

Women in Local Governance: Citizen Perceptions of Female Leaders' Servant and Ethical Leadership and Their Citizenship Behaviors in Kathmandu, Nepal

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Received 6 December 2025 | Accepted 24 December 2025 | Published 20 January 2026

ABSTRACT

The introduction of the reservation system in the local governance system of Nepal has significantly increased female representation in ward offices. This high number now offers a valuable opportunity to understand how citizens perceive the leadership behaviours of these elected women. This study investigates how perceptions of citizens about Servant Leadership (SL) and Ethical Leadership (EL) of female ward representatives influence the Organizational Citizenship Behaviour of citizens with the Public Service Motivation (PSM) as a mediator. Using simple random sampling, data was collected from 458 residents of Gokarneshwor Municipality, Kathmandu filtering only those respondents who were familiar with the elected female ward leaders. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyze the data which showed strong explanatory power with 78.6% of variance in the citizens' OCB ($R^2 = 0.786$). The results revealed that direct effects of SL ($\beta = 0.511$, $p < .001$) and EL ($\beta = 0.444$, $p < .001$) were significant and they positively predict OCB. Further, PSM also strongly predicts OCB ($\beta = 0.505$, $p < .001$) and partially mediates the influence of both styles of leadership. The results highlight the fact that women leaders are not just numbers to fill up the seats via reservation, but their action and approach to public service delivery have impressed the citizens and hence them being in the local government offices representing their wards and providing services to general public is a clear indication of the country marching towards gender equality. This study clearly backs the reservation system as citizens perception on their women political leaders elected under the reservation system is indeed a positive one.

KEYWORDS

Citizenship Behaviour, Ethical Leadership, Local Governance, Nepal, Public Service Motivation, Reservation, Servant Leadership

INTRODUCTION

In developing countries like Nepal, local governments play a very vital role on promoting equality and delivering sustainable services for residents of diverse backgrounds (Jonck, 2024). In recent years, reservation systems have had a very crucial impact in increasing the number of female leaders in decision making positions at all levels of the government. With the representation of women increasing in the governing bodies of all levels, the responsibility of the government to deliver better services to the citizens and meet their expectations is also increasing (Ding & Wang, 2024; Sreeram & Kumar, 2025). In Nepal, both the constitution and electoral systems have proper reservation policies to promote gender representation. The laws of Nepal reserve seats for women at the local ward level, at municipal level, province level and state level like the House of Representatives (UN Women, 2023). As a result, the recent local election

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has put more women in leadership roles in Nepal than ever before. However, even with the high numbers, very few women have won elections in open competition and for higher positions like the mayor and female representation in those top-most positions remains limited (Institute for Integrated Development Studies, 2025).

The increase in the number of women at leadership positions does not guarantee effective leadership outcomes. Further, research has shown that a significant number of women elected through reservation are assigned subordinate roles rather than decision-making positions (IIDS, 2025) and lack the decisive authority necessary to influence policy. Hence, their actual capacity to deliver meaningful impact and successfully gain trust of the citizens (Jonck, 2024) must be studied to truly understand the true impact of reservation.

Contemporary public administration research has highlighted the importance of leadership style in developing public trust, improving service delivery outcomes, and creating civic engagement with public institutions (Hanafiah & Li, 2024; Satia, 2024). For example, Servant Leadership (SL), defined by its core elements of empathy, empowerment, humility, and commitment to the needs of the followers and community welfare, is empirically linked to heightened proactive behaviour and commitment among public sector employees and citizens (Hanafiah & Li, 2024). Similarly, Ethical Leadership (EL), which is characterized by leaders who show integrity, fairness, moral decision-making, and transparency, is demonstrated to grow accountability and build essential institutional trust (Satia, 2024). Research suggests that when public leaders adopt either the Servant or Ethical approach, they inspire followers through motivation and engagement which leads to better performance of the organization and public satisfaction (Zhu & Akhtar, 2023; Hanafiah & Li, 2024; Satia, 2024).

Furthermore, meta-analytic research confirms a positive relationship between Servant Leadership (SL) and Public Service Motivation (PSM) which is an intrinsic drive leaders possess to serve the common good and is noted in multiple cultural settings (Ding & Wang, 2024). This evidence highlights that conduct of leader is critical, not just for organizational performance, but also for influencing citizen perceptions legitimacy and dedication to public service of the leader. To be more precise, when citizens perceive leaders as ethical, equitable, and devoted to community welfare, citizens tend to trust the leader and show active participation in civic activities (Ding & Wang, 2024; Kaur & Singh, 2023).

