

Women's Representation in Three-tier Elections in Nepal (2017-2022)

Indira Devi Prasain^a, Ram Prasad Dhakal^b

^a *Mahendra Morang Adarsh Multiple Campus, T.U. Biratnagar, Nepal.*

^b *Centre for Population and Development, Purbanchal University.*

Corresponding author: Email: indira.prasai@mmamc.tu.edu.np

Abstract

The gender quota is a significant strategy to enhance the global representation of women in legislative bodies. The Constitution of Nepal 2015 implemented a 33 per cent women's quota through a mixed electoral system, ensuring their inclusion. This study analyses women's representation in Nepal's three-tier parliament elections from 2017 to 2022, using a quantitative, descriptive research design with data from the Election Commission of Nepal to identify patterns and trends in women's political participation. It evaluates the constitutional provisions for gender inclusivity through the theoretical frameworks of liberalism and multiculturalism. Nepal ended a 250-year monarchy in 2008 and smoothly transitioned into a federal democratic republican state. After adopting the new federal Constitution in 2015, Nepal completed two rounds of elections in 2017 and 2022 at all three levels. All three levels of Parliament are inclusive, and the federal and provincial levels achieved one-third of women's participation in both elections. Moreover, the local level had a women's share of 41% in 2017 and 41.2% in 2022. The overall representation of women was 40.8% in 2017 and 41.1% in 2022. However, reservation quotas and proportional systems only fulfilled the women's representation. There needs to be more representation of women in the first past the post-election. Women need a frontline leadership position due to a lack of capacity or barriers within political parties, economic deprivation, and lack of networking of women. Even though the country has changed into a federal democratic republican state, women are still being affected by the patriarchal mindset. Implementing a women's quota into the direct electoral system is essential to promote women in the state mechanism. Female seats at any level should not be reduced, even in candidate selection in the interparty coalition arrangement. The quota for women in Parliament should be increased to fifty percent to ensure women proportionate representation.

Keywords

women, political representation, parliament, quota system, electoral system

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1 Introduction

Since women play significant roles in a democracy, they do not seem to be given importance in the governance process. The attainment of gender equality and the full participation of women in politics in a meaningful way are critical indicators of democracy [1]. Women's participation in politics at all levels results in more equal societies and a more robust and representative democracy. To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, women must have equal access to political power and leadership roles [2]. After the extended contribution of women in the political struggle, some positive efforts have been made for women. The Constitution of Nepal, 2015, created after the popular movement of 2006-2007, grants 33% political representation to women, addressing their historical exclusion in political, economic, and social spheres. It was an essential step towards gender equality in Nepal. Gender equality means that all people, regardless of gender identity, have equal access to resources, opportunities, voice, participation, decision-making, and rights [3].

Gender quotas in politics, also called "electoral gender quotas," have represented one of the significant electoral reforms in world politics since the 1990s [4]. Quotas in politics are affirmative actions aimed at reserving a specific percentage of seats or nominations for a particular group. They are usually introduced to boost the group's involvement in decision-making positions and often set a minimum threshold. Quotas can be either statutory or voluntary. Statutory quotas are formally included in a country's Constitution or electoral laws. These quotas ensure that all political parties meet specific gender requirements in their electoral candidate lists, and voluntary quotas are adopted by political parties, requiring a certain minimum number or percentage of women candidates. Statutory quotas are more effective than voluntary ones [5]. The gender quota is the most effective method for increasing female representation in government bodies. This approach helps remove institutional, structural, and social barriers and promotes gender equality [4]. Since 1970, some of the world's democratic industrial countries, such as Germany and Norway, have used the party quota method, which various countries have now assured in their constitutions [6]. The representation of women in Parliament across the globe is a positive effort, and women are coming to Parliament. In the last 25 years, several countries, including Rwanda, Mexico, and the United Arab Emirates, have made significant women's representation in Parliament [2]. United Nations' fourth women's conference in Bei-

jing focused on women's political representation. This has helped to move forward with women's political rights.

Nepal employs a gender quota system, ensuring 33% representation for women from the 2008 Constituent Assembly onward, yet a persistent glass ceiling hinders their political progress. With the promulgation of the Constitution 2015, the transition to federalism, and the provision of inclusion, Nepal has taken some positive steps to address significant gaps in women's electoral representation and achieved greater gender equality. Through the quota system, women achieve significant rights in Nepal but are unlikely to reach the leadership level. [7]. In Nepal, three-tier polls have created a milestone for women's political participation.

