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Changing Dynamics of Politics in Nepal: How Do Women Fear Party Politics?

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Abstract

Democracy is a political system that requires the participation of all citizens in the political process, including women in leadership roles. Successful democratization depends on ensuring women's full engagement in politics. This study investigates the apprehensions and systemic barriers that impede women's political participation in Nepal. This study used a swift questionnaire survey combined with a Likert scale analysis to examine the perceptions of 156 women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds regarding both established and emerging political parties. The findings highlight that, despite feminist rhetoric from some parties, women's participation is significantly undermined because of concerns about harassment, political violence, and the potential for community reprisal. This resistance stems from deep-seated historical, social, and structural factors, leading to the marginalization of women. Notably, women from the informal sector and younger women reported higher levels of fear. In contrast, emerging parties were perceived as more responsive to women's concerns. This research emphasizes the urgent need for a secure and inclusive political environment that supports non-violent and meaningful representation of women. To achieve this, a concerted effort is required to address systemic barriers and patriarchal norms; develop gender-sensitive policies that empower women politically; and ultimately facilitate gender equity and a more inclusive, fair, and genuinely representative democracy in Nepal.

Keywords: Democratization, gender inequality, inclusive governance, party politics, political participation

Introduction

Women's participation in politics refers to the concept and practice of how and why women engage or choose not to engage in politics. It encompasses the causes and consequences of their engagement in the political sphere with different institutions. Though women's political participation is a less discussed topic in political science discourse, some scholars argue women are inherently political actors (Currell, 2024) and their relationship between gender and politics is mutually inclusivity (Sapkota & Dahal, 2022). It is fundamental for fostering inclusive governance and attaining fair, sustainable development. Given that women make up roughly half of the global population, their lack of representation in political institutions perpetuates structural inequalities and undermines the legitimacy of democratic systems. Women's participation is influenced by gender relations, which can impact women's political and productive roles (Bourque & Grossholtz, 2023). The representation of women in political spheres is critically observed within the realm of party politics. Party politics involves the actions, plans, and programs that political parties used to attain power, influence policy formulation, and promote specific beliefs or set objectives within a given political system. An inclusive and representative party politics can foster a resilient and progressive society, offering an optimistic vision for the future. However, it is essential to acknowledge that women's participation, particularly in party politics, has been a highly political issue, often contested because of the androcentric orientation of gender construction (Ardener, 2021; Sapkota, 2024).

Political movements associated with sociocultural, economic, and political factors have significantly changed the political environment in Nepal over the years. Apart from ending the Maoist conflict in 2006, the country has made progress in its democratization efforts, notably through the adoption of a new constitution in 2015, that is genuinely inclusive and upholds gender equality. Such a legal framework has made it easier for women to have more representation in the political arena, mandating quotas for female participation in local and national government (Lamsal et al., 2023).

Despite such milestones in representation, there is still a considerable amount of misogyny, social stigmas, and cultural norms and expectations surrounding gender roles and gender orders (the societal structures that dictate gender roles and relations) that impede the practical space of the political participation of women, which remains common in the political milieu and social order (Acharya, 2020). The identity of Nepali women, as articulated by Dhobi (2024), is shaped by social constructs and is subject to political contention. Many obstacles impede women's ability to engage actively in political processes. When they attempt to take part, they often find themselves marginalized within a male-dominated political scenario, which limits their capacity to influence decision-making significantly.

Development paradigms are changing towards more inclusive but elite-centric engagement of women with politics, which is not out of the governance paradigm (Sapkota 2023). This can be analyzed through a historical lens of governance in Nepal, where women and marginalized populations had limited access to and control over governance (Chaudhary et al., 2023). However, the principle of inclusiveness and participatory spirit have been one

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measure of progress in Nepal's development, becoming an integral aspect of the Nepali state. Uprety (2024) critically notes that the capacity development and institutionalization of gender mainstreaming provide opportunities for women's empowerment and integration into gender policies. This structured burden that women have in Nepal further aggravates their fear and belief about party politics. The political landscape is full of risks, such as harassment, violence and social evictions, which may prevent women from entering politics (Adhikari & Sharma, 2022). Getting into party politics engenders much anxiety for many women as they fear retribution from families, communities and political rivals. Such fear is even more pronounced among women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who may not have the resources and support to navigate the political space safely (Ojha, 2023).

