Voters' Perception and Women's Electoral Success in Nepal: An Econometric Analysis

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Abstract

This research explores the socio-cultural and institutional barriers to women's electoral success in Nepal, focusing on voter perceptions of female leadership. It aims to estimate the likelihood of voting for women candidates in the existing socio-economic and political dynamics. The study employed a quantitative research design. An ordered logistic regression model analyzed responses from 385 individuals from the Rupandehi district, utilizing a structured questionnaire. Findings reveal surprising trends, notably that female respondents exhibit a lower likelihood of supporting female candidates, indicating internalized biases and societal expectations regarding gender roles. Male respondents show varied biases influenced by education and occupation. The research highlights those patriarchal norms significantly hinder women's political support, while positive factors like social media engagement can shift perceptions over time. The study highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions, such as expanded gender quotas and awareness campaigns, to address systemic biases and enhance women's political representation, thereby contributing to gender equity in Nepal's political landscape.

Keywords: Election, gender, inclusion, ordered logit, voter's perception

Introduction

Women's political participation is a crucial indicator of gender equality (Sundström et al., 2017; Sen & Mukherjee, 2017) and a key aspect of inclusive governance (Clayton, 2015). Although significant strides have been made in increasing women's representation in political leadership over recent decades (Hessami & Fonseca, 2020), the underrepresentation of women in politics remains a persistent global issue. As of 2023, women occupy only about 26 percent of parliamentary seats worldwide, underscoring the ongoing gender gap (IPU, 2024). This disparity is rooted in historical (Makama, 2013), cultural, and socio-economic factors (Shvedova, 2005), with entrenched patriarchal norms confining women to domestic roles and limiting their participation in public life, including politics (Baker, 2017; Kassa, 2015; Lorber, 2001). Leadership is still widely viewed as a male domain, where men are considered more suited for decision-making and governance roles (Schneider et al., 2019; Garfield et al., 2019).

Despite international commitments, such as the Beijing Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals, which advocate for increased female representation in political decision-making, women remain underrepresented in legislatures worldwide. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), as of 2023, women hold only about 26 percent of parliamentary seats globally. Current global statistics reveal notable disparities in women's political representation. In Europe and North America, 33% of parliamentary seats are held by women, compared to 27% in sub-Saharan Africa (Shreeves, 2021). Women represent 35.5% of elected members in local governments globally, with only three countries achieving 50% representation, while Central and Southern Asia lead with 41% (UN Women, 2021). In South Asia, approximately 20% of parliamentary seats are held by women, with Nepal at 33% due to gender quotas (Adhikari, 2022), Bangladesh at 20% (Kabir, 2022), and India at 15% in the Lok Sabha despite reserved seats in local governance (Ghosh, 2022; Jha, 2022). Affirmative action policies have increased women's representation in local bodies across South Asia, notably in India's Panchayati Raj system, which reserves 33% of seats for women. However, challenges persist in countries like Sri Lanka, with only 5.3% of women in parliament, Pakistan with 16.2% (IPU Parline, 2024), and the Maldives, where women hold just 3.2% of parliamentary seats.

In 2023, Nepal ranked 54th globally for women's representation in national parliaments, with 91 female lawmakers out of 275, reflecting limited progress in female representation in the 2022 parliamentary elections (IPU Parline, 2024; Sapkota, 2024). While women's representation reached almost 41% in the 2017 local elections due to constitutional reservations, most women hold lower-ranking positions, with only 2.29% of female mayors and 0.99% of female ward chairpersons in 2022 (Election Commission Nepal, 2022). The political landscape in Nepal has shifted significantly since the transition to a federal democratic republic, and gender quotas have been essential in increasing women's representation (Adhikari, 2022; Adhikari & Lawoti, 2024; Kaur, 2018). However, these measures have not translated into equal power-sharing, as structural and socio-cultural

barriers persist, particularly regarding voter perceptions and political party dynamics (Acharya, 2017; Mohtey, 2021). Patriarchal norms and voter biases often position women as secondary to men in public life, and this perception is exacerbated for women from marginalized communities such as Dalits and indigenous groups, who face compounded layers of discrimination despite affirmative action policies (Burathoki, 2020; Krook, 2015; Upreti et al., 2020). While the 2017 elections under the new federal constitution marked significant progress, these systemic barriers continue to hinder women's equal participation and electoral success in Nepal (Manandhar, 2021).

