi, the only female Ward Chair among 32 in Pokhara Metropolitan City, mentioned, “After five years as a ward member, I am now ward chair and aspire to advance to senior positions in the future.” Shahi acknowledged that she may face challenges in her ambition for a senior-level position in the upcoming elections but remained committed to the belief that it is time for women to take up senior leadership roles.

In 2023, CPN (UML) issued an internal memo requiring that one out of every five officials in party committees at the province and lower levels be a woman. This change was driven by the persistent efforts of senior leader Padma Khadka, who secured the position of Under Secretary in the Karnali Province Committee in November 2023.⁴⁰ Khadka shared her

⁴⁰ Shahi, Om. 2024. Following Khadka’s strong opposition, CPN (UML) mandated participation of at least one woman among its office-bearers across all committees. April

difficult experiences with the study, explaining that it took nearly a year for party leaders to agree to her promotion. This change ensured that at least one woman held an official position, demonstrating that when women are represented in senior committees, they could advocate for greater gender inclusivity.

Women leaders initiated discussions within party committees about their right to hold positions of authority at the local level. Harimaya Bishwakarma, a Dalit leader and member of Pokhara Metropolitan City's Municipal Executive, had held two consecutive terms as a Dalit Women Ward Member for Ward 5. She benefited from the policy advocated by Padma Khadka and was elected in June 2024 as Under Secretary in the Pokhara Metropolitan Committee of CPN (UML). She emphasized that while competition was tough, it was important for women to be represented in senior leadership positions within the party to promote more women into executive roles. She also noted that senior leaders, predominantly male, had significant influence over candidacies and nominations. While women's aspirations for senior leadership roles were commendable, progress remained limited, with a noticeable gap in promoting women to higher levels.

Socio-economic and Political Background

Socio-economic, political, and educational backgrounds played pivotal roles in determining political success. Women with strong political connections and economic stability were more likely to thrive in politics, as their backgrounds determined the level of opportunities they received within political parties, government, and parliament. Access to power

19, Available at: <https://shilapatra.com/detail/134939?s=08>, accessed on May 2, 2024. (In Nepali)

emerged from familial, communal, and economic linkages, helping explain patterns of participation noted in this study.⁴¹

In the 2008 Constituent Assembly, 40 percent of women members were married to politicians, while 26 percent had family backgrounds in business and professional services.⁴² Most of the 62 women leaders interviewed for this study had benefited from their family's political legacies, socio-economic background, education, and caste privilege. Those with privileged socio-economic backgrounds appeared to have a greater chance of remaining in politics, as shown in Graph 7. It was evident that most women leaders had family ties to politics, were from privileged castes, and had relatively better educational and economic backgrounds.⁴³

Strong socio-economic and political backgrounds directly contributed to sustained political engagement and access to opportunities, and maintaining political patronage. The Graph 7 indicates that individuals with stronger backgrounds were more confident in pursuing leadership positions, while those from underprivileged backgrounds faced significant difficulties and insecurities. Rekha Chaudhary, who lost in Surunga Municipality for Deputy Mayor, expressed her concern about retaining a political career, as she was the first in her family to join politics. She said, "I am not educated, nor am I rich. I feel that a Tharu woman like me cannot survive in politics

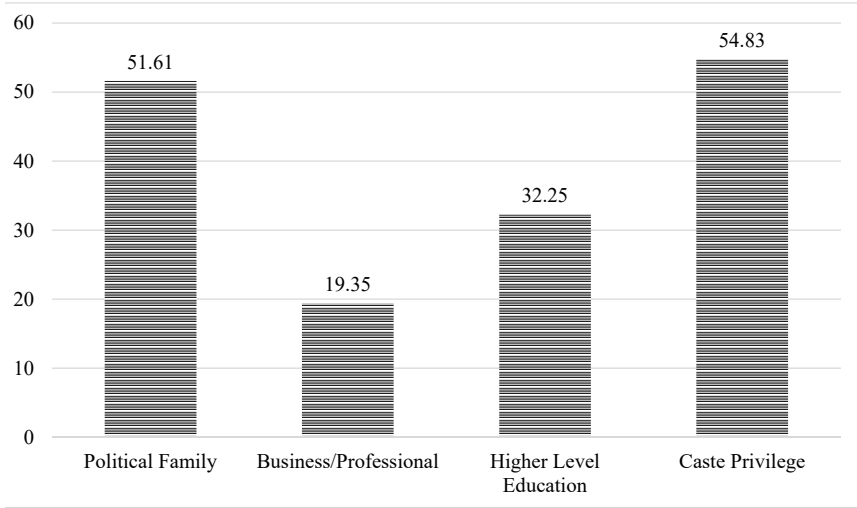
⁴¹ Women Political Leader (WPL). 2014. *Which are the Barriers for Women's Participation in Politics? (WIP/World Bank Survey)*. Brussels: WPL. Available at: <https://www.womenpoliticalleaders.org/barriers-womens-participation-politics-wipworld-bank-survey/>, accessed on August 27, 2024.

⁴² Lama, Sangeeta, Deepti Khakurel, Khushbu Agrawal and Milan Shrestha, eds. 2011. *Women Members of the Constituent Assembly: A Study on Contribution of Women in Constitution Making in Nepal*. Kathmandu: Women's Caucus, Constituent Assembly Secretariat, Nepal Law Society and International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. Available at: <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/women-members-of-the-constituent-assembly.pdf>, accessed on July 10, 2024.

⁴³ Graph 7 illustrates the demographic profiles of 62 women leaders who took part in Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). Each person included in the data has been categorized based on their political background, professional/business affiliations, level of education, and privileged caste background. If an individual possesses attributes from multiple categories, they are accounted for in each relevant category within the data set.

for long.” Women leaders from the study with strong backgrounds received support from their families, communities, and parties to enter politics, engage actively, secure positions, and fulfill official responsibilities.

Graph 7: Socio-economic, Educational and Ethnic Background of Respondents



A Janjati female leader, who reportedly received more votes than the current Ward Chair, was denied a nomination despite being eligible. She alleged the party leadership of telling her that her financial situation did not meet the necessary election expenses. In contrast, a woman leader with political connections and strong economic standing was reportedly nominated despite losing a previous election.

Nominations for the FPTP system at the federal and provincial levels clearly favored candidates with influential backgrounds. A candidate who lost the provincial assembly election in Gandaki Province admitted that her subsequent nomination was largely due to her financial status, stating, “I cannot deny that my nomination was influenced by my financial

capability.” In contrast, Gita Ranpal, a former Dalit Ward Member of Waling Municipality in Gandaki Province, was allegedly denied a nomination for the provincial assembly. She said, “Dalit women are still only considered for the position of Dalit ward member.” A Dalit woman leader from Pokhara Metropolitan City in Gandaki Province shared that she would not seek re-election due to her party’s lack of support for Dalit women in leadership roles. Another Dalit woman from Birendranagar Municipality in Karnali Province chose not to continue as a Dalit ward member position again after being denied a nomination for ward chair. An executive member from the same municipality expressed disappointment at being nominated as a woman ward member instead of ward chair.



Sita Kumari Sundas is the only Dalit woman elected through the FPTP system to the Gandaki Provincial Assembly in 2022. Born in Thooladihi village, Syangja, Sundas was the first in her family to join politics. Her mother ensured Sita received an education at a time when it was uncommon for daughters.

Sundas went on to earn a Master’s degree in Sociology. Growing up, Sita experienced caste-based discrimination realizing how she was not even allowed into her friends’ houses and had to eat separately. Realizing the deep-rooted inequality, Sundas decided to join politics in 1981 through the student wing of CPN (UML), inspired by her mother, who had also opposed the Panchayat system.

Despite her activism, Sundas hesitated to run for the 2017 provincial elections due to the high costs but led CPN (UML) to victory in seven out of 11 local levels in Syangja District as the key

party official in the district. In 2022, after other contenders failed to reach agreement, Sundas was chosen as the party's candidate for the provincial assembly seat. With over four decades in politics, Sundas, who is now a central committee member of her party, is planning to run for the Federal Parliament in the next election.

The study also noted that women without strong socio-economic and political support were often fielded in unwinnable positions, limited to less influential roles, and denied higher positions or candidacies they aspired to within the party.

Family Support

The study reinforced how Nepali politics is aligned to the patriarchal framework, where women are often excluded from opportunities for economic advancement, public life, and political engagement, and where traditional roles like domestic duties, childcare, and maintaining social relationships are assigned to women. Despite the potential for women's participation in politics to challenge these norms, the study noted how the support of their families remained central to their advancement in public life.

Most of the respondents unanimously agreed that family support was vital for women pursuing a political career. A member of the executive committee of Putalibazar Municipality emphasized that without family backing, women in politics were likely to face numerous obstacles and might not receive the necessary support from society, the public, and their parties. Of the 62 women leaders interviewed, only five said they did not receive family support, while all others were either encouraged or directly assisted by their family members. Women leaders with longer experience

in politics meanwhile noted that family support was not always assured, but came gradually over time.