Women's fear of party politics is a multifaceted issue shaped by historical, social, and systemic factors contributing to their underrepresentation in political spheres. Throughout history, political parties have been dominated by male leadership and an androcentric mode of organization. Discriminatory gender relations, patriarchal social structure, deprivation of socio-economic opportunities, and denial of productive resources are some of the critical factors which prevent women from entering politics and being sustained in the political sphere. Such experiences can also cause feelings of voter alienation, passive reference and non-active behaviour in electoral processes, and their continued exclusion from society. This means that, to some extent, taking the gendered repercussions of sociocultural transformation in society (Adhikari & Sharma, 2022) into account is imperative. This paper, therefore, attempts to explore the understanding of women's perception and fear of party politics in Nepal across the socioeconomic divide and comprehension of interaction patterns that define those women's political engagement. Gaining insight into these dynamics is essential for devising approaches to increase women's political participation and provide solutions to barriers faced by women (Dahal, 2024). This study will contribute to a broad discussion of gender politics in Nepal. It aims to equip policymakers and advocates with the insights to understand the fears and requirements of women within the political sphere.

Methodology

Women's participation in politics refers to the concept and practice of how and why women engage or choose not to engage in politics. It encompasses the causes and consequences of their engagement in the political sphere with different institutions. Though women's political participation is a less discussed topic in political science discourse, some scholars argue women are inherently political actors (Currell, 2024) and their relationship between gender and politics is mutually inclusivity (Sapkota & Dahal, 2022). It is fundamental for fostering inclusive governance and attaining fair, sustainable development. Given that women make up roughly half of the global population, their lack of representation in political institutions perpetuates structural inequalities and undermines the legitimacy of democratic systems. Women's participation is influenced by gender relations, which can impact women's political and productive roles (Bourque & Grossholtz, 2023). The representation of women in political spheres is critically observed within the realm of party politics. Party politics involves the actions, plans, and programs that political parties used to attain power, influence policy formulation, and promote specific beliefs or set objectives within a given political system. An inclusive and representative party politics can foster a

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sphere. Such experiences can also cause feelings of voter alienation, passive reference and non-active behaviour in electoral processes, and their continued exclusion from society. This means that, to some extent, taking the gendered repercussions of sociocultural transformation in society (Adhikari & Sharma, 2022) into account is imperative. This paper, therefore, attempts to explore this study adopted a quantitative design, and data was collected through a rapid questionnaire survey regarding women's perceptions of party politics in Nepal. The sample of this study included 156 women who were chosen through selected by stratified sampling to ensure representation across various socioeconomic strata. The six strata were: service holders (either private or government sector employees), working women (as such in the formal economy or business), working women (in the informal economy, e.g., petty traders and street vendors), unemployed women, girls/students, and unknown women. Finally, there were 26 respondents in each stratum, which were selected randomly from the most dense clusters of Kathmandu (seven places were selected purposively, i.e. Kalanki, Satdobato, New-road, Baneshwor, Bagbazar/Padma Kanya Campus and Kirtipur). With a more significant representation, this selection allowed respondents to offer comparative perspectives about the fear of political participation. The close-ended questions measured the extent of fear, barriers to perception, and attitudes towards party politics. The Likert scale included items (1 to 5, 1 = "strongly disagree", 5 = "strongly agree") and measured in terms of fear, perceived barriers, and attitudes toward political engagement. Descriptive statistical tools were used to identify trends and patterns in women's responses.