Despite a lot of research on both women leadership and the reservation system, a substantial knowledge gap remains regarding how citizens perceive the behaviours of women who were elected through reservation system. Most existing literature in the sector focus either on internal employee behaviour within the public organizations or evaluation of leadership of female leaders by the staff members or on impact of reservation system and its achievements in terms of gender equality goals. Relatively few empirical studies study the citizen-level dynamics and try to understand their perceptions about the elected female leaders. Specifically, research is very rare on how a female leader's style influences the perception of the general public and whether their actions foster the Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) among residents (Bhattacharya & Packalen, 2023; Jha & Sharma, 2024). So, there is a critical area unexplored, particularly in understanding how citizens respond to, recognize, and finally engage with the female leaders in

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local governance settings especially in Nepal as there have been only 2 local elections with such reservation system at Ward Level.

The study addresses the knowledge gap that exists by exploring how residents in a specific Nepalese municipality (Gokarneshwor Municipality of Kathmandu District) perceive the Servant and Ethical Leadership behaviours shown by the female ward representatives of their local ward elected via the reservation system. The primary objective is to investigate how these perceptions influence the recognition of the Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) of the residents defined as benefiting the community. Furthermore, the research explores if the citizens' perceptions of Public Service Motivation (PSM) in these elected female leaders acts as a mediating mechanism between the two perceived leadership styles (SL/EL) and the OCB. By focusing on citizens' direct experiences with the female leaders and the perceptions thus built, this study attempts to examine if the female leaders elected from the reservation system successfully convert the political inclusion policy into publicly recognized leadership and community contributions.

Theoretically, this research contributes by integrating the two Servant and Ethical Leadership models into the perspectives of citizens on gendered political representation which is a relatively underexplored area. In the practical terms, the results will highlight gender sensitive leadership training, capacity building initiatives, and policy recommendations for female leadership based on the perception of citizens and thus move beyond just the number. The study examines the perception of citizens on how elected female leaders have led at local government level, focusing on the ones elected by the reservation system, and how they can engage the general public for better governance in participatory ways (Kaur & Singh, 2023; Sharma & Kumar, 2024).

Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis

Main theoretical background in the study is a combination of leadership, public service motivation, along with organizational behaviour theories in order to understand engagement of citizens under the female reservation leadership. To increase citizen participation in government activities and to uplift the Organizational Citizenship Behaviours (OCB), leadership at the local government level from female leaders elected by the reservation systems has to be very strong (Kaur & Singh, 2023). The leadership of the female leaders can have an impact on the participation of citizens which results in quality of local governance and inclusion (Bhandari et al., 2023) and results in better governance beneficial for all.

Servant Leadership and OCB (H1)

Servant Leadership (SL) is a style of leadership where the top-most priority is given to followers and the focus is on empowering the public along with community development, the concept started by Greenleaf (1977). Recent research also confirms that servant-oriented behaviours like displaying empathy, humility, and genuine involvement of followers in decision making process, significantly enhances the public engagement and helps develop institutional trust amongst residents (Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2023; Ali et al., 2025). When residents observe female leaders elected through gender quotas showing community focused services, it creates powerful relationship and trust (Greenleaf, 1977). This results in citizens developing voluntary Organizational Citizenship Behaviours (OCB), and being motivated towards providing

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constructive feedback, participating in local programs, and supporting development initiatives of the local government (Makau et al., 2024). In the context of Nepal, the leaders with Servant Leadership approach can build trust and have greater civic participation in local governance.

H1: Perceived Servant Leadership of female leaders is positively related to Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB).

Ethical Leadership and OCB (H2)

Ethical Leadership (EL) involves the leaders demonstrating morally right and appropriate conduct as this is done both personally and in their interactions with people and also actively promoting ethical behaviour through decisions they make (Brown et al., 2005). Within public leadership, there is high importance of ethical leadership because it is vital for building public trust, reinforcing the institutional legitimacy, and also ensuring accountability (Rostami et al., 2024; Zhang & Zhou, 2024). When citizens perceive their leaders as ethical, honest, and transparent, they are motivated to engage in voluntary actions that can benefit the community (Zhu & Akhtar, 2023). By setting a standard of fairness and morality, ethical leaders increase confidence of citizens and motivate them for involvement that benefits the government and community.