The potential for women to be nominated and win at the local level had led to increased support from families for their involvement in electoral politics. In the Madhesh Province, opportunities were provided to women in the HoR, provincial assemblies, and local governments to compensate for the longstanding political contributions of male members. Amrita Das, a candidate for Deputy Mayor in Maulapur Municipality, stated that her nomination was expected due to her husband's contributions to the party. In another interview, a candidate's husband mentioned that while he did not receive the mayoral candidacy, his wife was nominated for ward chair on his behalf.



Khagisara Ale is the current Ward Chair of Kaligandaki Rural Municipality. Inspired by her mother, a former ward member elected in 1997, Ale joined politics through the student wing of the Nepali Congress. Her political commitment deepened after an attack during a rally in 1997.

Following a brief pause due to her marriage and a young child, Ale returned to politics, as the President of the party's women wing in the village.

In the local elections of 2017, Ale sought to run for vice-chair but settled for the ward member position. After a successful term, she convinced her party to nominate her for the position of ward chair. Despite facing questions about her ability, she was able to convince the voters and won the election, becoming one of only 14 women ward

chairs (out of 759 wards in 85 local levels) in Gandaki Province. Ale remains active in both her party and community, currently serving as the Deputy-President of her party for an electoral constituency. She has expressed her desire to move up the political ladder, seeking a higher position in the next elections.

One notable trend in Nepali politics involved husbands and wives joining politics together, particularly during major political movements, although only a few women continued in politics after the movement. But it was not the case for Khagisara Ale, Ward Chair of Ward No. 2 in Kaligandaki Rural Municipality, who said that her husband took a different job while she continued in politics. Such examples were rare, and according to the gender expert Kaushila Chand, women often had to rely on their families for support to remain in politics as they had limited access to resources within the patriarchal social order. She explained that such “support” often meant permission from fathers, husbands, and sons rather than genuine encouragement.

Economic Challenges

While many influential women leaders did not openly discuss financial issues with this study, respondents speculated that many women were hesitant to run for office due to a lack of funds and insufficient support from parties and their own communities.⁴⁴ Two women leaders, who won their elections under the FPTP system in Madhesh Province, shared how their financial strength enabled them to participate in the electoral process. In contrast, an unsuccessful candidate expressed her distress over being

⁴⁴ Upadhyay, Mahalaxmi ‘Dina’. 2024. Views expressed in a discussion on Women in Democracy and Electoral Expenses. *Nepal Literature Festival*, Pokhara, February 16, 2024. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJpeczu2TJo> (1:08:50-1:09:03). Accessed August 27, 2024. (In Nepali)

trapped in a cycle of debt. A Dalit leader shared that she decided to run for office, expecting support from her party, only to end up selling her jewelry to fund her campaign.

With the cost of contesting elections rising exponentially, the lack of an economic foundation was a significant factor affecting women's participation in politics.⁴⁵ Women respondents who had contested elections reported spending anywhere from NPR 50,000 to 500,000 for ward member races, NPR 500,000 to 5 million for ward chairperson to mayor/deputy mayor and chairperson/vice-chair races, and NPR 5-10 million for the provincial assembly and federal HoR races under the FPTP system. Women who contested under the PR system also reported spending more than the limit set by the ECN.

Elected representatives at the provincial and federal levels received a monthly salary and other benefits, while only meeting allowances were provided at the local level. A 2019 Supreme Court ruling terminated the monthly salary benefits for local representatives.⁴⁶ Despite this, the need for financial resources continued beyond the election. All 79 KII respondents concurred that money was crucial for networking, public outreach, and retaining a political career. A Dalit Woman Ward Member of Pokhara Metropolitan City noted, "After winning the election, you must engage with voters and require funds to participate in party activities. It's a tough situation." She further added that she was considering not running in the next election due to financial constraints.

Women leaders expressed that political parties needed to support women by providing direct financial aid and ensuring political appointments. The

⁴⁵ Mlambo, Courage, Forget Kapingura and Richard Meissner. 2019. Factors Influencing Women Political Participation: The Case of the SADC Region. *Cogent Social Sciences* 5 (1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2019.1681048>, accessed on April 20, 2024.

⁴⁶ Himalkhabar. 2022. Balen Says - I will Make Statue from my Salary, Law Says - Mayor Does Not Have a Salary. July 9, Available at: <https://www.himalkhabar.com/news/131048>, accessed on August 27, 2024. (In Nepali)

study noted how women leaders at the provincial level showed greater interest and understanding of such appointments. Urmila Bishwakarma, a member of the Karnali Province Assembly from CPN (Maoist Centre), stated that political appointments would help women remain active for longer. Her party appointed her as a member of the provincial Tourism Promotion Development Committee. Harimaya Sharma, Central Committee Member of CPN (Maoist Centre) who was appointed the Chief Minister's advisor, said, "These appointments signify that women will have opportunities for such positions, alongside resources."

Women respondents of the study also cited challenges in maintaining active involvement in politics due to travel expenses for party field meetings and costs for providing refreshments during events and programs to their cadres. Others, however, argued that these were manageable within the party structure due to the availability and management of resources. Geeta Ranpal, a former Executive Member of Waling Municipality, explained, "I am self-dependent. I don't need to worry about a few rupees to attend meetings. I can travel around easily on my own."

The findings of this study clearly indicated that women leaders needed financial support to continue their political careers. Limited ownership of, and access to, resources placed them in a difficult position and even made them reconsider their political engagement - which was a cause for concern.

Potential of Continuity in Politics

When asked about the adequacy of the motivation for young women's involvement in politics, 43 out of 48 respondents of the survey at the local level responded positively. In Karnali Province, three out of 15 people responded negatively while two out of 18 in Madhesh Province also disagreed with the notion that their activism would continue.



Gita Chaudhary's political journey began within her family and was driven by a desire for greater equality for marginalized communities in the Tarai as a student. After leaving the Nepal Sadbhawana Party due to its perceived shift from core issues, Chaudhary remained engaged in politics, participating in the Second People's Movement

and joining various Tharu organizations. In 2017, Chaudhary joined the Madheshi Janadhikar Forum (Loktantrik) and ran for Mayor of Surunga Municipality. Despite finishing third, she gained valuable experience.

Following the party's merger with Nepali Congress, Chaudhary faced challenges establishing herself within the new bigger party and securing the mayoral nomination. Despite active opposition from older male leaders, she won the 2022 election with a clear margin. As one of only 25 women head of local governments in Nepal (out of 753), Chaudhary has faced challenges related to patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes with people even reluctant to greet her properly. As Mayor, Chaudhary has made significant strides in her community, including making Surunga the first child marriage-free municipality in Madhesh Province. Chaudhary is also active in party politics, serving as a general convention member of Nepali Congress for Saptari-4 Constituency.

Women leaders interviewed for this study overwhelmingly expressed a strong desire to remain active and advance in public life. They emphasized that while electoral politics was influenced by party decisions, they were

committed to engaging in the party's organizational activities. Former HoR member and CPN (UML) leader Sujita Shakya expressed confidence that women's participation in both organizational and electoral politics would expand, and cited the constitution's mandatory provisions. Santosh Pariyar, Chief Whip of Rashtriya Swatantra Party, echoed similar sentiment, noting that joining politics and resisting its influence was less challenging now than before.

Another notable finding of the study was that, despite feeling neglected by their parties, women leaders expressed interest in remaining in politics. A woman candidate for deputy mayor in Surunga Municipality expressed disappointment at being overlooked by her party following her defeat in the election. Despite her desire to remain politically active, the party's district-level leaders failed to reach out. Another unsuccessful candidate expressed uncertainty about her political future when the party started neglecting her. She said, "Province-level leaders contacted me before and during the elections, but after losing, they stopped answering my calls. I don't know where I stand with the party now." Neither of these leaders had participated in any meetings at the local or district level since the 2022 election.

Women leaders in this study warned that the lack of support systems, security, and clear legal provisions could hamper women's involvement, continuation, and advancement in politics.

Capacity Development

None of the nine political parties examined in this study took steps to enhance the leadership skills of women, aside from providing routine training to affiliated sister organizations and party members. Respondents of the study said parties focused on training members on ideology, and various contemporary political affairs. Women leaders said they lacked opportunities to enhance essential skills such as public speaking,

organizational strategies, public relations, network expansion, inter-party dialogue, and communications. Respondents noted that this led to women leaders lacking skills in informal discussions, power dynamics, and negotiations. Anju Jha, the Director of Mandwi, an organization working on Madheshi women and children empowerment, expressed concerns over women's inability to negotiate and articulate their views effectively. She argued that women leaders were often limited to the formal aspects of politics and suggested that parties needed to offer training to familiarize them with the informal aspects of political engagement.