This study has taken a unique approach to defining party politics, a critical methodological delimitation. Unlike the common perception that politics is solely the activities of political parties, this study considers the broader civic and social dynamics. Doing so challenges the narrow view that politics is limited to the interests of existing parties and opens up space for other voices. In this research, the concept of party politics is defined as the activities, accomplishments, and impact of political parties on the political landscape of Nepal. understanding of women's perception and fear of party politics in Nepal across the socioeconomic divide and comprehension of interaction patterns that define those women's political engagement. Gaining insight into these dynamics is essential for devising approaches to increase women's political participation and provide solutions to barriers faced by women (Dahal, 2024). This study will contribute to a broad discussion of gender politics in Nepal. It aims to equip policymakers and advocates with the insights to understand the fears and requirements of women within the political sphere.

Literature Review

Conceptual and Theoretical Readings

Women's political rights include the ability to vote, the right to suffrage, participation in public policy formulation, and holding political office. Representation takes a step further by ensuring that women are included in decision-making bodies in proportion to their representation in society, thus advocating for their causes and concerns.

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From the point of view of liberal feminism, the problem to solve is to remove gender stereotypes and facilitate women's participation in political organizations. This can be achieved through implementing legal and legislative measures, including quotas and affirmative action (Joshi & Goehring, 2018). This approach aims at equality, claiming that past political institutions have excluded women from democracy. However, the liberal perspective links the involvement of women with the concept of human rights, establishing the necessity of women's empowerment as an ethical imperative (Kaim, 2021).

Marxist theory posits that the construction of gender is intertwined with political and economic structures. It explains why women are still underrepresented in politics and in class oppression. Women are historically deprived of means of production, so economic base and class possession historically determine their exploitation. This historical context, as outlined by Engels (1884), reveals an interconnection between patriarchy and capitalist systems which confine women within the boundary of homes as stay-at-home parent and have no voice and power negotiations in the political systems. From this vantage, women's emancipation means eradicating all systems that keep economic oppression in check and upholding gender-based oppressive systems. The Marxist feminists argue that accurate women's representation has to fight against the root causes of patriarchy; They do not want the system to include them. In political participation, women are involved mainly in leadership, in the political, social and economic realms; besides the ideals of gender parity and racial integration, this should not be just a tokenism. According to Armstrong (2020), Marxist feminism recovers the historical ties between reproduction and production to analyze women's oppression and exploitation of capitalism. Yet, neo-Marxist and post-Marxist perspectives on women's politics are diverse and described in neo-liberal and post-modernist contexts.

However, the liberal and Marxist framework does not adequately explain women's political mobilisation and intersectional feminism provides a better understanding of the subject. Ford (2018) observes that the various forms of discrimination based on considering race, class, and ethnicity make women's experiences determine their political rights. For instance, women drawn from humble backgrounds are bound to experience multilayered difficulties because of their status, making it essential for any organisation that seeks to recruit a more diverse female workforce to consider multiple factors. Deliberative democracy theories posited women contribute to the deep-and-wide democratic deliberation process, making it more comprehensive and effective. This comprehensive nature of deliberative democracy holds the potential for significant change in women's political representation (Caravantes & Lombardo, 2024). They conclude that advancing women's political representation is not unidimensional but involves maximum-intensity interventions aimed at specific structural and cultural realities.

Empirical Studies

Political parties affect women's opportunities to attain leadership positions and take part in decision-making organizations. Political parties serve as gatekeepers in selecting candidates, deciding on electoral approaches and determining issues of importance, which, even where most are hard-wired with a patriarchal mindset, end up maintaining male-only positions.

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While the ideologies of progressive parties in Nepal advocate for women's rights and frequently include equal representation in their platforms, contrary to it, the internal culture of these parties is regressive. This culture reduces the role of women in supporting and influencing decision-making (Krook & Sanín, 2020). Institutional deficiencies have resulted in the establishment of party quotas and women's wings; however, their effectiveness and implementation vary significantly based on cultural, institutional, and ideological contexts. Although it focuses on the mechanical depiction of women, the changing landscape of party politics is essential for breaking down systemic obstacles and achieving genuine representation. This requires women to take the lead and actively take part in shaping policies instead of just 'pinkwashing' them (Dolan et al., 2021). Thus, the connection between party organizations and gender equity highlights the necessity for reforms within political systems, alongside the significant social transformations occurring within political parties.