H2: Perceived Ethical Leadership of female leaders is positively related to Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB).

The Nexus of Leadership and Public Service Motivation (H3, H4)

The eagerness to serve the general public and make meaningful contributions to the well-being of the society is Public Service Motivation (PSM) (Perry & Wise, 1990). For active involvement in the community activities and local government, motivation is vital for the leader and once motivated, they will do things willingly (Homberg et al., 2019; Horton & Van, 2024). This study examines how citizens perceive the motivation of leader to participate in governance changes with their perception of the leadership style of the leaders. When the elected female leaders exhibit Servant Leadership, they show focus on the needs of the community and work to empower community and this helps the leaders connect with the citizens and take action on their behalf (Sharma & Kumar, 2024). Similarly, Ethical Leadership advocates for fairness and justice, so it gives the justification the leaders need to participate in the government actively due to fairness (Ali et al., 2023). As a result, when the citizens feel that female leaders have the servant and ethical leadership styles; it helps them feel strongly about the PSM perception of the female leader. This in return, strengthens their perception of the motivation in leader to remain engaged in the local governance activities (Homberg et al., 2024).

H3: Perceived Servant Leadership of female leaders is positively related to their Public Service Motivation (PSM) perception.

H4: Perceived Ethical Leadership of female leaders is positively related to their Public Service Motivation (PSM) perception.

The Motivational Bridge: PSM and OCB (H5)

Former research on leadership has established that the Public Service Motivation (PSM) in

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leaders has a very strong impact on their follower in regards to their involvement in government activities (Kim & Oh, 2023). Elected leaders that have high levels of PSM can generate involvement of citizens in government projects and activities. This inner drive in the citizens brought by the leaders make them to engage in productive activities that benefit the community as a whole (Paarlberg & Perry, 2018). Hence, PSM of the leader plays an important role in connecting how citizens perceive leadership and the willingness of the leader to actively lead the local governance with full engagement.

H5: Public Service Motivation (PSM) is positively related to Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB).

H5a: PSM mediates the relationship between Perceived Servant Leadership and OCB.

H5b: PSM mediates the relationship between Perceived Ethical Leadership and OCB.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION***Research Design and Study Setting***

The study utilized cross-sectional survey in order to test all of the relationships hypothesized above and examine the perception of citizens on the elected female leaders with data collected via questionnaire, making it a quantitative study. For this study that examines the established connections between different leadership factors, cross-sectional survey is suitable as it allows for a thorough analysis of how demographically different citizens perceive their female leaders (Hair et al., 2023; Ringle et al., 2023). This study, conducted in Gokarneshwor Municipality of Kathmandu District in Nepal, has a total of nine wards (numbered from 1 to 9), focuses on these wards which are the lowest level of government in Nepal. This study examines how the perceived leadership styles of female ward representatives elected by the reservation system and their PSM influence the organizational citizenship behaviours of the residents. This is a subject that is vital for policymaking to achieve gender equality by understanding the effectiveness of reservation strategies from the perspective of citizens that voted for the leaders (Bhandari et al., 2023).

Population and Sampling Strategy

There are a total of 11 municipalities in Kathmandu District and the study is carried out in one of them, Gokarneshwor Municipality and it has a total of 9 ward offices. In each ward office, there are 2 elected female leaders (representatives) under the reservation system. Gokarneshwor Municipality was selected as it is a municipality with urban, rural and semi-urban settings within the same municipality while it also had robust census data, making the study possible with scientific sampling method. As per the data from the 2019 Census conducted by the municipality of households within the municipality, the established population was 12,614, as there were 12,614 households, with the unit of analysis being one respondent from each household. The sample size for the population of 12,614 was 388 (Yamane, 1967), the study was conducted amongst 458 respondents, enough for analysis with Structural Equation Modeling for the PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2017) as well as to make sure that there were adequate respondents even after the screening question. Probability based simple random sampling, digital lottery, was conducted with household number as a unique identifier and the household was reached via the contact details taken from the municipality office as secondary data. This ensured that every household had an equal chance of being picked. This simple random sampling makes the results more reliable and applicable to the larger population of the municipality and beyond

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(Taherdoost, 2023) and thereby reduces the chances of potential bias in the sample. To qualify for the survey, respondents were asked about their familiarity with the elected female leaders and only the ones who knew the elected female leaders were allowed to participate in the survey ensuring that they had idea about the female leaders to evaluate them.