Nine women respondents of this study had received capacity training, provided by CSOs and development organizations. They said this training had been useful in enhancing their skills at the local level, providing them a better understanding of technical aspects like planning and budgeting. Maiya Nepali, a Dalit woman ward member from CPN (UML), expressed that training programs had helped her gain clarity on her roles. Specialized training sessions were also held in some areas to enhance the public speaking skills of women leaders. Bishnu Maya Gurung, former secretary of the National Association of Indigenous Women in Gandaki Province, noted that combining legal training with public speaking sessions conducted by her organization had a positive impact.

Development partner organizations and CSOs were more active in empowering elected women leaders at the local level than the political parties. Women who lost their elections and were fully involved in party organization complained that they were left out from limited training opportunities. Devi Poudel, the Chairperson of Women Association for Marginalized Women (WAM) Nepal, acknowledged the positive impact of training but criticized that they were provided to only a select few and were limited at the district and local government level.

During the first Constituent Assembly, numerous training sessions on parliamentary procedures like bill drafting, clause-by-clause discussions, zero hour, and special hour were available at the national level. Such

programs, however, had since been discontinued. Shanta Chaudhary, a central member of CPN(UML), mentioned receiving similar training as a Constituent Assembly member but had to focus more on party organization recently.

CHALLENGES

Systemic Barrier

Nepali society's patriarchal dominance places men on top of socio-economic and cultural structures with women facing obstacles of gender-based violence, limited educational opportunities, harmful traditions, and a lack of ownership and control over property.

Every woman leader respondent of this study emphasized the unequal opportunities they have had to endure in their political journey. Jiban Pariyar, Joint General Secretary of the Nepali Congress, stressed the significance of formal education for professional development, party confidence, and people's trust, especially for those holding positions of influence. Respondents from Karnali Province identified the lack of access to education as a major barrier for women leaders, while elected women officials at the local level highlighted the importance of formal qualifications. Multiple respondents noted that limited access to information and knowledge also posed a significant challenge for women. Limited access in the past led to lower participation of women in higher education compared to men. As a result, this limitation continued to hinder women's participation and impact across all areas of politics, the economy, and social life.⁴⁷

Over 80 percent of the survey respondents emphasized that formal education was essential for aspiring to leadership roles. The 2021 census

⁴⁷ Pandey, Binda. 2019. *Steps to Equality: A Feminist Analysis of Political Movements*. Pp. 14. Kathmandu: Fine Print Books.

revealed a gender disparity in literacy rates, with women lagging behind men. The overall literacy rate in Nepal stood at 76.3 percent, with 69.4 percent for women and 83.6 percent for men.⁴⁸

Article 38 (1) of the Constitution entitles every woman equal lineage rights without gender discrimination while Article 18 (5) specifies equal rights for all children, regardless of gender, to ancestral property. However, in practice, patriarchal norms persisted. Instances of daughters receiving equal property were rare and considered exceptions. According to multiple respondents, this disparity in practice limited women's ownership and control over financial resources. Gender expert Kaushila Chand highlighted this as a major barrier to women's independence and political participation.

Respondents of the study also identified domestic violence and workplace harassment as significant barriers to their participation and continuity in politics. According to Santosh Pariyar, the Chief Whip of RSP, women leaders had to endure undue pressure on various aspects of their personal lives. Reports of being constantly scrutinized for what they ate, their marital status, and even their decision to have children were common. Such harassment appeared to extend to social media, where they were attacked for everything from their attire to their way of speaking. In a 2022 study on sexual violence against women in politics on social media, 58.7 percent of responses were insults and hate speech.⁴⁹

Harimaya Sharma from CPN (Maoist Centre) highlighted how discrimination during menstruation and the *chhaupadi* — a cultural practice in some parts of Nepal where women are isolated from their family and community during their menstrual cycle — have restricted women's participation in politics. She noted that women would face challenges if

⁴⁸ National Statistics Office. 2023 (Reprint). *National Populations and Housing Census 2021: National Report (Volume 01)*. Kathmandu: National Statistics Office.

⁴⁹ Panos South Asia. 2022. *Analysis of Gendered Violence in Social Media Against Women in Politics in Nepal*. Kathmandu: NDI, USAID and Panos South Asia. Available at: https://southasiacheck.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Analysis-of-Gendered_web.pdf, accessed on June 28, 2024.

people found out about their menstrual cycle while attending events or programs in villages. Political analyst Dhan Kumari Sunar echoed these sentiments, pointing out the lack of mechanisms within political parties to address the hygiene and dignity needs of women during menstruation.

Madhesh and Karnali provinces had the highest prevalence of child marriage.⁵⁰ The negative impact of child marriage was evident in maternal and child health, women's education, economic status, and social influence. Political analyst Tula Narayan Shah emphasized the correlation between such socio-cultural issues and women's political participation. He pointed out that women from affluent backgrounds had access to education and were able to avoid child marriage, while those from disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to be married off early, leading to early parental responsibilities and missed educational opportunities, and hindering their political engagement.

Nepal enacted the Caste Discrimination and Untouchability (Crime and Punishment) Act in 2012 to address caste discrimination as a criminal offense. Previous laws prohibited caste discrimination, but did not include provisions for punishment. Dalit women reported facing challenges in their social, economic, and political lives due to their vulnerable background. Maiya Nepali, a Dalit woman member at Pokhara Metropolitan City-24, took legal action against the her own Ward Chair for caste-based discrimination.⁵¹ She expressed her frustration, stating, "They (non-Dalit) refuse to accept that we are equal representatives of the people, despite being elected." Respondents also reported how two candidates for the ward chair position believed they were defeated in the election due to caste discrimination.

⁵⁰ Kafle, Surendra. 2024. Child Marriage Continues, Laws Not Followed: The Government Data Indicates Child Marriage is Still 35 Percent. *Annapurna Post*, March 18. Available at: <https://www.annapurnapost.com/story/454059/>, accessed on April 10, 2024. (In Nepali)

⁵¹ Roka Magar, Bikas. 2023. Ward Member Maiya Nepali Says: Raising Voice against Discrimination will help in Justice Delivery. *Onlinekhabar*, November 24. Available at: <https://www.onlinekhabar.com/2023/11/1396545>, accessed on August 27, 2024. (In Nepali)

Out of the nine political parties reviewed in this study, five participated in the 2017 elections. Nepali Congress, CPN (UML), CPN (Maoist Centre), RPP, and the then Sanghiya Samajwadi Forum (now Janata Samajwadi Party) did not file a single Dalit woman candidate in the 2017 HoR elections. In 2022, CPN (Maoist Centre) nominated a Dalit woman. In the 2017 provincial assembly elections, the five parties failed to nominate a single Dalit woman, while in 2022, only two Dalit women received direct nominations in the HoR from CPN (UML) and Janamat Party under the FPTP. Parties often met the quota for Dalit women members through the PR system. Nepali Congress Joint General Secretary Jiban Pariyar said, “While this guarantees representation it becomes challenging to establish women as leaders in the public eye.”

The Election Commission Act 2016 requires all elected representatives to submit election expenditure details within 30 days of the final results. Failure to comply can result in a fine of NPR 500,000 or the amount of the expenditure, whichever is higher.⁵² Failure to submit the expenditure statement within six months can lead to candidates being barred from contesting elections for six years.⁵³ Many Dalit women candidates, lacking education or information about the law, faced fines for non-compliance. Chief Election Commissioner Dinesh Thapaliya acknowledged the negative impact of this law on Dalit women members, and pointed to existing legislative shortcomings.⁵⁴ Anju BK, who previously contested for Deputy Mayor in Birendranagar Municipality, stated, “Despite being recommended for the provincial assembly, I was disqualified due to my failure to submit the expenses [for previous election]. I was not aware of the law and received no information from either the party or the election commission.”

⁵² Election Commission of Nepal Act, 2016. Article 26 (2)

⁵³ Election Commission of Nepal Act, 2016. Article 26 (3)

⁵⁴ Khadka, Ghanashyam, Abadhesh Kumar Jha and Krishna Prasad Gautam. 2022. Women and Dalit Women Candidates Planning to Join Politics feel Intimidated. *Kantipur*, September 23. Available at: <https://ekantipur.com/news/2022/09/23/166389329903055333.html>, accessed on August 27, 2024. (In Nepali)

Acceptance of Women Leaders

Two male participants of a FGD in Surunga Municipality in Madhesh Province stated how they could not envision a woman as a leader under any circumstances. Three area experts consulted for this study noted that women had not been established as leaders at the local level. One of them said, “Women lack autonomy in local and provincial assemblies. If they cannot make decisions independently, how can they be considered leaders solely on election outcomes?”

All respondents agreed that while there had been a slight increase in the acceptance of women as leaders, it remained insufficient. They noted that both the general public and political parties were hesitant to fully accept women in leadership roles. NWA President Usha Raut cited the example of how only the women’s wing, not the main party, organized anniversary programs even for women leaders like Shailaja Acharya and Mangala Devi Singh who fought for democracy, highlighting it as a measure of the party’s inadequate acceptance of its women leaders.