In Nepal, beginning with the labor movement in 1947, women initiated a struggle against the Rana regime, advocating for democracy and human rights. This involvement marked the start of a continued and active role for women in every major democratic movement in the country. Their significant contributions spanned key milestones, including the first People's Movement of 1990, the second People's Movement of 2005, the Maoist Revolution, and the Madhesh movement. Inspired by the global feminist movement and Nepal's domestic democratic efforts, women fought tirelessly for democracy and gender rights. During the second People's Movement, various civil society organizations, social movements, and collaborative women's initiatives amplified the call for inclusivity. A notable achievement of these collective efforts was the push for a 33% reservation for women in governance, reflecting a shared vision for an inclusive state (Lama et al., 2011). One of the fundamental requirements for a democracy to function is elections. These are official procedures by which people use their right to vote to choose representatives for different positions in the government. As a cornerstone of democratic systems, elections enable adult members of society to participate in the decision-making process and contribute to the formation of representative governance. Only periodic elections can make legal authorities responsible for the people. Nepal adopted a mixed election system in 2007; before that, Nepal had a multiparty party democracy and a direct election system. Between 1960 and 1991, it operated under a "Panchayati rule," an autocratic, party-less governance system led by the monarchy. Nepal's 2015 constitution adopted a mixed election system: First Past The Post (FPTP) system and a proportional representation system

in two levels of government: federal and province. However, the local-level government uses a first-past-the-post system, with reserved seats for a general woman and a Dalit woman as ward members and a requirement for at least one female candidate for either mayor or deputy mayor in urban municipalities and chairperson and deputy chairperson in rural municipalities. The success of the election is a prominent sign of the initiation of the implementation of the new Constitution of Nepal (The Constitution of Nepal, 2015, Articles 222 and 223). The first municipal elections in Nepal were held in 1953 after the establishment of democracy in 1951, leading to the overthrow of the Rana oligarchy (Levi, 1956). Nepal held the first parliamentary election on February 18, 1959. Nine political parties contested the elections in 109 constituencies, with the Nepali Congress winning a two-thirds majority by securing 74 seats (Joshi et al., 1966). The province-level election was held for the first time in 2017 in Nepal after transitioning from a federal democratic republic to an inclusive state with seven provinces. Following the promulgation of the new Constitution in 2015, the first and second elections in three-tiered parliaments, i.e., federal, provincial, and local levels, were successfully held in 2017 (ECN, 2018) and 2022, respectively [11, 12].

In Nepal, there have been many elections for legislative bodies since 1951, and women's presence in such bodies has been negligible until 2000. After establishing multiparty democracy in 1990, Nepal conducted three legislative elections in 1991, 1994, and 1999. However, less than 5% of seats were obtained by women, demonstrating their weaker representation in democracy [22].

Adopting the 2015 Constitution in Nepal marked a transformative shift from a unitary state to a federal system. This restructuring established a three-tier government comprising one federal, seven provinces, and 753 local bodies. The federal Parliament, a vital component of this system, consists of two houses: the House of Representatives (Lower house) and the National Assembly (Upper house). The House of Representatives has 275 members, with a mixed electoral system for inclusive representation. Elections employ the First Past the Post system for 165 members and the proportional representation system for the remaining 110, ensuring an aggregate of 33% female representatives. The lower house has a term of five years. Political parties or independent candidates choose representatives for each constituency. Under the first-past-the-post system, each constituency elects one member, while voters cast an additional ballot for members through party-list proportional representation. The current constitutional provisions dictate that 60% of members should be elected through the first-past-the-post system, while 40% should come from

the party-list proportional representation system. To enhance gender inclusivity, each party must have one-third of its elected members be women. Failure to meet this criterion obligates the party to appoint a proportional representation of one-third of the total through the party list. A party with an overall majority following an election forms the government. If a party has no majority, parties can seek to form coalitions (Constitution of Nepal, 2015, Article 84).