Data Collection Procedure

To gather data from the residents, the study used Google Forms to conduct an online survey. After establishing contact with the respondent, a link with the form was sent to the selected participants via WhatsApp and SMS. To make sure that respondents knew their elected female leaders, a screening question was included: “Do you know the female elected leaders in your Ward office?” and only those respondents were allowed to participate in the survey who knew their female leaders and answered “Yes” to the screening question. This ensured that the respondents knew the female leader they were evaluating. The method helped to establish the reliability of the data and its significance as well and both these are crucial to understand how perceived leadership styles can impact the perceived motivation and involvement of the elected female leaders (Evans & Mathur, 2023).

Instrumentation and Measurement

The study used very established scales to measure how the citizens perceived their local female leaders. All the measurement items of the study were rated on seven-point Likert scale with numbers ranging from 1 to 7, with the number 1 representing Strongly Disagree while 7 represented Strongly Agree. The questionnaire had a short introduction to assure respondents of data security and privacy and inform them about the study, the time it would take in general to answer all the questions of the survey as well as their right to exit the survey and points of contact. Firstly, the questionnaire had 14 items for the Servant Leadership (SL) that were adapted from Van Dierendonck and Patterson (2021) with questions relating to citizens perception on the leader’s community service, empowering people, and meeting the needs of the citizens. Secondly, adapted ten items from Brown et al. (2005) and Rostami et al. (2024) were used for Ethical Leadership with questions relating to the perceived integrity, fairness, and moral behaviour. Next, for Public Service Motivation (PSM) in leader, 11 items were included to judge the motivation in female leaders (Kim & Oh, 2023). After that, the Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) of the citizens to involve in the governance was adapted from Paarlberg and Perry (2018) and 9 items were included. And finally, some demographic information was collected on gender, age, education, occupation and ward number. A pre-test with 40 respondents was done before the survey to ensure validity as well as reliability which resulted with constructs and items returning satisfactory result endorsing the instrument developed for the study.

Data Analysis Method

To analyze the established relationships, the data was analyzed with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) as it can handle complex models, moderation as well as mediation and focus on predicting the dependent variables (Hair et al., 2023; Ringle et al., 2023). Further, analysis of data was done in two distinct stages, firstly, the test of measurement model done to examine reliability and validity (convergent as well as discriminant), and secondly, structural model examined the relationships between the variables of study that were proposed.

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In the analysis, R2 values were calculated to evaluate the variance explained, while the mediation and moderation were tested by applying bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples for checking the statistical significance of the results (Preacher & Hayes, 2023).

RESULTS

Data analysis was done with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS software. A two-step approach was used in the survey as at first, evaluation of measurement model was completed and then the structural model (Hair et al., 2023; Ringle et al., 2023). Primary goal was to test relationships amongst the two leadership styles (SL and EL) and Public Service Motivation (PSM) with Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB).

From the 458 respondents who participated, 54 respondents did not know the elected women leaders and hence did not qualify for the survey leaving behind 404 respondents as the total sample that had completed data. Amongst the 404 that qualified and completed the survey, only 332 responses were considered for the study after data screening as 72 responses were removed during the screening process. From the 332 responses that were finally considered for the study, there was a proper representation of the demographics that were included in the survey which can be seen from the Table 1A and 1B below showcasing demography of respondents. Due to the outer loading not meeting the thresholds, 4 items of ELQ, 3 items from PSM, 4 items from OCB and 2 items from SLQ were removed during the data screening and analysis.