The lack of public acceptance of women leaders was also reflected in election outcomes. Respondents in this study noted that, during nominations and campaigns, male opponents openly expressed doubts about women’s abilities to fulfill official duties. Khagisara Ale, Ward Chair of Kaligandaki RM, shared, “Opponents openly stated that as a woman, I would not have the time to serve people as effectively as a man.” In the 2017 election of the same rural municipality, the Nepali Congress candidate lost by the margin of 600 votes, while in 2022, Maya Rana of the Nepali Congress lost by the margin of more than 1,600 votes despite representing a coalition. Ale added, “Our party lost even with an alliance because the candidate was a woman. Otherwise, why would we lose by a larger margin than in the previous election?”

Parties appeared to scapegoat women leaders instead of reassessing their roles in shaping public perceptions. Nepali Congress President Sher

Bahadur Deuba openly blamed women for the party's defeat at a program organized by NWA, the party's official women wing. The party fielded only 6 percent women candidates in the last two elections for HoR.⁵⁵ In 2017, it failed to elect a single woman under the FPTP system, and in 2022, only one woman was directly elected. In the provincial elections, the party nominated only six women out of 322 candidates in 2017, which decreased to five out of 179 in 2022. The party did not file any women candidates in six of the seven provinces. In 2017, the party had only two women elected through FPTP in the provincial assemblies. Deuba's disparaging remarks towards women was not limited to a single leader, but pointed to a general pattern degrading women rather than honest review of their own roles in the dismal participation of women in the public office and party leadership.⁵⁶

CPN (UML) Chairperson KP Sharma Oli also made derogatory remarks aimed at women leaders while trying to fill the 33 percent quota for central committee members in the party formed after the unification of the CPN (UML) and CPN (Maoist Centre) in 2017. Despite widespread criticism, Oli never backtracked from his remarks.⁵⁷

Respondents of this study cited numerous instances of facing public humiliation, taunting, and disregard from male colleagues. They also noted that male leaders often treated women as subordinates rather than equals, even when they held the same positions. A CPN (UML) leader said, "They [male members] think they are the most important people, while they consider us [women] to be worthless." Women leaders were rarely given the opportunity to express their opinions within the central committee. An RPP leader noted that male leaders withdrew their support

⁵⁵ Chalaune, Ankala and Chiran Manandhar. 2023. *Women Candidacy under Nepal's First-Past-the-Post System: An Analysis of Elections to the House of Representatives and Provincial Assemblies*. Kathmandu: Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN).

⁵⁶ Interview with Hima Bista, Director, Women Lead on February 26, 2024.

⁵⁷ Pandey, Binda. 2021. *Claims for Space: Fight for the Rights*. Kathmandu: Shangrila Books. (In Nepali)

once women reached a competitive level. One woman leader said, “They might speak kindly if you agreed with them, but when it came to women’s advancement, they are reluctant to cooperate.” Mayor Mohanmaya Dhakal added, “It is natural to compete for positions, but it is unfair to use gender as a basis for discrimination”

Women leaders also expressed concerns about risking future opportunities if they lost elections. They needed to balance societal and political expectations carefully, knowing that a setback could have far-reaching consequences. A lack of women representation in party and government leadership positions also contributed to the belief that it was preferable to refrain from participating rather than risk any failure. Anju Jha, Director of Mandwi, stressed that failure for one woman leader could potentially impact many others across political parties.

Caste-based Discrimination

The intersection of gender and caste compounded the discrimination and exclusion faced by marginalized women in Nepali politics. Dalit women faced discrimination on multiple levels: as Dalits, as women, and as members of an impoverished underclass. Pramila Sada, who was re-elected as a Dalit ward member in 2022, resigned from her second term within three months due to caste-based humiliation within her party, the Nepali Congress. At a stakeholder session in Madhesh Province on August 9, 2024, she explained how her party leadership initially promised her a promotion to the deputy chief in the DCC but later backtracked on their commitment, insisting that she accept the Dalit ward member position instead. Sada stated, “They openly discussed the potential implications of promoting a Dalit, suggesting that it would require them to greet me, which they considered disrespectful. No one reassured me or defended my dignity, and instead, they seemed relieved when I resigned.”

Having faced caste, class, and gender discrimination growing up as a Dalit child, **Maiya Nepali** was drawn to politics during her school days, inspired by the anti-discrimination message of the Maoist ‘People’s War.’ She believed the fight for equality was her calling. Despite being married while still in school, Nepali remained active in Dalit rights organizations in Pokhara until 2011, when she decided to join the CPN (UML), her husband’s party. Voting in the 2017 local elections gave Maiya the confidence to pursue elected office, and in 2022, she was nominated by her party and got elected as the Dalit woman ward member for Pokhara Metropolitan City-24.



Even as an elected representative, Nepali continued to face caste-based discrimination, particularly from her senior colleagues at the ward, who often demeaned and humiliated her in public meetings. She successfully filed a case for caste-based discrimination, but the court’s sentence of four and a half months in prison and a fine of 75,000 rupees against her Ward Chair was never enforced. Despite legal victories, Nepali feels the system has failed to protect her.

She remains politically active as a member of Nepal Mukti Samaj and the Agricultural Federation’s Gandaki Provincial Committee.

Caste-based discrimination continued to be a significant barrier for individuals seeking positions within political parties, securing nominations, conducting campaigns, and holding office. Dalit women leaders, in particular, faced compounded discrimination, which had a detrimental effect on their sense of dignity. Madheshi Dalit and Pahadi (Hill) Dalits

both experienced extensive marginalization at various levels, often lacking access to financial resources and support systems. Despite efforts by political parties, the ECN, and the government, the measures taken so far had been insufficient to address these complex challenges adequately.

Sunita Mestar, a former Dalit ward member in Janakpurdhham Sub-Metropolitan City, expressed that despite receiving the nomination to contest as a ward chairperson in the local elections of 2022, she suffered defeat due to caste-based discrimination. Mestar added, “Dalits are often confined to leadership roles within their own community. They did not support my candidacy as they believed I could not adequately represent the interests of all communities.” After the 2022 elections, only 1.4 percent of deputy mayors or vice-chairpersons at the local level were Dalit women, with no Dalit women leading as mayor or chairperson.

Dalit women also reported facing a widespread lack of trust from the party leadership. A Dalit woman member of the Pokhara Metropolitan City expressed her grievances about the ward chairperson’s reluctance to assign her an acting executive role despite being the most deserving member, solely because of her caste background. Another Dalit woman member of Waling Municipality shared her experience of facing indirect discrimination, which she said had a detrimental impact on her self confidence. She highlighted instances of non-Dalit women moving away during tea breaks when they were seated together, and the hesitation felt by Dalit representatives to visit non-Dalit homes due to discriminatory practices. Maiya Nepali, who went to court seeking legal remedies said she continued to feel insecure, adding, “I thought the legal action would be enough but now I understand the caste-based discrimination is just too deeply rooted.”

The study noted that Dalit women had benefited from capacity building training, enabling them to carry out their official duties better, maintaining relevance within the party, and remaining well-connected to the public. Bhola Paswan, Dalit rights activist, emphasized the need for increased

investment in Dalit women by the state, and to ensure their safety, respect, and greater access to leadership positions. He also highlighted the growing recognition and stressed how Dalit women needed to play a more active role in politics, with many aspiring to leadership roles following their participation at the local level in 2017. Paswan cited the importance of the state facilitating opportunities for Dalit women in spirit of the principle of proportional inclusion.

Government Employee Perceptions of Women Leaders

During the field study, male staff and employees were often present during interviews conducted with women representatives. They frequently attempted to interject or correct the responses of women representatives, which the respondents perceived as gestures of solidarity. One rural municipality Vice-Chair noted that the male Chief Executive Officer (CEO) often assisted her by preventing certain cases from being brought to the judiciary committee, which she headed as provided by the Local Government Operation Act (LGOA) of 2017.⁵⁸ All the elected women leaders interviewed, except for one, confirmed receiving similar ‘support’ from male government employees. Anju Jha, Director of Mandwi, highlighted how women leaders struggled to distinguish between ‘support’ and ‘control’ and explained how women leaders were often kept under control by their male personal secretaries and government employees. Women leaders were rarely seen by themselves in their offices, relying on administrative officers or personal secretaries for answers to even simple questions. This reliance, according to Jha, diminished their authority in the public eye.

Surita Sah, a provincial assembly member in Madhesh, added that specially male employees attempted to influence the decisions of women leaders, underestimating their capabilities. The lack of autonomy and

⁵⁸ The Local Government Operation Act 2016, Article 16 (B,1)

respect for women leaders' knowledge was cited as a source of attempts to manipulate their decisions. In a survey of 48 local-level participants, 21 disagreed that government employees had provided satisfactory support to women representatives, while eight remained neutral. Respondents also said that the government employees did not give any importance to women other than the elected representatives. A Gandaki Province leader of CPN (UML) shared her experience of visiting local government office to address public concerns and receiving the answer of "send your leader." She said she had to assert her position, stating, "I am the leader," which was met with surprised looks.