Article 86 of the 2015 Constitution states that the National Assembly members undergo an electoral process of every six years, facilitated by an electoral college. Additionally, the tenure of one-third of the members will be over every two years. The members' tenure was determined using a lottery method for the first time, with one-third serving for two years, the remaining one-third for four years, and the remaining one-third for six years. The electoral college consists of members of the provincial assembly, the Chairperson/Mayor, and the Vice Chairperson/Deputy Mayor of the local bodies. Each provincial assembly member's vote weighs forty-eight, whereas each Chairperson/Mayor/Vice Chairperson/Deputy Mayor's vote weighs eighteen. The electoral college elects 56 members to the national assembly, and three members, including one woman, are nominated by the president of Nepal based on the Nepal government's recommendation (Constitution of Nepal, 2015, Article 86; International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2020).

The Constitution of Nepal, 2015, Article 176, made a provision that provincial assembly members for a five-year term unless dissolved earlier. Political parties or independent candidates give candidates for each constituency, using the same election system as the federal Parliament. The total number of seats across all provinces is precisely twice that of the House of Representatives, totalling 550.

Local bodies of Nepal have a similar structure of elected members across both rural and urban areas. In rural municipalities, the executive is led by a chairperson, elected through first-past-the-post voting, with the vice-chairperson also chosen similarly. Ward chairpersons and four ward members, including one general woman and one Dalit woman, are elected by the Village Assembly to be part of the executive. In urban municipalities, the executive is headed by a mayor, elected through first-past-the-post voting, with a deputy mayor elected similarly. Ward chairpersons and four ward members, including one general woman and one Dalit woman, are elected by the Municipal Assembly to join the executive (Constitution of Nepal, 2015, Articles 215 and 216).

Nepali women constitute 51% of the country's total population as per the 2011 census (National Statistics Office Nepal, 2022). For centuries, Nepalese

women faced various types of discrimination and lost social, economic, and political rights, which limited their political roles. The need for more information about legal provisions, their rights, and electoral procedures has hampered women's empowerment [8]. Though Nepalese women still face minimal roles at the leadership level, they secured 33% of political rights and representation in parliaments after a prolonged struggle. After adopting quota as affirmative action in the Constitution, the three-tier polls have created a milestone for women's political participation. Elections have been held twice since Nepal entered the inclusive state system. What was the position of women in Nepal's politics before the inclusive state system was introduced? What is the representation of women in the three-level polls that have been held twice? What was the representation of women from the Proportional Election System and the First Past the Post System? How was the presence of women at the leadership level in both elections at the local level? There is a lack of studies on the presence of women at the three levels, federal, provincial and local, held in 2017 and 2022.

This article aims to provide insights into women's representation in the three-tier parliament elections of 2017 and 2022 in Nepal after it became a federal democratic republic and inclusive state by adopting the quota system for women and other marginalized groups.

2 Methods

The study aims to assess women's representation in the three-tier parliament elections in Nepal from 2017 to 2022 through a quantitative, descriptive research design. The study utilizes data from the

Election Commission Nepal, which provides detailed election results and demographic information on elected officials. It is grounded in the theoretical frameworks of liberalism, which emphasises individual rights and equality, and multiculturalism, which focuses on recognising and including diverse cultural groups in the political process. The data analysis examines the patterns and trends in the proportion of women elected at the federal, provincial, and local levels.

3 Results

Table 1 comprehensively covers the timeline of significant election years, providing a historical picture of women's representation in the Nepalese House of Representatives from 1959 to 2022. Over this period, the data displays various political eras and reforms, shedding light on the dynamic evolution of gender diversity within the legislative body. The detailed breakdown of women's representation and the percentage of women underscores the complex journey towards achieving equitable gender representation. The data exposes a historical gender disparity, notably in the early years when Nepal had only one elected woman out of 109 members in 1959. The absence of data during the 1970s and 1980s in the Panchayati system suggests a potential neglect of gender diversity in political discourse. In the subsequent decades, we have witnessed a gradual increase in elected women representatives. It significantly rose during the Constituent Assembly Elections of 2008 and 2013 due to the quota system in proportional elections. Women's representation in the legislative elections of 2017 and 2022 was also high due to the continuation of women's quotas.