This study investigates the socio-cultural and institutional barriers to women's electoral success in Nepal, focusing on how voter perceptions of female leadership impact election outcomes and either political parties' role in supporting or hindering women's participation in governance. It also evaluates the effectiveness of gender quotas and affirmative action policies in fostering genuine political empowerment for women. By examining these factors, the research aims to provide insights into the persistent underrepresentation of women in Nepal's politics and suggest strategies for enhancing their political success in future elections.

Literature Review

As Sharlamanov and Jovanoski (2014) mentioned, the sociological model of voter perception delves into how voters' choices and attitudes are influenced by their social context, including their social identities, group affiliations, and societal norms. Voters may be more inclined to support candidates who share their ethnic background (Carlson, 2015; Fisher, 2015) or gender (Bauer, 2017; Campbell & Heath, 2017), or who advocate for issues important to their social group (Berry, 2015; Berry & Wilcox, 2018; Devine, 2015). Similarly, children raised in politically active families are likely to adopt similar political views and engage more actively in the political process (Torney-Purta, 2017). However, the psycho-sociological model of voter perception integrates psychological and sociological factors, emphasizing the interplay between individual cognitive and emotional processes and social influences in shaping electoral decisions and political behavior. Cognitive biases, as systematic patterns of deviation from rational judgment, lead individuals to construct "subjective reality" based on perceptions rather than objective facts, significantly influencing how voters interpret political information (Bless & Fiedler, 2014). In politics, a candidate's charisma or physical attractiveness might overshadow other less favorable aspects of their platform or qualifications (Landtsheer et al., 2008).

Emotions are powerful drivers of voter behavior, often more directly impacting decision-making than rational analysis (Vasilopoulos, 2019). Political campaigns frequently leverage emotional appeals to create lasting impressions and influence voter behavior (Franz & Ridout, 2007). Political campaigns use emotional appeals to connect with voters on a deeper level, often through rhetoric, imagery, and personal narratives (Richards, 2004). Individual stories can humanize candidates and foster empathy, making voters feel more aligned with their experiences and perspectives (Bligh & Kohles, 2009; Nai & Martínez, 2019). Voters'

attitudes and values are deeply planted and significantly shape their political decisions (Chong, 2000). A voter's political ideology, such as being liberal or conservative, influences how they perceive candidates and policies. Voters tend to support candidates whose views align with their own ideological beliefs (Baldassarri & Goldberg, 2014).

The economic model of voter perception and behavior posits that individuals make electoral decisions based on rational calculations aimed at maximizing their economic well-being, emphasizing the role of personal economic interests, cost-benefit analyses, and incentives in shaping voter choices. Rational choice theory underpins the economic model, positing that individuals make decisions by rationally evaluating the expected benefits and costs associated with different choices. In the context of voting, this means that voters weigh the potential economic outcomes of their electoral choices and act in ways that maximize their economic utility (Aldrich, 1993). Similarly, a voter who benefits from lower taxes may prefer candidates who promise tax cuts (Slemrod & Bakija, 2017), while a voter who values increased public services might support candidates advocating for more government spending (Khemani, 2015). Voters engage in a cost-benefit analysis when deciding whether to vote and for whom (Mouter, 2019). If the perceived benefits of voting such as improved economic conditions outweigh the costs, individuals are more likely to participate in the electoral process (Blais et al., 2019). Also, voters base their choices on the performance of the economy under the current government (Hansford & Gomez, 2015). Voters may reward incumbents with re-election if the economy is performing well and penalize them if the economy is struggling (Rammohan et al., 2020). Voters' preferences are influenced by how proposed policies align with their economic interests (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2017). Similarly, asymmetric information leads to suboptimal voting outcomes if voters cannot accurately assess the economic impact of their choices (Elkjær, 2020). The spatial model of voter perception and behavior is a theoretical framework used to understand how voters' preferences and choices are influenced by the positioning of political candidates and policies in a multidimensional ideological space (Armstrong et al., 2020).

Upreti et al. (2020) argue that while women's participation in local elections is notable, achieving full gender equality requires sustained, collective efforts from all stakeholders, including men, women, and political leaders. In 2008, Nepal elected a constituent assembly to create a new constitution. Women made up about 33% of the 2008 assembly. However, having many women in the assembly did not necessarily lead to more women-friendly policies, like patterns observed in Western parliaments (Kanel, 2014).