Surita Sah was one of four women – out of 64 total directly elected members – elected through the FPTP system in Madhesh Provincial Assembly in 2022, running as an independent candidate after her party, Loktantrik Samajwadi Party, rejected her claim for nomination. She

was also elected in 2017. Active in social services, Surita was drawn to politics during the Madhesh movement of 2007 and eventually became a member of the first Constituent Assembly in 2008 serving as the Minister of State for Communications.

Initially elected indirectly under the proportional representation system, Surita contested under FPTP in 2013 but lost by a narrow margin of 134 votes which she attributed to gender bias. Disillusioned with the lack of opportunities for women and the prioritization of their issues in party politics, she left her party to run independently in 2022. Following her victory, Sah became the first cabinet minister in

Madhesh Province under Chief Minister Saroj Yadav's government. She now represents the Janata Samajwadi Party, led by Upendra Yadav, and continues to advocate for greater representation and leadership opportunities for women in political parties.

The bureaucracy, like politics, is also heavily male-dominated. Collaborating with and working under women leadership was still a relatively new experience for male employees. The 2017 election saw a significant increase in the number of women holding local office, and this trend continued in 2022. Women leaders often struggled to maintain their self-esteem while navigating the bureaucratic system and often found it difficult to distinguish between genuine support and manipulation while trying to balance multiple challenges.

Issues Faced by Women in Campaigning

Since the first general election in 1959, pamphlets, public meetings, and door-to-door campaigns were important means of electioneering. In recent years, social media also played a key role. Party manifestos served as the primary publicity material for all candidates with the study highlighting two key factors, beyond financial resources, that significantly impacted the election campaigns of women leaders: time and the role of party leadership.

Bhagwati Chaudhary's political journey reflects a break from her family's political legacy. Her grandfather was a member of the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) and her father was active in the Nepali Congress, but she chose to align with the CPN (UML) due to its stance against societal discrimination. Her decision to join a different party was unexpected, especially for a woman in the Tharu



community at the time. Initially joining CPN (UML) in the 1990s, Bhagwati only became fully active a decade later, taking on the challenge of expanding the party's influence in NC strongholds like Aurawani, Sunsari.

Chaudhary gained national prominence after her nomination in the second Constituent Assembly election in 2013, where she contested against a prominent figure, Bijay Kumar Gachchhedar, the then Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the Madheshi Janadhikar Forum (Loktantrik), who had won several previous elections. As a district-level woman leader, she faced significant challenges and did not have any realistic chance of winning. Having faced successive defeats in 2013 and 2017, she ran again in the 2022 HoR election, this time defeating Gachchhedar, who had won the last six elections since 1990. Chaudhary was one of only four winners out of 11 women who were nominated by her party under the FPTP system. Chaudhary went on to be nominated as the Minister of Women, Children, and Senior Citizens in 2024, and is now a central committee member and Sunsari District in-charge of CPN (UML).

Interviews with women leaders and political party representatives indicated that filing nominations was often left to the final moments. Most women respondents reported having to file their candidacy nominations late, leaving them with limited time for campaigning. Many respondents said they only had two to three weeks to conduct their entire election campaigns, which they cited as a major factor in their defeats. Manakali Ramjali, who filed her nomination for Karnali Province Assembly Member at the last

minute, explained that the limited time and challenging geography of her constituency, made it impossible for her to reach all the voters. She said, “If I had more time, I would have gained more votes.” Advocate Kunjani Pariyar also noted that this issue was especially adverse to Dalit women ward members. She said, “Some Dalit women were not aware that they would be contesting the election until the day before [official nominations], which made them confused about their own roles during campaigning.”

At the local level, door-to-door visits, personal meetings, social media dissemination, and pamphlet distributions were reported to be the primary modes of electoral campaigns. Mass meetings were reported to be crucial for the provincial and federal elections, which were held on the same day. Managing expenses for large gatherings and mass meetings was difficult for women leaders. A CPN (UML) leader, who contested the HoR election, said that she could not organize a mass meeting due to lack of funds, which she believed contributed to her loss. She stated, “If I had secured an additional one million rupees, I could have held a mass meeting where central leaders would deliver speeches. The outcome could have been different.”

The study also noted that support for women candidates varied depending on the level of office they were contesting. For example, mayoral and deputy mayoral candidates received support from provincial party leadership when senior leaders addressed the mass meetings. Provincial-level candidates received support from both provincial and federal leadership, while federal candidates were backed by senior political party leaders including the party president or general secretary. Despite this, federal-level respondents noted a disparity in leadership support. Respondents pointed out how Sher Bahadur Deuba, KP Sharma Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’ - leaders of three major parties - campaigned for Renu Dahal in both the elections in 2017 and 2022.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Renu Dahal of CPN (Maoist Centre) is the Mayor of Bharatpur Metropolitan City who won the elections in 2017 and 2022. Her party formed an electoral coalition with Nepali Congress in 2017 and CPN (UML) in 2022. Senior political leaders including Sher Bahadur Deuba, KP Sharma Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’ addressed a mass

Pushpa Thakur, Vice-President of the Loktantrik Samajwadi Party (LSP), believed that having national leaders present during campaigns was impactful as many voters paid attention. But this level of support was not available to all women candidates. Gita Chaudhary, Mayor of Surunga Municipality, remarked, “Despite a close proximity to my constituency, the central leadership did not address our campaign gatherings. I would have certainly secured more votes.”

Women and Dalit women ward members at the local level expressed dissatisfaction with their lack of involvement in the public events. They were often given limited opportunity to speak during meetings. One Dalit woman candidate admitted feeling uncomfortable during door-to-door visits due to fears of caste-based discrimination adding how she would visit non-Dalit homes only in the company of ward chair candidate. She said, “We have to live in this society so I did not want to take any risks.”

Media coverage of women during elections varied depending on their position with women candidates for mayor in cities receiving greater attention and coverage. Other candidates reported receiving scant media attention with two candidates from Pokhara Metropolitan City revealing how they had to pay for media interviews. Women candidates at the provincial and federal levels blamed the media for focusing on their personal lives rather than their campaign agendas. Sobita Gautam, a RSP HoR member who contested the election for the first time, was among the exceptions, and said the media gave her sufficient coverage during the campaign.

According to study respondents, while parties provided campaign materials like manifestos and pamphlets, candidates were responsible for most of the campaign arrangements. Saliman Miyan, a ward member from Bhairabi Rural Municipality, reported that each ward member candidate had to contribute NPR 50,000 for campaigning. Only two federal-level

meeting for her. She is also daughter of the Chairperson of CPN (Maoist Centre), Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’.

female leaders in this study received official support in the range of NPR 100,000 to NPR 400,000. Women from disadvantaged backgrounds were particularly affected, with many left in debt following their campaigns. One such candidate, Mithilesh Sada, a daily wage laborer, ran for the Madhesh Provincial Assembly but received no party support. In an April 2024 interview, she expressed her ongoing struggle to repay campaign debts. Sada also mentioned difficulty finding post-election employment, as people assumed she had already been elevated as a province-level leader.

Violence and Harassment

A 2022 study found that 66 percent of women politicians reported experiencing violence at least once in their political careers. Multiple women respondents in the study reported facing violence from men, including physical assault, beatings, and slander. The study revealed that such incidence of violence had even led women politicians to suicidal situations.⁶⁰

Most of the female leader respondents of this study, however, asserted that sexual violence and abuse were not common. They strongly supported their parties and leaders and were dismissive of any accusations. One woman leader at the federal level even claimed, “Women are solely responsible for the violence against them. I have not encountered any such incidents. Women should take precautions themselves.” A provincial level leader suggested that violence could be countered by immediate opposition. A political commentator even claimed that some women allowed themselves to be exploited for favors. Nonetheless, all respondents acknowledged the widespread stigmatization of women in politics.

⁶⁰ Sharma, Neelam. 2022. *Breaking the Silence: Research Report on Gendered Violence Against Women and Gender and Sexual Minorities in Politics in Nepal*. Kathmandu: Purple Foundation.

Study noted that those denying the existence of violence against women often tended to be elected officials holding high-ranking positions in their parties, from affluent backgrounds, belonging to perceived upper castes, and boasting political legacies. One rural municipality Chair pointed to a specific court case as an example, claiming that women falsely accused men. She emphasized, “As women, we must also uphold our dignity.” Another notable finding of the study was that only seven women leaders interviewed highlighted the issue of violence against women. These leaders stated that sexual violence, abuse, character assassination, and trolling were widespread. This was not denied by two male leaders holding key positions in their party and the federal parliament. A student leader shared her experience of receiving unwanted messages and calls on social media, causing mental distress while a mayoral candidate revealed receiving obscene pictures on her messenger during the election campaign.