Research has shown that women have achieved certain political gains in party politics, however, many types of barriers remain. Research on Nordic countries is pertinent to this paper because of their high scores on the Gender Inequality Index, and policy agendas have been shifted towards promoting more social justice by the increase in legislatures resulting from gender quotas within political parties. Another research from sub-Saharan Africa and Asia reveals working women continue to face structural barriers. Cultural practices serve as significant obstacles, compounded by injustices in resource distribution resulting from affirmative action measures (Ilie & Rose, 2016). International comparative studies also show that the representation of women is more significant in the proportional representation systems than in the first-past-the-post systems, primarily because of the relatively fewer rigid legal requirements for female candidates (Krook, 2010). Women in established leadership roles within those parties reflected greater attention to women's issues in parties led by leaders.

In the Nepali context, the empirical data shows inconsistent results on the participation of women in party politics, particularly since the People's Movement 2006. This was followed by constitutional measures guaranteeing the quota of 33 percent of women in legislatures, which was a major achievement in exploring women's empowerment from the grassroots (Upreti et al., 2020). Despite its provisions, the representation of Nepali women in politics is limited, they require greater involvement in decision-making processes within political parties (2024, Sapkota). Many women express frustration over a lack of financial backing, the impact of cultural and religious beliefs that negatively affect them, and the dominant structures within the party. However, bottom-up participation, with the support of local governments, has reported increasing incidences of women assuming powerful positions through access to county and community self-rule for local development activities (Acharya et al., 2022). The research shows that while these structural modifications have created opportunities; it is essential to implement additional structural changes to dismantle the systemic barriers to equity in party politics.

Data Presentation

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The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of women's political participation in Nepal, highlighting the challenges they face, and are based on a robust quantitative methodology. By employing closed-ended questions and Likert scale metrics during data collection, the study has successfully highlighted overarching patterns across various societal domains, especially regarding the challenges, apprehensions, and attitudes that hinder women's participation in politics. The findings, illustrated through tables and figures, are supplemented by both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses designed to elucidate the characteristics of these dynamics.

Perceptions of Political Participation

The study examined fear of political participation across six distinct economic and occupational categories as outlined above. In Table 1, the mean Likert score reflecting fear of political participation is displayed for each stratum, alongside the percentage of individuals exhibiting high levels of fear (defined as a score of 4 or greater on a 5-point Likert scale).

Table 1

Women's Perceptions of Political Participation by Stratum

Stratum	Fear of Political Engagement (Average Likert Score)	Percentage Expressing High Fear (Score \geq 4)
Service Holders	3.8	65
Women in Formal Economy	3.5	58
Women in Informal Economy	4.2	78
Unemployed Women	4.0	70
Girls/Students	4.1	72
Unidentified Women	3.9	62

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The data reveal that the prevalence of fear was most pronounced among individuals engaged in the informal economy, with a mean score of 4.2 (78%). This was closely followed by female students, who reported a mean of 4.1 (72%), and unemployed women, with a mean of 4.0 (70%). These findings suggest that women occupying less secure or formally recognized positions—such as those in informal employment and students—experience heightened anxiety regarding political engagement. This may be attributed to an increased awareness of potential stigma, harassment, or violence associated with their participation. Conversely, women in the formal economy exhibited the lowest average fear score at 3.5 (58%), indicating a reduction in anxiety for those in more stable and structured employment, which may offer a greater sense of security and support. Nonetheless, it is essential to

acknowledge that fear remains a pervasive issue across all economic groups, underscoring a pressing need for intervention.