Table 1A: Demography of the Respondents

Description	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Demographics: Gender</i>		
Male	154	46.38554
Female	174	52.40964
Others	4	1.204819
<i>Demographics: Age</i>		
Under 20 Years	21	6.325301
21 to 30 Years	90	27.10843
31 to 40 Years	81	24.39759
41 to 50 Years	72	21.68675
51 to 60 Years	50	15.06024
61 to 70 Years	18	5.421687
Above 70 Years	0	0
<i>Demographics: Education</i>		
Master's Degree or above	56	16.86747
Bachelor's Degree	105	31.62651
High School (Grade 12)	98	29.51807
Secondary School (Grade 10)	44	13.25301
General Reading and Writing	27	8.13253
No Schooling	2	0.60241

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<i>Demographics: Occupation</i>		
Government Service	34	10.24096
Private Service	78	23.49398
Self Employed / Business	57	17.16867
Foreign Employment	33	9.939759
Retired	18	5.421687
Agriculture	38	11.44578
Unemployed	74	22.28916

Source: Created from primary data by the author

The demographic analysis which is compiled from a total of 332 respondents of Gokarneshwor Municipality clearly shows a sample characteristic of a young, educated, and employed diverse urban population. The gender distribution of the sample shows a slightly higher female participation (52.41%) while male was 46.39%, with a small representation from the “Others” category (1.20%) as recognized by the Government of Nepal. Age of the respondents indicates a strong concentration in the active and young people, specifically those aged 21 to 30 years (27.11%) and 31 to 40 years (24.40%). Collectively, these two groups account for over half of the total sample. Conversely, only 5.42% of respondents are above 60 years and no respondents were above 70 years.

Educational level across the sample is high, with the majority (78.02%) having an education level of High School (Grade 12) or higher. The largest single category amongst the study categories is respondents with a Bachelor's Degree (31.63%), followed closely by the High School (grade 12) graduates (29.52%). Regarding occupation, the largest proportion are in Private Service (23.49%) and Unemployed (22.29%), followed closely by the Self Employed/Business category (17.17%). Furthermore, the survey had proportional representation across the 9 wards of the municipality with the data ranging from a minimum of 9.31% in Ward 9 to a maximum of 13.21% in Ward 8 as listed in Table 1B.

Table 1B: Ward Distribution of the Respondents

Ward Number	Frequency	Percentage
1	41	12.3123
2	34	10.2102
3	35	10.5105
4	35	10.5105
5	42	12.6126
6	34	10.2102
7	37	11.1111
8	44	13.2132
9	31	9.30931

Source: Created from primary data by the author

Measurement Model Assessment

For all key variables of study, robust reliability as well as validity was confirmed by the measurement model. Cronbach's Alpha (α) along with another popular tool Composite Reliability (pa and pc) which are strongly recommended for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) were used for evaluation of internal consistency. Findings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2023; Henseler et al., 2024). For instance, Servant Leadership (SLQ) construct reported a pc of 0.983, and Public Service Motivation (PSM) showed a pc of 0.984, the Table 2 below highlights them all. These scores show the excellent internal consistency and also confirm that the items being studied are highly reliable indicators of their respective latent variables of the study.

Table 2: Reliability and Validity

Construct	Cronbach's alpha (α)	Composite reliability (pa)	Composite reliability (pc)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
ELQ	0.977	0.977	0.981	0.896
OCB	0.966	0.967	0.974	0.882
PSM	0.981	0.981	0.984	0.882
SLQ	0.981	0.982	0.983	0.831

Source: Created from primary data by the author

Further, the Convergent validity was established by using two critical measures of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and the outer factor loadings. During the outer loading evaluation, to meet the threshold of outer loading, some items were moved during data analysis and screening. AVE values were above the minimum required threshold of 0.50 which confirm that more than half of the variance of associated indicator items is explained by latent construct (Hair et al., 2023). Furthermore, the individual outer loadings for all reflective indicator items were exceptionally high and above 0.80 which shows even the minimum values are above the 0.70 threshold. This strongly confirms convergent validity of constructs being studied (Sarstedt et al., 2024) and hence confirms that the items of the study are measuring the intended respective constructs accurately and reliably.

Similarly, Discriminant validity was checked using Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) which is preferred modern criterion for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) that is based on variance. Results showed HTMT values for all, as listed in Table 3 below, were below the threshold number (0.90) (Henseler et al., 2015). The HTMT value between Ethical Leadership (ELQ) and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) was the highest with 0.899, but remained marginally below the threshold (0.90), acceptable in research with conceptually related constructs (Henseler et al., 2015). In behavioural research, latent constructs of study often have an underlying social core leading to high inter-correlations like in studies evaluating leadership and employee outcomes, findings showed HTMT values from 0.88 to 0.91 for some constructs but the studies maintained discriminant validity through bootstrapping procedures (Ali et al., 2023; Hair et al., 2024). In the context of this study, ethical and servant leadership have theoretically overlapping frameworks and HTMT ratios near 0.90 are common (Sarstedt et al., 2024) in these studies. Further, the HTMT ratios near the threshold of 0.90 do not always