The General Secretary of the RPP, Kunti Shahi, acknowledged the existence of physical and mental violence against women in politics. Due to the absence of a proper complaint mechanism, women often remained silent and hesitated to report such violence. Manju Yadav, a Central Committee Member of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Socialist) emphasized that discussing violence, especially sexual violence, often led to victim-blaming, labeling them as weak, characterless, and unfit. She shared her experience of violence and fighting to receive protection. As a Madhesh Province Assembly Member from CPN (UML) at the time, she said she had to resort to counter-offence against one of her male colleagues after continuous harassment, with the party chairperson eventually coming to her support.

Individual Choices and Societal Pressure

Study respondents identified several challenges faced by women in politics, including the unpredictable nature of public life, frequent travel for political

party events, interactions with men, and the demands of electoral politics. These factors, among limited opportunities, pose varying degrees of difficulty for women leaders.

Born into a family with a British Gurkha connection, **Manju Devi Gurung's** political journey began during the 1979 student movement, inspired by her maternal uncle while she was still in school. Although early marriage and family responsibilities delayed her ambitions, she eventually



joined CPN (UML) and became active in the All Nepal Women's Association (ANWA) after the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990. Due to party rules requiring extended active participation, it wasn't until 1997 that she secured organized membership, having faced challenges balancing political activity with family duties.

Gurung's career gained a major boost when she was elected Deputy Mayor of Pokhara Metropolitan City in 2017, something she credited to the constitutional provision mandating that one of the two local executive positions be held by a woman. She was nominated again in 2022 and successfully won re-election, despite her party losing the mayoral race due to an alliance of five opposition parties. As Deputy Mayor, Gurung has earned recognition for her leadership of the judiciary committee, which serves as a model for other local governments across Nepal. Gurung, who currently serves as the central committee member of her party, has her sights set on a seat in either the provincial assembly or federal parliament in the next election.

General Secretary of the Bibeksheel Sajha Party, Ranju Darshana, noted that Nepali women remained reluctant to join politics due to negative societal pressure. She emphasized that women were particularly sensitive to their reputations as successful women in politics were often linked to unfounded scandals and rumors, discouraging many women from pursuing their interests in politics. Two young women leaders active in student politics shared similar concerns, highlighting how attacks on their character could affect their families. One mentioned how families were subjected to rumors about their daughters engaging in inappropriate behavior with male colleagues, leading to restrictions on their political involvement. Respondents said parents also worried about women involved in politics not finding suitable marriage partners. Parwati Tamang, Gandaki Province Assembly Member from NC, believed that finding an understanding partner was also challenging for women involved in politics. She said, “People often ask me why I was still not married. When I look back, I think I was worried that the freedom required in politics would be too hard to compromise.” She also felt that women in politics were considered less desirable than women in other fields.

Another woman leader, who lost her position as ward chairperson, admitted feeling disheartened when people passed judgment on her simply for riding on a male colleague’s motorcycle. The male respondents of this study across all levels also acknowledged the prevalence of character assassination against women leaders in Nepali politics. Jiban Pariyar, Joint General Secretary of Nepali Congress, gave his own example. He said, “As a man, I can go anywhere anytime without thinking much, but my female colleagues cannot do the same.” He pointed out two reasons for this: security concerns and family and societal perceptions of independent women. Deputy Spokesperson of RPP, Mohan Shrestha, agreed and said, “Men also hear such rumors, but we are trained to ignore or even be proud of it. But women leaders are diminished by rumors about their character.”

Women in politics needed to balance multiple roles: productive, reproductive, and social.⁶¹ Study respondents stressed women were able to undertake multiple tasks. While they emphasized the importance of prioritizing family and reproductive roles, they also acknowledged that this often discouraged women from entering politics due to fears of adverse impacts on their families. Bimala Bhandari, President of the Federation of Nepali Journalists Kaski, said that women must not let politics divide their families despite conceding that she did not have hard evidence to prove families being disrupted by women's political involvement. Among the 62 women participants in the study, 53 married women with children expressed how women possessed unique abilities to engage in politics while also performing family obligations.

Vice-Chair of Kaligandaki Rural Municipality, Sabitra Koirala emphasized the importance of balancing family responsibilities with political duties. She highlighted the dual and triple roles as a testament to women's adeptness in handling multiple tasks. "Women are aware of their responsibilities and are more attentive than men. If we cannot look after our families, engaging in politics loses its significance," she added.

It was evident that women leaders consciously navigated perceived gender roles to avoid scrutiny and accusations of negligence or selfishness. This further underscored the pressure they faced to excel in every role, having to become a role model both in family and politics. Women leaders did not have the luxury of trial and error; they needed to demonstrate excellence in all fields to thrive in politics.

The fear of caste-based discrimination remained a significant challenge for Dalit women leaders, affecting their dignity and often compelling them to reluctantly engage in public life. The Dalit women leaders interviewed for the study expressed their resolve to combat this form of discrimination by continuing to engage in politics. Despite challenges in making it to the

⁶¹ Mooser, Caroline. 1993. *Gender Planning and Development: Theory, Practice and Training*. London: Routledge.

decision-making roles, Dalit women believed that political participation was essential for achieving equality, as it would enable them to influence laws and policies and attain positions of authority.

This study also noted that women were not generally involved in informal politics, focusing instead on formal activities, such as party meetings and gatherings, rather than informal activities like networking and public relations. The dual or triple role posed a challenge for women in politics, leading to their exclusion from the informal political networks. According to gender expert Kaushila Chand, women's involvement in multiple roles had marginalized them from participating in the party's informal dialogues, capacity building, and external relations. Chand emphasized that crucial decisions were often made during informal conversations, where women were noticeably absent. Women also lacked the opportunity to engage with party members and engage informally.

Usha Kiran Timsena, Central Committee Member of CPN (UML) agreed with Chand that patriarchal mindset, security concerns and the lack of resources were key challenges.⁶² She pointed to the tendency of her male colleagues to exclude women from informal political engagements. The General Secretary of the Bibeksheel Sajha Party, Ranju Darshana, also agreed on the importance of informal political activities in Nepal. She stated that even a casual meeting over tea could lead to character assassination of women. She said, "We lack financial resources and time. On top of that, no one invites us." Rita Baramu, an independent researcher, expressed how security, resources and gender-friendly policies were linked to women's engagement in informal politics. She said, "Since politics often involves informal interactions, governments, political parties, and society must strive to create safe, supportive environments that empower women to participate fully in these informal aspects of political life."⁶³

⁶² Timsena shared her opinion at a discussion program organized by Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) on August 2, 2024, in Lalitpur.

⁶³ Baramu shared her opinion at a discussion program organized by Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) on August 23, 2024, in Lalitpur.

Candidate Nominations and Selection

Political parties set their own candidate selection criteria. Recommendations for various positions, from ward chairs to other local, provincial and federal representatives, involved party committees at different levels. The decision on candidates for provincial assemblies under the FPTP system was made centrally. For the federal HoR candidates, parties theoretically followed a policy of making decisions at the central committee level based on recommendations from lower committees but these processes often lacked transparency.⁶⁴ Study respondents pointed to factors like lobbying, financial status, and personal networks influencing candidate selection.

Among the nine parties included in the study, only the Nepali Congress and the CPN (UML) had a formal requirement to recommend a woman among three potential candidates. While the CPN (Maoist Centre) lacked such a mandate, they did prioritize women candidates for key positions like mayor, chair, and ward chair in areas where they were strong, but of the 174 mayoral candidates fielded by the party, only 18 were women while 130 out of 214 candidates for deputy mayor were women.⁶⁵ Only 29 out of 290 rural municipality chair candidates were women, while 203 out of 315 candidates for vice-chair were women. For ward chair positions, only 91 out of 4,428 candidates were women.⁶⁶

Sita Gurung, born in Atharai, Terhathum, is the only woman elected through the FPTP system from Nepali Congress in the 2022 HoR elections. Her political journey began early, influenced by her

⁶⁴ Sharma, Sheetal. 2022. Candidate Selection Criteria on One Side, Aspirants and Recommendations on the Other *Meronews*, April 16. Available at: <https://meronews.com/2022/04/116849.html>, accessed on June 27, 2024. (In Nepali)

⁶⁵ Candidate eligibility criteria issued by CPN (Maoist Centre) on April 1, 2022.

⁶⁶ Election Commission of Nepal (ECN). 2022. *Local Level Election 2022 Result Book*. Kathmandu: ECN.



father, who was active in the anti-Panchayat movement. As a teenager, Gurung helped deliver messages for the protestors, which exposed her to gender and class discrimination in society. Gurung earned a scholarship to study as a staff nurse but left after six months, realizing she wanted to address societal inequalities

through politics. Gurung's father set strict conditions for her political involvement, including "avoiding romance and entertainment." These conditions were not imposed on her brother, who was also active in politics.