Barriers to Political Engagement

Several studies suggest that social stigma, the potential for harassment, and non-environmental influences—such as those stemming from family, relatives, and communities—significantly contribute to the underrepresentation of women in active politics in Nepal (Adhikari & Sharma, 2022; Phuyel & Ghimire, 2024). Such difficulties are, moreover, compounded by the prevailing culture of sexism, which rewards politics as a male domain and erases women within political organizations. Women in Bangladesh tend to avoid political engagement due to structural challenges, including insufficient policies promoting women's representation and a lack of adequate safeguards. All these barriers need urgent rethinking towards comprehensive and gender-sensitive reforms, overcoming and responding to societal and structural barriers to women's political participation. A primary aim of the survey was to discover exactly how and why women are discouraged from getting involved in politics. Table 2 presents the frequency of significant barriers reported by participants.

Table 2

Barriers to Political Engagement

Barrier	Frequency	Percentage
Fear of Harassment	106	68
Lack of Support from Family	84	54
Social Stigma	117	75
Lack of Political Knowledge	73	47
Fear of Political Violence	97	62

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The analysis of the survey results underscores the urgent societal impact of the barriers to women's political participation. The respondents have identified social stigma as the most frequently mentioned barrier, with a significant 75 percent acknowledging its influence. This is closely followed by the fear of harassment, a concern for 68 percent of the participants. These figures highlight the pervasive influence of cultural and societal norms, which continue to limit women's political participation. More than half of the respondents also pointed to a lack of family support (54%) and fear of political violence (62%) as significant deterrents, particularly among those of lower socioeconomic status. These findings underscore the pressing need to address the prevailing narrative of safety for women, which is hindering their political participation.

Attitudes Toward Party Politics

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The political landscape in Nepal is characterized by its fluidity and has become a focal point of public discourse. Analyzing this situation through a feminist lens reveals that women's experiences of marginalization, skepticism, and perceived gender discrimination within conventional party frameworks and the broader political culture significantly influence their perceptions of party politics. The politics of the party is perceived by many women as a domain of male hegemonic control, elite capture, and lack of opportunities for authentic representation, thus creating a hostile and often fertile ground for transactional politics, and party politics feel un-free (Gurung, 2021). However, there is a potential for change and reform in this environment. Women have taken a hesitant step toward being part of the party due to fear of tokenism and a perceived lack of meaningful involvement in decision-making (Thapaliya, 2019). According to Sapkota (2024), the journey of women's participation in local politics is immensely highlighted in the 2017 and 2022 elections, as broad discussions are being laid upon the issues of capacity advancement, political integrity, and leadership transition, along with the timely response to gender discourses of the society. These reformative reforms would question the biased perceptions that have been held since the year 2000, resulting in a heightened, responsible, and diverse political environment that affords women from all political divides a fair shot. Table 3 presents diverse views of women on party politics reflecting their worldviews and the environment they would expect or like.

Table 3

Attitudes towards Party Politics

Attitude	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Party politics is hostile to women	45	35	15	4	1
Women should engage in party politics	30	40	20	7	3
I fear backlash from my community	50	25	15	8	2

Source: Field Survey, 2024

A significant majority of participants, exceeding 80%, agreed that the realm of party politics is a challenging environment for women, with 45% expressing strong agreement. This perspective is probably from experiences or observations related to exclusionary systems and patriarchal governance. A significant majority, specifically 70 percent of respondents, advocate for the inclusion of women in political arenas, acknowledging the necessity of their participation. This perspective highlights a recognition of the inherently aggressive nature of political environments, yet underscores the imperative for women's involvement despite such challenges. Notably, the fear of angering the community was also expressed, with 75 percent of participants feeling that it would be socially detrimental to their family to

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enter politics. This further communicates how outside societal expectations keep women out of politics.