Table 1: Trend of women's representation in the central Parliament in Nepal, 1959-2022

Election Year		Elected Mem- bers	Nominated Mem- bers	Constitu- encies	Women Repre- sentation	% of Women
Nepalese	Legislative Election, 1959	109	0	109	1	0.92
Nepalese	Rashtriya Panchayat Election, 1971	109	16	109	-	-
Nepalese	Rashtriya Panchayat Election, 1981	112	28	112	-	-
Nepalese	Legislative Election, 1986	112	28	112	-	-
Nepalese	Legislative Election, 1991	205	0	205	6	2.93
Nepalese	Legislative Election, 1994	205	0	205	7	3.41
Nepalese	Legislative Election, 1999	205	0	205	12	5.85
Nepalese	Constituent Assembly Election, 2008	575	26	240	197	32.78
Nepalese	Constituent Assembly Election, 2013	575	26	240	199	33.11
Nepalese	Legislative Election, 2017	275	0	165	90	32.73
Nepalese	Legislative Election, 2022	275	8	165	91	33.09

Source: Election Commission of Nepal, 2017 and 2022.

Table 2 displays women's representation in local-level elections for 2017 and 2022. The fewer elected members in the 2017 election resulted from a shortage of candidates, particularly the absence of Dalit women candidates across political parties, leading to unoccupied positions. In the 2017 local-level election, the percentage of women candidates con-

stituted 41% of the total candidates. Looking at the 2022 local-level election, the percentage of female candidates slightly increased to 41.2% due to increased Dalit and marginalized candidates. These figures indicate women's consistent representation in politics between the two years.

Table 2: Women's representation in local-level elections in Nepal, 2017 and 2022

Sex	2017		2022	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Male	20,689	59.0	20,632	58.8
Female	14,352*	41.0	14,465	41.2
Total	35,041	100.0	35,097	100.0

Source: Election Commission of Nepal, 2017, 2022.

*Some female seats were vacant at the local bodies.

Table 3 discusses valuable insights into the landscape of female leadership at the local level in the year 2022 election. The data reveals interesting trends when looking at the roles of "Mayor" and

"Deputy Mayor" in urban municipalities. Thirteen women elected from a total of 293 positions for Mayors constitute only 4.4% of the total. On the other hand, the Deputy Mayor position showed

a remarkable contrast; 234 women were elected out of the same 293 positions, with an impressive female representation of 79.9%. A similar pattern emerges when we focus on the "Chairperson" and "Vice-Chairperson" positions in rural municipalities. Among 460 Chairpersons, 12 elected women constitute a female shares of 2.6%. Meanwhile, the Vice-Chairperson position showcases a substantially higher female representation. Of the same 460 positions, 335 elected women account for 72.8% of the representation. This notable difference underscores the dynamic in female leadership

across these roles. The striking contrast in female representation between the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson roles can be attributed to a provision that mandates at least one of the top two positions (Chief or Deputy) to be held by a woman, with the Vice-Chairperson position typically being allocated to females. Additionally, election coalitions in 2022 between two parties have led to gendered power dynamics, where, for instance, one party might elect a male mayor while the other elects a male deputy mayor, or vice versa, further decreasing the share of female leadership across these roles.

Table 3: Local level women leadership in Nepal, 2022

Designation	Share of Females (%)
Mayor	4.4 (13)
Deputy Mayor	79.9 (234)
Chairperson	2.6 (12)
Vice-Chairperson	72.8 (335)

Note: Figures in parentheses represent the number. Source: Election Commission of Nepal, 2022.

Table 4 provides an insightful analysis of women's representation in the Province Level Elections of Nepal for 2017 and 2022. In the First Past the Post (FPTP) elections for women across various provinces of Nepal, the data from the 2017 and 2022 elections reveals some distinctive patterns. In 2017, Madhesh and Bagmati emerged as provinces with the highest percentages of women elected through FPTP, at 7.8% and 7.6%, respectively. Conversely, Karnali recorded that no women were elected through FPTP that year. Moving to the 2022 elections, Bagmati maintained prominence with the highest percentages once again (7.6%), while women's share in FPTP of Madhesh Province declined to 6.3%. The trend displayed decreased FPTP representation for women in Sudur Paschim,

which dropped from 3.1% in 2017 to 0% in 2022. Karnali province still needs more women representatives from the FPTP election 2022. Women's share in FPTP decreased in Koshi province from 5.6% in 2017 to 3.4% in 2022. Proportionate elections increased women's representatives within the provincial Parliament, counterbalancing the decline in women's representation from the First Past the Post (FPTP) election. Overall, women's representation in provincial elections through the First Past the Post (FPTP) system decreased from 5.2% in 2017 to 4.2% in 2022. These findings underscore the dynamic nature of women's participation in FPTP elections across different provinces, reflecting no improvements in their political Representation over the two election cycles.