Gurung joined student politics in Nepali Congress, later being displaced to Kathmandu due to the Maoist insurgency. She actively participated in the protest movements against King Gyanendra's rule, even getting her arm fractured, and serving as the coordinator of the women's movement mobilization committee. Although parties often limit women to proportional representation, Gurung received an FPTP nomination in both the 2017 and 2022 elections. Despite losing narrowly in 2017, she was renominated in 2022, facing criticism from some who believed a previous loser should not get a second chance. After her marriage, some had even questioned her eligibility, claiming a married daughter should receive dowry, not votes.

Gurung has made strides within Nepali Congress, playing a key role in adding a provision to the party statute recognizing the reproductive period as active political time. She has risen through the ranks from student politics to her current role as a central committee member.

The study revealed that parties forming electoral alliances exploited legal loopholes to circumvent the legal mandates requiring women’s candidacy in either of the two executive positions – Mayor/Chair or Deputy Mayor/Vice-Chair – at the local level.⁶⁷ In 2017, women were elected to at least one executive position in 682 of the 753 local levels. However, in 2022, the number dropped to 588 due to alliances where two coalition parties fielded candidates for only one executive position, allowing them to avoid nominating women. The impact of the alliance was evident in the 165 local levels – including one metropolitan city and five sub-metropolitan cities – where men from two different coalition parties were elected to both executive positions.⁶⁸

In 2017, Surita Sah was denied a party ticket for the Madhesh Provincial Assembly under FPTP system due to a coalition agreement involving her party. She contested and won the election as an independent candidate. She said, “I came to the provincial assembly after serving at the federal level, a step that most politicians would refuse to take. Yet, my party still selected a male candidate for my constituency. I found this unethical and extremely unfair”

All respondents agreed that the party’s candidate selection process prioritized factors like campaign financing, party support, and patronage networks over gender inclusion. Gita Chaudhary, Mayor of Surunga Municipality, recalled facing intense competition for a party ticket. She shared, “There were many potential candidates claiming that women were unlikely to win, so the party should give the tickets to men. I had to fight hard to make my case. Even after the party decided on my candidacy, many local party leaders did not support me. Instead, some of them actively opposed me.”

⁶⁷ Local Election Act 2016, Section 6(2).

⁶⁸ Election Commission of Nepal (ECN). 2022. *Local Level Election 2022 Result Book*. Kathmandu: ECN.

Six out of the 62 women leaders who took part in this study were chosen by their party to run in constituencies where the party's influence was weak, or where the previously selected candidates had withdrawn their nominations, or where the party simply wanted to make its presence known. This was evident in the number of votes they received. For example, a candidate for the Karnali Province Assembly received only 59 votes, while a mayoral candidate for Pokhara Metropolitan City received just 338 votes, compared to the elected mayor who received around 9,000 votes.⁶⁹

Two first-time candidates expressed surprise at their unexpected nominations. Mithilesh Sada in Madhesh Province received a last-minute ticket from the Janamat Party after its previous candidate withdrew. The party had nominated Rekha Chaudhary as Deputy Mayor to attract Tharu votes. The CPN (Maoist Centre) strategically selected two women candidates for ward chair races, which they were sure to lose. One candidate said she was chosen at the last minute due to a lack of other options, well aware of the likely loss. The other received only 25 votes in a ward where the winner received nearly 10,000.

According to respondents, the Nepali Congress allocated tickets to women for both executive positions in Bhairabi Rural Municipality of Karnali Province due to their previous electoral losses and slim chances of winning. Vice-Chair Devi Bhandari conceded that securing nomination was easy because there were few other aspiring contenders knowing that defeat was certain.

Political party's approach of nominating and selecting candidates appeared contradictory with critics pointing out to the practice of favoring women who were related to party leaders, affiliated with specific factions, or obedient to party officials. This study noted that 51 percent of women respondents in positions of power had family ties to politics. In contrast, 90 percent of Dalit women respondents of the study had no political

⁶⁹ Election Commission of Nepal (ECN). 2022. *Local Level Election 2022 Result Book*. Kathmandu: ECN.

connections. Advocate Kunjani Pariyar highlighted that women from marginalized communities faced stiff competition from women from privileged backgrounds within internal party contests and stressed that criticisms of the current proportional representation system were also aimed at hindering the participation of marginalized women.

Political analyst Tula Narayan Shah believed that the proportional representation system provided significant representation to women but such representation was favored only to those women who could be controlled, including influential leaders' wives, daughters, and daughters-in-law. He argued that there was a lack of recognition for women's independent identities, which had led to the widespread criticism of the proportional representation system.

Pressure to Excel at Home and in Public

Women in politics faced increased scrutiny, balancing familial and societal obligations with their political roles. While expected to be 'bold' and 'authoritative' in official positions, assertive behavior often led to public criticism. Anju Jha, Director of Mandwi, emphasized that women leaders needed to appear 'bold' and 'authoritative' to be taken seriously. Manika Jha, a senior journalist in Madhesh Province, noted that such qualities often made women undesirable in the eyes of the leaders and the public. She said, "If women leaders are 'bold' and 'authoritative,' they are seen as 'manly.'"

Respondents pointed to the fact that Nepali women were typically responsible for family care and child-rearing. Female leaders reported how they had to struggle to be seen as capable and faced challenges entering, surviving, and advancing in politics due to time constraints and financial burdens. This reality often sparked debates about their capabilities and sustainability in politics. Women leaders across political parties noted that this increased pressure forced them to excel in all aspects of their lives.

A CPN (Maoist Centre) leader emphasized how women needed to juggle multiple roles— that of a mother, daughter, leader, and more—while excelling in each to avoid hindering their political progress and fending off constant scrutiny and stress.

Political analyst Dhan Kumari Sunar echoed similar sentiment and highlighted how women were expected to fulfill multiple roles, unlike men who could focus solely on politics. Manju Nepali, a Dalit woman Ward Member from Pokhara Metropolitan City, concurred, saying, “As you can see, I am breastfeeding my baby. I must think a hundred times before attending public meetings. Sometimes I miss party meetings or must rush every day to reach the office.”

According to respondents, women leaders were condemned as negligent if they failed to meet their familial obligations. If they were unable to fulfill their political duties, they risked being excluded from opportunities. A central committee leader of the CPN (UML) spoke of the relentless pressure to excel without adequate support systems, often leading to anxiety and stress. She added that after her electoral loss, she was criticized for her failed marriage and other perceived ‘weaknesses’ and was considered ‘incompetent’ in managing her family.

Lack of Investment in Women

According to study respondents, significant pressure was placed on women leaders by male counterparts, civil society, the media, and the general public with women expected to be adept administrators, articulate speakers, effective strategists, and competent jurists all at once. For example, Rita Shahi, Chairperson of Bhairabi Rural Municipality in Karnali Province, expressed disappointment at facing scrutiny and doubt from those who entrusted her with leadership responsibilities. Shahi further complained about the lack of support from her party, which she blamed for undermining

women's confidence by questioning their ability to make independent decisions.

Parwati Tamang, a Nepali Congress leader, recounted that she had to abandon her education early after her family was displaced during the Maoist insurgency. She was elected as a member of the Gandaki Provincial Assembly in 2022 at the age of 50. Despite her long association with the party, she complained that the party had failed to provide adequate support and investment in women leaders. Women leaders interviewed in the study emphasized the need for the political parties to offer more support through training, and provide more opportunities with greater responsibilities, and allow inputs from women leaders in decision-making processes. Respondents also highlighted the need for formal support from their parties during elections and campaigns and argued that political parties offered only limited and tokenistic support to women.

Women leaders reported struggling to gain sufficient support and investment from political parties, government entities, and other stakeholders. This lack of investment was evident in the minimal participation of women in party offices, their limited candidacies in the FPTP electoral system, and their restricted leadership roles at the local level. A CPN (UML) central committee member highlighted how women were often neglected by leadership during election campaigns, leading to weak performances and defeats. She said she only received party support after persistent requests.

Women leaders in the study voiced concerns over the absence of consistent capacity-building opportunities, limited representation in public forums, decision-making processes dominated by informal settings, and the exclusion of women from such formal structures. Although political parties did not explicitly reject women's participation, none of the interviewed party leaders presented a clear plan to enhance women's involvement both in number, and quality. Party leaders considered the formation of women's wings and departments as significant achievements, as highlighted by Usha

Raut, President of NWA. She noted that many party leaders believed that these departments sufficiently represented women. She complained about women's marginalization in important party meetings and criticized the focus on fulfilling legal quotas over addressing substantial issues like skill development and delegation of responsibilities. RSP Chief Whip Santosh Pariyar remarked that the expectation for women to excel without adequate investment was inherently unfair. Study respondents also pointed to the prevailing attitude of replacing one woman with another and considering that as an achievement.

Excessive Emphasis on Electoral Politics

The excessive emphasis on electoral politics appeared to overshadow other crucial political processes including organization, committee functions, decision-making, legislation, and inclusion of women. Study respondents said that an electoral defeat often signaled the end of political aspirations for women leaders, unlike for men who found their ways back to prominence despite electoral setbacks. Respondents explained how losing in elections diminished their standing within party hierarchies and hindered future participation while their male counterparts enjoyed more opportunities for comebacks in subsequent elections.