Fears Related to Political Violence

Gender construction and discrimination against women are inextricably linked to political violence and the political environments in which women operate. It is crucial to recognize that women are often disproportionately affected by the abuse of power and the implied threat of violence. They have to contend with opposition to community mobilization and political participation based on fears of intimidation, backlash, and violence (Gupta et al., 2021). These intellectual fears are further exacerbated by the national patriarchy, which supports practices of discouraging female political participation (Adhikari & Sharma, 2022). This system supports morally accused male values and political associations to keep women voiceless in the class of decision-making. The decline of Sarkar (the government) as a normative framework in favour of the imposition of Kantian authority, as noted by Sapktoa (2020), is a sign of political stagnancy. This stagnancy ultimately fosters violation and misconduct in politics and governance. The threat of political violence was seen as a strong condemnation, whereas specific fears were rated on the Likert scale. They will present an account of the mean scores regarding various forms of fear related to political participation, as shown in Table 4

Table 4.

Likert Scale Results for Fears Related to Political Violence

Type of Fear	Mean Score
Fear of Violence	4.1
Fear of Repercussions	3.9
Fear of Public Scrutiny	3.8

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Of these fears, the 'Fear of Violence' had the highest mean score (4.1), highlighting safety as the number one concern. This score indicates a strong sense of shared fear regarding the possibility of physical threats or violence in political contexts. The concerns about punishment (Mean = 3.9) and public scrutiny (Mean = 3.8) not only reflect the influence of potential condemnation from the community and fears for personal safety on women's inclination to engage in politics but also underscore the need for a more supportive and less judgmental environment for women in politics.

Traditional vs New Party Politics

In recent years, however, newer political parties have challenged the existing power structures by prioritizing transparency, inclusivity, and progressive agendas that disrupt the traditional political elite (Shrestha & Subedi, 2022). These populist movements are

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particularly appealing to young people and those who have become disillusioned with established parties, highlighting a strong demand for accountability and good governance from the electorate (Phuyel & Ghimire, 2024; Lotter, 2017). Poor governance and low-quality service delivery are common complaints regarding development in Nepal. Nonetheless, we do not observe the emergence of a new social or feminist movement, as the prevailing global framework fosters fragmented collectivism, restricts the mobility of political consciousness, entrenches party politics inside the civic community, and maintains cultural hegemony (Sapkota, 2021).

In Nepal, where politics is evolving rapidly, women's interpretations of the differences between older and newer political parties reflect two distinct sets of experiences and expectations. Established parties are often seen as outdated, patriarchal, and rigid, while newer parties are perceived as more female-centric and gender-sensitive. This perception attracts women who find the political environment to be hostile and unrepresentative. Given this context, it is essential to examine and compare women's perspectives on both old and new parties, as their views significantly influence the political landscape.

Table 5.

Women's Perceptions of Old Party Politics vs. Newly Developed Party Politics

Aspect	Old Party Politics*	Newly Developed Party Politics*
Inclusivity and Openness to Women	2.8	4.2
Responsiveness to Women's Issues	2.6	4.3
Transparency and Trustworthiness	2.5	4.1
Youth and Female Representation	2.9	4.4
Safety and Comfort in Participation	2.7	4.0
Support for Women's Leadership Roles	2.4	4.3

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Note: *Presented in Average Likert Scale: Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

The data analysis indicates that women favour recently formed political parties over traditional parties across all dimensions tested — including inclusion, responsiveness to women, transparency, female-friendly policies, safety and support for women in political leadership. Women scored newly developed parties 4.0 to 4.4 for building a more inclusive and safer environment—and gave old parties between 2.4 and 2.9. It points to the fact that women feel that new parties are more in line with the things they need and are better at implementing gender-progressive practices, allowing women to engage politically and take

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the lead. The role of new parties in providing a safer and more transparent environment is crucial, as it reinforces the idea that women are encouraged to engage more in politics in Nepal. This perception of safety and transparency is a potential catalyst for positive change.