Table 4: Women's share in the provincial level election of Nepal, 2017 and 2022

Provinces	2017			2022		
	FPTP	PR	Total	FPTP	PR	Total
Koshi	5.4 (3)	81.1 (30)	35.5 (33)	3.6 (2)	83.8 (31)	35.5 (33)
Madhesh	7.8 (5)	74.4 (32)	34.6 (37)	6.3 (4)	83.7 (36)	37.4 (40)
Bagmati	7.6 (5)	72.7 (32)	33.6 (37)	7.6 (5)	79.5 (35)	36.4 (40)
Gandaki	5.6 (2)	75 (18)	33.3 (20)	5.6 (2)	79.2 (19)	35.0 (21)
Lumbini	1.9 (1)	85.7 (30)	35.6 (31)	1.9 (1)	91.4 (32)	37.9 (33)
Karnali	0.0 (0)	81.3 (13)	32.5 (13)	0.0 (0)	93.8 (15)	37.5 (15)
Sudur Paschim	3.1 (1)	81 (17)	34 (18)	0.0 (0)	85.7 (18)	34.0 (18)
Total	5.2 (17)	78.2 (172)	34.4 (189)	4.2 (14)	84.5 (186)	36.4 (200)

Note: Figures in parentheses represent the number. Source: Election Commission of Nepal, 2017, 2022.

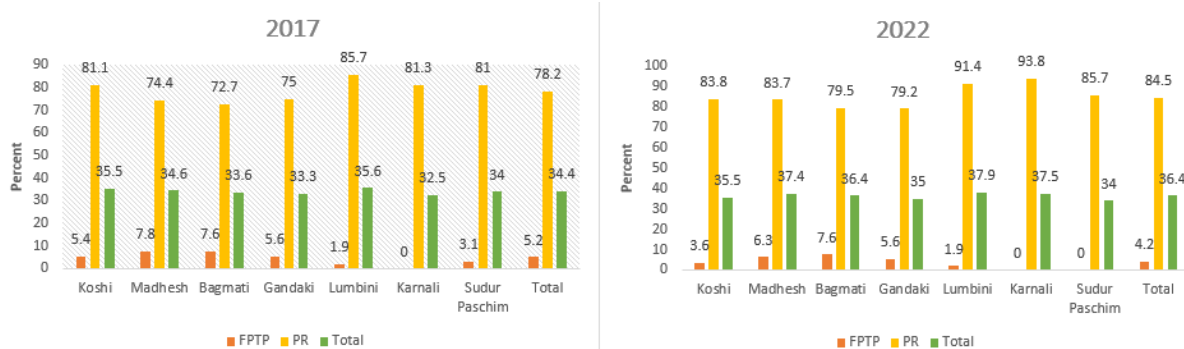


Figure 1: Share of women in the provincial election in Nepal, 2017 and 2022

Source: Election Commission of Nepal 2017, 2022.

Table 5 and Figure 2 present the percentage distribution of women's representation in the Federal Parliament Election of Nepal for 2017 and 2022, categorized by the type of seats-First Past the Post (FPTP) and Proportionate. In 2017, the Women's share in FPTP seats was 3.6% (6 seats) and it increased to 5.5% (9 seats) in 2022. Conversely, the Proportionate category witnessed a slight decrease, with women constituting 76.4% (84 seats) in 2017

and 74.2% (82 seats) in 2022. The overall representation of women in the Federal Parliament slightly increased from 32.7% (90 seats) in 2017 to 33.1% (91 seats) in 2022, considering both FPTP and Proportionate seats. The parentheses figures represent the number of seats corresponding to the percentage values. This analysis shows the nuanced changes in women's political representation in Nepal over the specified election years and seat types.

Table 5: Women's share in the federal parliament election of Nepal, 2017 and 2022

Type	Women Share 2017	Women Share 2022	Total Seats
FPTP	3.6 (6)	5.5 (9)	165
Proportional	76.4 (84)	74.2 (82)	110
Total	32.7 (90)	33.1 (91)	275

Note: Figures in parentheses represent the number.
Source: Election Commission of Nepal, 2017, 2022.