Concerted efforts were made to ensure 33 percent women participation in party working committees, yet the internal party dynamics were increasingly dominated by considerations of electoral gains. Women leaders across political parties reported neglect from party leadership following electoral defeats. Two women candidates from the Janamat Party said that their communication and engagement with the party leadership decreased dramatically after their electoral defeats. Dr. Sharjaha Khatun, Deputy Mayor candidate in Gaur Municipality from the Nepali Congress, stated that she felt less important after her election defeat. She said, "Before the election, I was approached by everyone. I agreed to the nomination

after receiving persistent requests from the party leadership. I used to get invitations to various public meetings and party gatherings. But the situation has completely changed now.”

Saliman Miyan, Ward Member of Bhairabi Rural Municipality, was born in 1973 during the partyless Panchayat era. Inspired by her mother’s activism during the anti-Panchayat movement, Saliman became politically active. Her mother’s role as village committee president and focus on ending gender



discrimination encouraged Saliman to pursue both education and politics. Saliman studied up to ninth grade and joined the Nepali Congress in 1990. Her experience as a health volunteer deepened her understanding of women’s issues.

Saliman first entered electoral politics in 1997, running unsuccessfully for a ward position. Despite setbacks, she continued to seek political office, contesting the last three district party conventions unsuccessfully. In 2017, Saliman aimed for a ward member seat, confident in the legal provision ensuring two women representatives, but the party did not nominate her. She wanted to run for ward chair in 2022, but the party nominated her as ward member instead, which she won. Three generations of her family are now active in the Nepali Congress. Dissatisfied with the limited representation of Muslim women in politics, Saliman plans to continue pursuing a higher office or support her daughter’s political ambitions.

CPN-UML's Meena Gurung explained the party's political culture differently. She argued that elections were a way to test strength, and those who could not demonstrate their strength were considered weak by the party and the general public, adding, "The party knows that it is not easy for women to win elections, so they should think about how to present women in a stronger light for the next contest." The study also noted that women who lost local and provincial elections were less politically active compared to those with party responsibilities at the national and federal levels. The impact of electoral defeat on public perception also appeared to carry significant and long-term consequences for women's participation in politics.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Women's formal participation in Nepali politics began with the fall of the autocratic Rana regime and the advent of democracy in 1951. Women were once only indirect participants in political movements, but they have fought throughout Nepal's modern history to secure formal participation through major legal statutes and political milestones.

Following the historic second People's Movement of 2006, the Interim Constitution of 2007 ensured 33 percent women's representation in the Constituent Assembly, and the 2015 Constitution institutionalized these historic gains, expanding women's mandatory participation across all levels of government, leading to a significant increase in women's representation in the public life. In the decade following the adoption of the new federal Constitution in 2015, the debate shifted to the lack of a meaningful participation despite significant numeric increases. The political parties, while showing some gradual improvements, failed to institutionalize gender equality in their internal party structures. One of this study's key findings was a lack of sincerity in institutionalizing proportional inclusion - with both political parties and government bodies failing to uphold the laws, as well as actively undermining them.

Despite constitutional mandates, women's representation in Nepali government and political parties remained inadequate. Even where quotas existed, women were often assigned less influential roles. Political

parties have not fully embraced their own statutes regarding women's participation, and there is little progress in integrating women into official roles. Political parties' understanding of women's representation was nominal and limited to numeric participation despite a noticeable increase in the aspiration for leadership among female leaders, especially at the local level. This was more evident among Dalit women, who increasingly sought higher positions and actively participated in party politics.

This study showed that family support, societal attitudes, access to resources, party backing, and safety nets were critical factors influencing women's political involvement as evident in the challenges faced since the adoption of the federal Constitution, and these factors would remain crucial in shaping the future trajectory of women's meaningful representation. The study also concluded how political parties needed to revise their legal statutes and overall political culture to accommodate the growing leadership ambitions of women. Despite Nepal's goal of 40 percent female representation in both federal and provincial legislatures by 2030, both political parties and the government were neglecting and undermining women's leadership ambitions rather than sincerely implementing legislation and policies to support them. The fact that an additional 400 women were still needed to be elected to achieve the 42 percent target at the local level also necessitated collaboration among political parties, government entities like the ECN, and other civil society stakeholders to work towards bridging the existing disparities.

Nepali women, who have continuously fought against authoritarian regimes since 1951, have faced the same pattern of challenges in their struggle for political participation. Despite playing important roles in these movements, women have had to repeatedly fight their own party leadership and male colleagues on issues like the right to vote, the right to contest elections, participate in constitution drafting, and secure one-third representation across state bodies. Despite significant gains in numeric representation, Nepali women continued to struggle for participation in key decision-making roles at the local level, the FPTP electoral system for

the HoR and provincial assemblies, and within party structures. Women leaders at federal and provincial levels faced constant pressure from party leaders, cadres, society, and the media to succeed under the FPTP system, but barriers including increasing costs of election, public mistrust, biased nomination processes, and lack of security limited their participation. The study pointed to the ongoing debate around systemic discrimination and limited opportunities, which continued to hinder women's equal participation in politics. It highlighted that women's involvement in key decision-making processes remained highly restricted. While there had been notable achievements – with women holding prominent positions like the President of Nepal and the Speaker of the HoR – these were seen as exceptions rather than the norm. The study concluded that much more progress was needed and called for all stakeholders to collaborate and take more decisive, sincere and coordinated actions to advance women's roles and representation in Nepali politics.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on its findings, and feedback from its respondents, the study makes the following set of recommendations to promote meaningful participation and greater advancement of women in Nepali politics.

Leadership and Agency level Intervention

- ***Prioritize Impactful and Continuous Capacity Building Efforts***

Despite constitutional and legal provisions mandating 33 percent women representation in politics and state institutions, women political leaders face multiple barriers. To address these challenges, agency-level interventions through long-term capacity-building programs targeted at women political leaders are crucial. CSOs and development partners should collaborate to design sustained engagement programs aimed at knowledge enhancement.

- ***Tailor Capacity Enhancement Interventions to the Needs of Dalit and Marginalized Women***

Recognizing the diverse intersectional differences among women political leaders belonging to different sections of Nepali society, it is essential to identify their specific challenges and tailor targeted programs reflecting ethnic, caste, community, provincial, and local characteristics. Such interventions can move beyond focusing on women with social, political, and economic capital who can leverage their socio-economic privileges.

Institutional and Structural Level Interventions

- ***Bind Political Parties to Ensure Gender-equality at Every Step of the Party Structure, Including Key Leadership Roles***

Political parties are key institutions for promoting women's political participation. They must effectively implement constitutionally mandated quotas. CSOs and development partners should initiate programs targeting political parties and their leadership to ensure women's representation in key decision-making institutions.

- ***Promote Civil Society Collaboration to Develop Gender-sensitive Programs and Interventions***

Civil society organizations and development partners can collaborate to develop programs and interventions that create informal forums to engage men and women in promoting gender equality without causing hostility or conflict among men.

- ***Establish Multi-stakeholder Platforms for Advancement of Women in Public Life***

Development partners can create well-resourced platforms for sharing knowledge and ideas among political party officials, CSOs, and community leaders to promote nationwide gender-

awareness programs for men and women. They should also devise training programs for women political leaders and candidates on fundraising, media engagement, and campaign strategies, highlighting women's voices through research, publication, and interview profiles.

- ***Invest in Training Academies and Knowledge Sharing Avenues***

Invest in local, provincial and federal level platforms like training academies, along with mobilizing economic and financial resources, to encourage young women to participate in public life.

Regional Level Interventions

- ***Initiate Regional Knowledge Sharing and Learning Exchange Platforms for Women***

Regularly share and exchange knowledge, legal frameworks, policies, and success stories regionally to promote women's political participation.

- ***Provide Cross-country Regional Networks for CSOs to Promote Gender-friendly Political Culture***

Establish a regional digital platform for cross-country networking among CSOs and development partners, enabling women leaders to share ideas, strategies, and experiences for political empowerment.

With the adoption of the federal Constitution, one-third of women's participation in federal and provincial legislatures and 40 percent in local governments has been ensured. While these constitutional and legal provisions have led to significant progress in women's numeric representation, the study concludes that participation at the leadership level remains dismal. Patriarchal social structure and inadequate support mechanisms continue to pose challenges in women's entry, continuity and attainment of leadership positions. The lack of effective monitoring mechanisms has led political parties and their leadership to be complacent in implementing commitments made on their own statutes and manifestos. To ensure women's proportional and inclusive participation, in line with the spirit of the Constitution, it is essential for the Government of Nepal, political parties, the Election Commission Nepal, and other stakeholders to take serious steps in enforcing existing laws and formulating progressive legislation.



Democracy Resource Center Nepal

www.democracyresource.org