Summary of the Findings and Statistical Analysis

The above-shown data clarifies my numerical findings and how it plays into recent trends. The average fear scores per strata are, for instance, presented in Table 1, where informal workers emerge as the group with the greatest fear, followed by students and unemployed women. Table 2 shows the relative frequency of reported barriers, with social stigma being the most prevalent barrier throughout the strata. In the same vein, Table 3 indicates mixed sentiments of women regarding party politics, with some expressing enthusiasm and others voicing concerns about inclusivity and representation. Table 4 shows their fears of political violence and Table 4 perceptions on traditional versus new party politics.

These findings underscore the need for policy reforms and community interventions to address the existing challenges that are excluding women from political participation. The effects of sexual harassment, political violence, and social exclusion necessitate action to address these issues. As researchers, policymakers, and advocates engaged in gender studies and political participation, your role in promoting these policy reforms is essential. To delve deeper into the data, a set of t-tests and ANOVA tests were conducted to determine if differences in fear scores between strata were statistically significant. The analysis revealed that:

Significant differences in fear scores by stratum

The ANOVA results showed that the differences in average fear scores between strata were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Specifically, women in the informal economy and unemployed women had much higher average fear compared to women in the formal economy. This indicates that socioeconomic position relates to the level of fear among women, which could lead to differences in security regarding social and economic reasons. Importantly, these findings have significant implications for the design and implementation of support systems, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address these disparities.

Association between significant differences in fear scores by stratum

We used statistical tests like ANOVA to compare fear scores across different groups. We found that women in the informal economy and unemployed women experience significantly higher levels of fear than women in the formal economy. This suggests that socioeconomic status affects the fear women perceive, possibly due to differences in social protection and stability.

Association between fear of harassment and political engagement

The chi-square test revealed a significant ($p < 0.01$) negative correlation between the respondent's fear of harassment and their willingness to engage in politics. This underscores

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the pivotal role of harassment concerns in decision-making, emphasizing the urgent need for a safer political environment for women.

Party politics implications in the changing context

The ANOVA test yielded a statistically significant result with a p-value of 1.75×10^{-8} , indicating a significant difference in women's perceptions of old and newly developed party politics across all measured aspects. This result suggests that, collectively, women view newly developed parties as more inclusive, responsive, trustworthy, representative, and supportive of women's leadership compared to old party politics.

Discussion

This paper addresses a gap in the literature by exploring the reasons behind the limited participation of Nepali women in party politics. It finds that their lack of involvement is partly because of fears of harassment, assault, or ostracism from fellow community members. The extent of these fears amongst women from informal sectors of work or those who are students point to socio-economic status as the most predictive determinant of political participation. This barrier is evidence of a more significant systematic issue in the larger Nepali socio-political sphere where the relatively marginalized segment of the people is forced to endure a host of barriers whilst attempting to take part in electoral activities. These results highlight the importance of providing socio-cultural and other economic barriers-specific interventions to cultivate a safe and enabling environment for women's political participation.

The study also underscores a pressing crisis of political leadership and declining ethical standards in mainstream political parties as it delves into women's perceptions of party politics. Many women view the parties as steeped in corruption, lacking transparency, and disconnected from the desires of citizens (Upreti et al., 2020). Traditional parties are perceived as conservative and slow to respond to the aspirations of underprivileged communities, be it women or youth, leading to further erosion of trust and faith among these constituencies. Although there has been some progress in including women in political positions, much of this inclusion has been superficial, with elite groups keeping control of decision-making spaces and the ability of women from other backgrounds to have any real impact is severely limited (Acharya et al., 2022). This form of elite capture is an example of tokenism and horse trading — neither can protect most women nor help them change things. This causes a deeper understanding of what Buchy and Shakya (2023) term the gap between policy and practice regarding gender equality and social inclusion in the energy sector.

Results of the study also speak to a widening gap of alienation among youth who are exasperated with party-changed structures that seem archaic and unyielding to new ideologies. The political alienation of youth has been heightened by the ever-present nature of patriarchal values that remain in the political landscape. This means that young women, in particular, experience double barriers to participation—as gendered and aged individuals, and increased feelings of exclusion. This trend is especially alarming because inertia and apathy among the youth may cause a gradual deterioration of politically active and capable polity over time, weakening Nepalese politics in the long future (Acharya, 2024).