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indicate the lack of distinctness, if the 95% confidence interval does not include 1.0. Findings of this study align with results of Homberg et al. (2024) as well as Timsina et al. (2024) who concluded that these variables perform as unique predictors even though they are very closely intertwined in the South Asian governance contexts. Hence, the high HTMT values in the study show the theoretical synergy between the constructs in this study of public perception on female political leaders. As all statistical criteria were met, study proceeded towards structural model assessment to examine relationships that were hypothesized (Hair et al., 2023).

Table 3: HTMT Matrix

Constructs	ELQ	OCB	PSM	SLQ
ELQ				
OCB	0.899			
PSM	0.894	0.879		
SLQ	0.869	0.877	0.897	

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model of constructs of this study showed a robust explanatory power with 78.6% of the variance (R^2) in the Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) ($R^2_{OCB} = 0.786$) of the citizens. This variance explains that the perceived leadership styles (Servant Leadership and Ethical Leadership) and the Public Service Motivation (PSM) in the female leaders play significant key roles in building voluntary participation of citizens in local government (Sarstedt et al., 2024). Furthermore, to assess path coefficients for significance, bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples was done (Hair et al., 2023) which showed that all the direct paths were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) as all the t-statistics exceeded 3.29. Particularly, perceived Servant Leadership (SL) showed the strongest positive impact on both the OCB ($\beta = 0.511$, $t = 6.724$) and PSM ($\beta = 0.536$, $t = 6.790$), whereas Ethical Leadership (EL) also significantly influenced the OCB ($\beta = 0.444$, $t = 6.044$) and PSM ($\beta = 0.438$, $t = 5.647$). Furthermore, PSM also showed positive and highly influential effect on OCB ($\beta = 0.505$, $t = 6.522$) and it confirms its important role. The statistical results collectively provide very strong empirical support for all the 5 the direct hypotheses H1 to H5. The findings highlight the fact that servant leadership of female elected leaders is the strongest driver of both motivation and engagement (Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2021; Kim & Oh, 2023; Henseler et al., 2024).

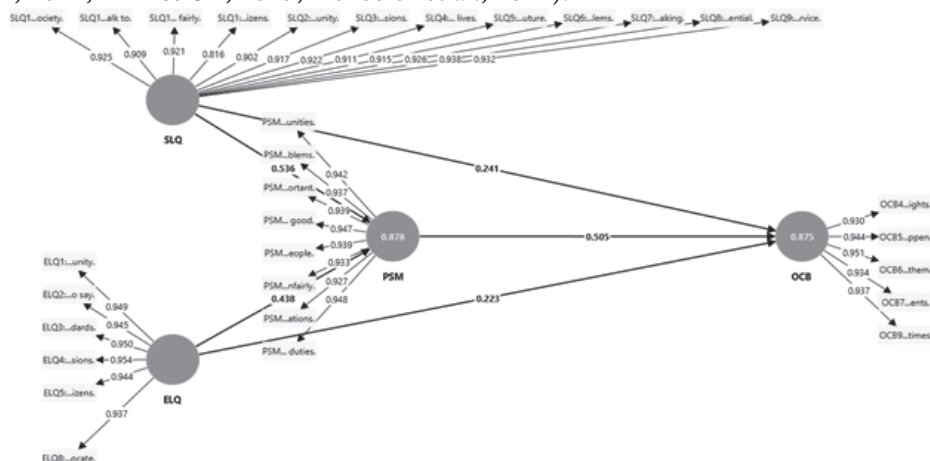


Figure 1: PLS SEM Model

Source: Created from primary data by the author

Further, bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was implemented to determine the indirect effect for the mediation analysis. The analysis confirmed that the relationship between SL as well as EL and OCB is partially mediated by Public Service Motivation (PSM). In particular, the analysis conducted confirmed support for Hypothesis H5a (SL → PSM → OCB) and Hypothesis H5b (EL → PSM → OCB). This finding is important because as it clearly suggests that the positive influence of behaviour of female political leaders is exerted through two channels, one of them being a direct impact on observable leader engagement and the second one being significant indirect impact achieved by further strengthening the motivation for public service (PSM) (Homberg et al., 2024). The partial mediation further suggests that leadership behaviours directly encourage social actions; a substantial portion of that effect operates by boosting the motivation of the citizens (Paarlberg & Perry, 2018; Sharma & Kumar, 2024).