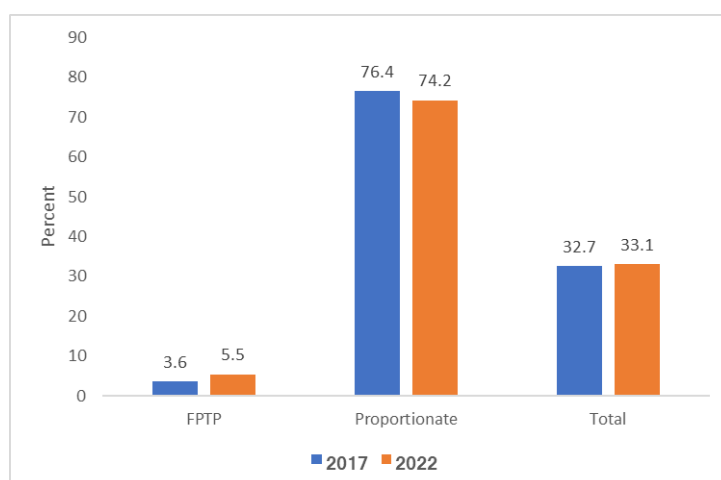


Figure 2: Share of women in federal parliament election in Nepal, 2017 and 2022

Source: Election Commission of Nepal 2017, 2022.

Table 6 outlines the percentage distribution of women members in the National Assembly of Nepal for 2017 and 2022, categorized by election type, Single Transferable and Nominated. In 2017 and 2022, the Single Transferable category shows consistent women's representation at 37.5%, accounting for 21 seats out of 56. Similarly, the Nominated category maintains a constant 33.3% representation, corresponding to 1 seat out of 3 in both years. The

overall participation of women in the National Assembly remains steady, with a total representation of 37.3% (22 seats) in 2017 and an identical figure in 2022. The parentheses figures indicate the number of seats corresponding to the percentage values. This analysis underscores the stability of women's representation in the National Assembly over the specified years and election types.

Table 6: Women's share in the National Assembly in Nepal, 2017 and 2022

Election	Women's Share (%)		Total Seats
	2017	2022	
Single Transferable	37.5 (21)	37.5 (21)	56
Nominated	33.3 (1)	33.3 (1)	3
Total	37.3 (22)	37.3 (22)	59

Note: Figures in parentheses represent the number.
Source: Election Commission of Nepal, 2017, 2022.

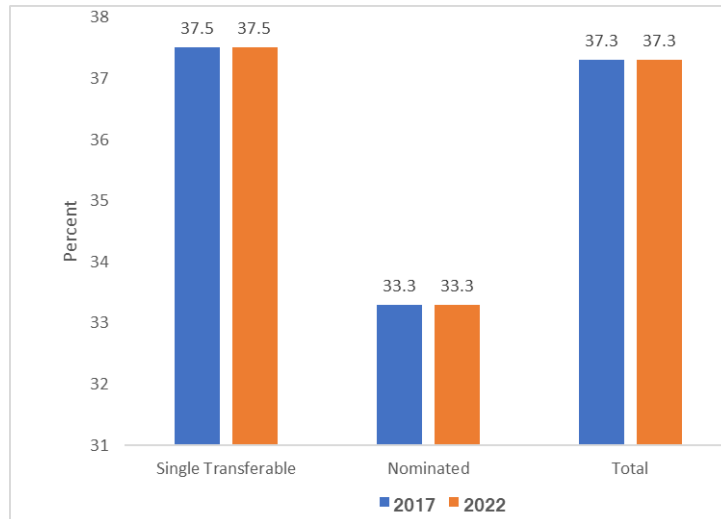


Figure 3: Share of women in the National Assembly in Nepal, 2017 and 2022

Source: Election Commission of Nepal 2017, 2022.

Table 7 summarises the women's representation in the three-tier Parliament. Women's representation is high in local bodies due to the provision of women reservation in leadership positions, i.e., one either from the mayor/chairperson or from the vice mayor/vice chairperson and the reservation of Dalit women and general women as ward members.

Overall, women's representation is slightly higher in 2022 (41.1%) than in 2017 (40.8%), driven by the lack of candidates with women's Dalit quotas as ward members in 2017. The increase in overall women's representation from 40.8% in 2017 to 41.1% in 2022 reflects the unmet expectations of women Dalit ward members in 2017.