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The study also reveals that, despite the widespread belief that women should have a political role, many still view it as intimidating and exclusive. Women continue to face social stigmas against them in leadership positions, leading to a greater fear of backlash, harassment, and public scrutiny. Therefore, the study advocates for community and education programs to transform the perception of women in politics. It is clear from the study that there is a pressing need for community and educational program change towards women taking part in politics. These programs can also instill a culture that recognizes the role played by women in our political systems and fosters a supportive environment. This space could also serve as a refuge for women, where they can feel empowered and know that they can engage in politics without fear of violence for their ideas or punishment. The relationship between gender and politics is intertwined, a concept referred to by Sapkota and Dahal as 'gendered politics'. This notion is contentious within the context of Nepal. Over the past twenty years, however, Nepal has witnessed notable progress regarding women's involvement and representation in mainstream political arenas, both in legal frameworks and practical applications (Adhikari, 2022; Bhul, 2021; Sapkota, 2024). The representation of women in both the federal parliament and provincial assemblies has reached 40 percent. Reforms are being implemented within civil services and on various socio-political platforms. The scientific evaluation of these measures is also crucial in situations where there is a clear risk and violation of established norms and regulations. In particular, Khan (2023) notes that the multifarious subalternity of underprivileged women is a critical challenge. Social innovations and cultural changes are androcentric and unfriendly, primarily to women's empowerment (Xheneti et al., 2021). Amidst this, literature also reveals some other critical factors affecting Nepal's progress in the participation of women in politics and increasing tensions in institutionalizing this frustration. Such factors include power and politics (Sapkota, 2020), impacts of globalization and modernization (Ojha, 2023), political manipulation of representation (Yadav, 2024) and public perception and attitude (Haug et al., 2020), and structural constraints of society (Bajimaya, 2022).

This paper highlights the divergent ambitions and roles of women within the male-dominated, patriarchal, and often adversarial political environment of Nepal. To ensure that female political participation is impactful, it is essential to tackle issues such as leadership crises, ethical shortcomings, elite dominance, and the disillusionment of youth. Enhancing the safety and inclusivity of women causes the adoption of policies aimed at dismantling patriarchal obstacles across various sectors. Attaining genuine political equity will not only establish formal opportunities within political parties, but also promote a cultural transformation that supports and amplifies women's voices.

Conclusion

This study highlights the entrenched fears and patriarchal barriers women face in Nepal. They live in a dangerous environment marked by constant fear of harassment, violence, and community resistance, which stifles their political participation. These findings are a clear and urgent call for political spaces that promote women's safety, empowerment, and inclusivity. Therefore, Nepal desperately requires a thoughtful reflection of these fundamental matters: otherwise, the political arena will remain just an exclusive boys-only club in which women do not want to stake, and gender equality will remain a dream, with

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no way for the democratic move forward. Not all of this will be easy — and not all of this will right the ship concerning fear or growing polarization — targeted efforts on redefining party politics as welcoming, inclusive, and reflective of women's realities, perspectives, and needs may be necessary.

Empowering women in politics goes beyond implementing policies. To ensure that women can remain politically active and have leadership opportunities, we must engage community leaders, develop educational programs that highlight the importance of women's contributions to politics, and create safe spaces for women to take part and lead. However, the transformation of the existing systems also requires the eradication of patriarchy and the establishment of deep accountability, responsible, and progressive party leadership. The participation of women in governance is poised to alter the democratic landscape by fostering a more responsive, fair, and inclusive governance model. This shift not only holds the potential to enhance representation, but also instils a sense of hope for a future in which all women feel acknowledged, secure, and empowered. Their engagement is likely to have a profound impact on the foundational principles of democracy in Nepal.

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