Table 4: Total Effects and Significance Testing

Path	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
ELQ -> OCB	0.385	0.391	0.094	4.083	0.0000
ELQ -> PSM	0.438	0.437	0.078	5.647	0.0000
PSM -> OCB	0.596	0.585	0.11	5.394	0.0000
SLQ -> OCB	0.529	0.523	0.095	5.54	0.0000
SLQ -> PSM	0.536	0.536	0.079	6.79	0.0000

Source: Created from primary data by the author

It is clear that empirical support for the framework of this research has been provided by statistical results, mediation analysis and structural model. The findings clearly demonstrate that the female leaders elected through reservation when perceived by citizens as exhibiting strong servant and ethical leadership significantly and positively influence both the motivation (PSM) and voluntary civic behaviours (OCB) perceptions. These findings of the study offer substantial theoretical validation for integrating both the Servant and Ethical leadership models with the motivational theory (PSM) in the context of political leadership.

DISCUSSION

Primary objective of the research was to understand perception of citizens about servant and ethical leadership of female leaders, and how these leadership styles influence citizen engagement in government. The study examined mediating power of the citizen perspective on leaders' Public Service Motivation (PSM). The results demonstrated high explanatory power of 78.6% of variance in OCB. The high R² value from the analysis validates the framework of the study and also highlights the critical role that perceived ethical and servant leadership behaviours along with the PSM play in developing community participation in governance (Sarstedt et al., 2024). Collectively, the findings clearly highlight that leadership conduct can inspire people

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to participate in local governance and be more involved (Hair et al., 2023; Kim & Oh, 2023; Henseler et al., 2024) of Gokarneshwor Municipality in Nepal.

The study confirmed both the Servant Leadership (SL) and Ethical Leadership (EL) were statistically significant predictors of Organizational Citizenship Behaviour. As SL had the most dominant positive influence ($\beta = 0.511$), which was closely followed by EL ($\beta = 0.444$), it shows that perceived leadership is vital in developing community engagement in governance. This finding also aligns with Social Exchange Theory and highlights that citizens perceive positive leadership behaviours in their female leaders, their voluntary action towards the community and government increase significantly (Van Dierendonck & Patterson, 2021; Ahmad et al., 2023). Importantly, the most significant predictive power demonstrated by Servant Leadership suggests that in the context of local governance, female leaders who give high priority to the needs of the community, who demonstrate humility, and who focus on the empowerment of citizens are seen as inspiration and draw active support as well as involvement of the citizens (Timsina et al., 2024). This finding of the study highlights the value of the reservation system in place in Nepal by showcasing that the influence of female leaders elected from the reservation system extends beyond numbers as they have developed a good perception on citizens leading to public trust and involvement.

This study strongly highlights the critical role played by Public Service Motivation (PSM) as mechanism that leads to better engagement. Both Servant Leadership ($\beta = 0.536$) and Ethical Leadership ($\beta = 0.438$) were found to significantly amplify the citizens' perspective on the motivation of leader to contribute to public service. This reinforces the fact that the conduct of female leaders serves as a force for the welfare of the community. Further, as the PSM itself was a powerful predictor of Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) ($\beta = 0.505$) in the study findings, this aligns with earlier theoretical and empirical work that identify motivation as the core driver behind pro-social actions to support of public institutions (Paarlberg & Perry, 2018; Sharma & Kumar, 2024; Horton & Van, 2024). The mediation analysis of this study provided confirmation that the leadership influences OCB by direct channel as well as indirectly by significantly increasing the PSM (Homborg et al., 2024). The results confirm that effective leadership (servant and ethical) acts as a two-pronged catalyst.