Table 7: Summary of women's share in the three-tier Parliament in Nepal, 2017 and 2022

Levels	2017		2022	
	Women's Share (%)	Total Seats	Women's Share (%)	Total Seats
Local bodies	40.9 (14352)	35041	41.2 (14465)	35097
Provinces	34.4 (189)	550	36.4 (200)	550
Parliament	32.7 (90)	275	33.1 (91)	275
National Assembly	37.3 (22)	59	37.3 (22)	59
Vice-President	0.0 (0)	1	0.0 (0)	1
President	100.0 (1)	1	0.0 (0)	1
Total	40.8 (14654)	35927	41.1 (14778)	35983

Note: Figures in parentheses represent the number.

Source: Election Commission of Nepal, 2017, 2022.

4 Discussion

The study examines gender quotas, reservations, and women's participation in Parliament during the 2017 and 2022 elections following Nepal's adoption of the 2015 constitution by the constitutional assembly. The 2015 constitution ensures a 33% allocation of women's political rights due to women's significant contributions to diverse democratic movements and political shifts, advocacy of civil society organizations, and the strong network of the women's movement. The quota system has led to notable representation of women in federal, provincial, and local legislative bodies. While the electoral system combines various methods, predominantly utilizing proportional representation to ensure women's inclusion, the first-past-the-post electoral process results in lower female representation. Reservations are predominant in ensuring women's substantial presence in local governance. Consequently, there appears to be a need for more substantial and meaningful female representation at the federal and provincial government levels. The electoral system and women's inclusion in many countries were observed and compared within our context.

Studies reveal that around 137 nations worldwide have incorporated women's quotas in parliamentary elections through election laws or political party quotas (International IDEA, 2023). Women's political representation is 26.5% of the world's Parliament due to sustained efforts by women's movements, awareness-raising initiatives, and developing a political culture attuned to gender issues (UN Women, 2023). The presence of women in the legislature is crucial as they exert a substantial policy influence, representing and advocating for women's trust and issues, contributing to fruitful outcomes (JONES, 1998). As a turning point for women's representation in Nepal, the 2008 constituency assembly elections placed Nepal with the highest percentage of women parliamentarians in Asia and 15 po-

sitions worldwide (Falch, 2010).

Rwanda has the most significant representation of women in Parliament, at 61%, with Cuba and Bolivia closely following at 53%. The United Arab Emirates holds a representation of 50%, while Mexico has 48%, and Nicaragua exhibits a representation of 47% each. South Africa rounds out the list with a 46% representation of women in Parliament (IPU, 2020). Excluding Denmark, Nordic countries' parliaments have women's representation of more than 40% of the parliaments (UN Women, 2022), which could serve as a source of motivation from which we can gain insights and apply them to our situation. Similarly, 19% of women are in the US Congress, 25% are in state legislatures, 20% are in governorships, and 22% are in mayorships (Miller, 2016). Due to this, women's voices and desires are not included (Funk, 2020). Regarding women's inclusiveness, Nepal outpaces the United States across all three levels of parliamentary representation.

In a study of Bangladesh's Members of Parliament, the provision for women members is stipulated by the 15th Amendment to the Constitution, designating 50 reserved seats out of a total of 350 seats at the national level. This reservation corresponds to approximately 14% of the total seats. Additionally, some women secure positions through general seats, contributing to a cumulative representation of women in the 11th Parliament (2018) at around 21%. This figure suggests that the total representation of women in the Nepalese Parliament exceeds that of Bangladesh, even though the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system is less prevalent in Nepal. Bangladesh employs a First Past the Post (FPTP) system for general parliamentary seats. In contrast, it applies a Single Transferable Vote (STV) for women's reserved seats, the allocation of which is proportional to the number of general seats secured by each political party (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2020). India's central Parliament had a mere 12% representation,

while the state legislative assembly experienced an 11% representation (Rai & Spary, 2019). In India, the Women's Reservation Bill, officially called the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, was presented in the Lok Sabha on September 19, 2023, as part of a particular parliamentary session (The Indian Express, 2023). The primary objective of this law is to reserve 33% of seats in both the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies, directly elected by the public, for women (HT News Desk, 2023). Therefore, India's women's quota represents a significant milestone in advancing gender equality.

In South Africa, adopting the proportional representation electoral system guarantees the participation of 46.5% of women, reflecting diverse backgrounds, including cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity. This representation extends to both urban and rural areas, as well as individuals with disabilities. The electoral system allows smaller political parties to attain representation and cultivate impactful Members of Parliament, even without broad public support. The country adheres to a five-year electoral cycle, applying proportional representation not just for the federal parliamentary elections in two houses but also for contests in provincial legislatures (People's Assembly, 2021). Therefore, South Africa is a model for other countries like ours to apply in their policies and practices.

In the late 1800s, Swedish women's push for inclusion in formal politics began with municipal reforms in 1862, granting unmarried women specific criteria the right to vote in local elections. In 1884, liberal MP Fredrik T. Borg proposed extending these rights to parliamentary elections, facing ridicule and sexism. The National Suffrage Society was formed in 1902, mobilizing mainly married, middle-class women for voting and candidacy rights. By 1913, they gathered 360,000 signatures for universal suffrage. The 1919–1921 suffrage reform marked a democratic breakthrough, electing five women in the first post-reform general election. Over 50 years, female MPs grew to 25% by 1979, a 'bloodless revolution' for gender equality. The 1990s saw fluctuations, decreased from 38% to 33%, stabilizing at 41% in 1994. Women's representation in Parliament has increased across all political parties, with left-wing parties reaching around 50% and right-wing parties at approximately 40%. Therefore, women increased in elected and appointed positions, establishing a pathway from parliamentary chairs to ministerial roles (Freidenvall, 2016). In 2023, on average, the national parliaments of Sweden comprised approximately 46.1% of women (Dyvik, 2022).

The representation of women in the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

was 50% (UN Women, 2018; IPU, n.d.). Approximately 30% of the UAE Cabinet comprises women, a percentage the same as that of the UK government and more than that of several countries, such as India, where women comprise 22% of cabinet ministers (The National, 2017). Therefore, we should follow countries that exhibit greater gender inclusivity in parliamentary, provincial, and local government bodies as our ideal models.

5 Conclusion

The Constitution of Nepal 2015, Article 56 established a three-tiered inclusive electoral system, incorporating mandatory quotas for women and other marginalised groups within the mixed electoral framework. Following Nepal's shift to a federal democratic republic under a new constitution, two elections demonstrated increased female political representation, attributed to the implementation of reservation quotas. Women occupy over two-fifths of seats across federal, provincial, and local government elections, exceeding 14 thousand. The notable rise in Dalit women serving as ward members at the local level reflects an enhanced presence in Nepalese local politics. Before the first constitutional assembly of 2008, female political representation was marginal. While the proportional representation electoral system boosts women's representation at the federal and provincial levels in Nepalese elections, the first-past-the-post system results in minimal representation, with a decreasing trend. However, the proportional system has led to increased nepotism and favouritism, limiting genuine representation for all women and contributing to their lack of frontline presence and leadership capacity. At the local level, most women secure positions through reservation quotas. There is a quota for Dalit women and general women as ward members. However, female representation under the first-past-the-post system still needs to improve. Guidelines mandate that among mayors or vice-mayors in an urban municipality and chairpersons or vice-chairpersons in a rural municipality, at least one individual from each political party should be female. In the 2017 election, the need for more Dalit candidates for ward members decreased their number. The alliance of political parties in election candidacy diminished the number of female representatives for chief and deputy chief of urban and rural municipalities in both elections. At the local level, women often lose representation as heads or vice-heads due to political alliances, with the tumultuous political landscape overshadowing other crucial national issues. The journey towards gender equality requires women to shift from passive roles to becoming proactive decision-makers. Empowering a diverse group of women across all three

levels of government in Nepal is essential to uplift the overall status of Nepalese women. Given the distinct under representation of females in Nepal's first-past-the-post system, it is crucial to establish dedicated electoral areas at the federal and provincial level, like ward members, where women compete exclusively, ensuring a more substantial and assured female representation. The article analyzes

the gender perspective of elections in Nepal by comparing the 2015 and 2022 elections in three distinct political layers. Participation by women in electoral positions is calculated, focusing on trends and changes in gender representation over time. Other factors, such as caste, age, education, and the broader contributions of the study, are excluded and should be explored in future research.

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