Substantive theoretical contributions are provided by the study in the fields of public administration and reservation. At first, the study broadens the scope of organizational leadership theory by successfully applying the Servant Leadership (SL) and Ethical Leadership (EL) frameworks in the context of public perception on their elected leaders. As the study shows how these constructs influence the perception of citizens about their leaders and how they perceive their leaders engage in the local government, the study establishes an empirical bridge that connects concepts from organizational psychology to public administration to understand the citizen-government relationships (Henseler et al., 2024). Further, the study identifies and validates Public Service Motivation (PSM) as a crucial mediating mechanism linking perceived leadership behaviour to the engagement (OCB) thus expanding the application of the motivation theory in the public sector (Horton & Van Ryzin, 2024). Further, this research provides a very solid, evidence-based confirmation about the impact of reservation in local government,

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showing that female leaders can get non-partisan support directly from the citizens when they demonstrate high-quality Servant and Ethical leadership. This highlights the potential of the reservation system to foster effective female leadership that not just fills seats but appeals to the entire community.

Implications of the Study

Results of the research have valuable insights on female political leaders, and are beneficial for political parties and policymakers as they can contribute to enhance local governance and inclusion. Firstly, the study provides a compelling case for developing Servant and Ethical Leadership skills amongst all elected officials and potential candidates who look to take the seats reserved for women. It can be done with municipal capacity-building and training programs, or by the leaders themselves realizing the citizen's perspective as seen in the study on the importance they placed on this leadership behaviour. Political parties should also provide such trainings to foster female leaders with strong leadership and citizen's trust. Such female leaders will help in making governance more inclusive and effective (Ali et al., 2025). Secondly, as Public Service Motivation (PSM) is established as a mediator, political parties and policymakers should actively explore multiple mechanisms to utilize perceived motivations in female leaders to motivate the citizens resulting in more engaged citizens, parties and government. With such initiatives, local governments can foster deeper and more sustained engagement of the general public (Horton & Van Ryzin, 2024). And finally, with citizens' perception of the female leaders elected from the reservation system showing very positive signs, the success of the political reservation system at local government can be taken into other sectors and verticals where women representation is low or where the number of women needs to increase. Seeking for ethical and servant leadership in candidates is indeed a strong starting point as shown by this study and with proper policies, gender equality can be achieved.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Even with the empirical validation of the model used, the existing methodological limitations can be rectified in future studies. The research design being cross-sectional in the study is its main limitation as it adds constraints to draw definitive conclusions on the long-term causality and endogeneity between perceived leadership, motivation, and citizens' behaviour. Future research can overcome this limitation by using a longitudinal design to track evolution of this influence in multiple time stamps, which could provide superior evidence of temporal stability and directionality (Sarstedt et al., 2024). Furthermore, this specific study lacked the contextual factors of governance in South Asia like caste, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status which could strongly moderate these relationships and help understand how citizens from various key backgrounds respond to leadership (Bhattarai & Pokharel, 2024). In a culturally diverse country like Nepal, inclusion of moderators like caste and ethnicity can help understand perceptions from diverse social backgrounds in the future research. Similarly, future research should also look to cover comparative analysis of public perception as male leaders against their female counterparts to understand how public perception changes with the gender of the leader. Likewise, as the study is a quantitative one with evaluation of the female leaders done by residents, future research can also make use of mixed method to get personal sentiments of the residents and leaders alike while female leadership can also be studied with self-evaluation by the leaders. Finally, as

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the data is collected from Gokarneshwor Municipality in Kathmandu, the external validity as well as generalizability of the study must be confirmed by replicating this research in diverse geographical, political and cultural settings with the reservation system in place. Doing this in future research would enhance the broader applicability of the findings (Homborg et al., 2024) from those studies and adding more theoretical and practical contribution to the sector.

CONCLUSION

The research successfully assessed the influence of female leaders who were elected through Nepal's reservation system in Gokarneshwor Municipality, Kathmandu on the citizen perspective of engagement by studying the relationships among the independent variables Servant Leadership, Ethical Leadership and Public Service Motivation, with the dependent variable Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB). Statistical results conclusively validated theoretical model, confirming that perceived SL and EL are highly significant and positive predictors of the citizens' OCB, with Servant Leadership establishing itself as the most dominant driver. Further, the analysis confirmed the critical mediating role of PSM on OCB, which indicates that effective leadership not only directly encourages the pro-social leadership behaviour, but also operates indirectly. In short, this study provides strong empirical evidence that gender-based reservation system of Nepal not only ensures the number of women at the local government in Nepal but also has successfully elected female leaders who are perceived as good leaders by the citizens. Hence, policymakers should give more priority to develop in leadership quality with motivational strategies to ensure participation of more women leaders in the political spectrum of Nepal.

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