Research Methods

In this study, voter perception as an independent variable is the key determinant of women's electoral success in Nepal. Perceptions are further influenced by socio-cultural, institutional factors, and economic factors. These factors interact with mediating variables such as political efficacy and voter engagement and, additionally, moderating variables like demographic characteristics and historical context alter the strength or direction of these relationships.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework
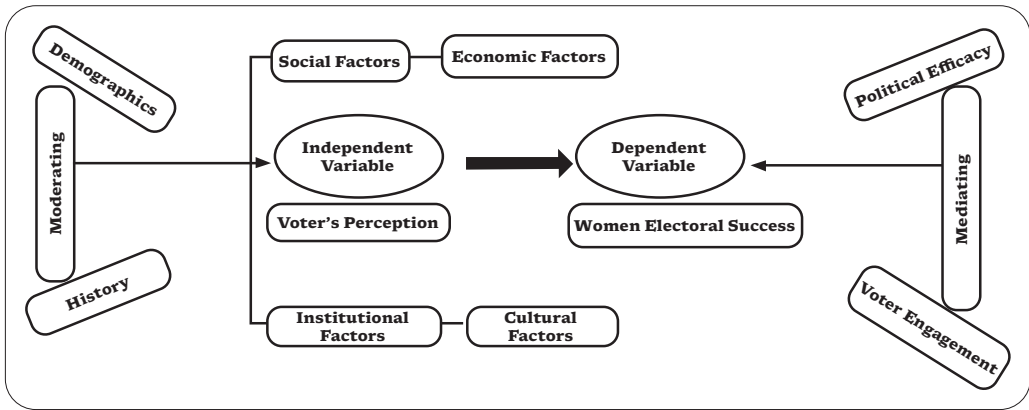
Research Design

The study is structured to investigate the complex factors influencing voter behavior and how these perceptions impact the electoral success of female candidates. This study employs a quantitative research design, with the use of an ordered logistic regression model.

Econometric Model

The cumulative probability of being at or below category j, given the vector of explanatory variables Xi is:

$$P\,(Y \leq j \mid X) = \frac{1}{1 + \exp\,(\beta Xi - \kappa j)}$$

Where, β is the vector of coefficients for the explanatory variables Xi
κj are the threshold parameters associated with each category j and j = 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7

Probabilities for each Category

To derive the probability for each category Y = j, the authors subtract the cumulative probabilities of adjacent categories, as shown below:

$$P\,(Y = j \mid X) = P\,(Y \leq j \mid X) - P(Y \leq j - 1 \mid X)$$

For a dependent variable with 7 categories (j = 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7), the individual probabilities are mathematically expressed as follows:

Category 1:

$$P(Y = 1 \mid X) = \frac{1}{1+\exp(\beta X_i - \kappa_1)}$$

Category 2:

$$Y = 2 \mid X) = \frac{1}{1+\exp(\beta X_i - \kappa_2)} - \frac{1}{1+\exp(\beta X_i - \kappa_1)}$$

Category 3:

$$(Y = 3 \mid X) = \frac{1}{1+\exp(\beta X_i - \kappa_3)} - \frac{1}{1+\exp(\beta X_i - \kappa_2)}$$

Category 4:

$$P(Y = 4 \mid X) = \frac{1}{1+\exp(\beta X_i - \kappa_4)} - \frac{1}{1+\exp(\beta X_i - \kappa_3)}$$

Category 5:

$$P(Y = 5 \mid X) = \frac{1}{1+\exp(\beta X_i - \kappa_5)} - \frac{1}{1+\exp(\beta X_i - \kappa_4)}$$

Category 6:

$$P(Y = 6 \mid X) = \frac{1}{1+\exp(\beta X_i - \kappa_6)} - \frac{1}{1+\exp(\beta X_i - \kappa_5)}$$

Category 7:

$$P(Y = 7 \mid X) = \frac{1}{1+\exp(\beta X_i - \kappa_7)} - \frac{1}{1+\exp(\beta X_i - \kappa_6)}$$

This study utilized scales from the literature review to measure all latent items on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree). The dependent variable in this study is the Likelihood of voting for women candidates. The study includes several independent variables ranging from socio, cultural, and economic to institutional factors.

$$Y_i = \alpha + X_i + \mu$$

Were,
Y_i = Likelihood to vote for women candidate
X_i takes various independent variables

Population, Sampling, and Data

The study focuses on eligible voters, potential candidates, and all political parties operating in the Rupandehi district. According to the 2021 Census, Rupandehi has a total population of 1,121,957. Of this population, 638,952 are registered voters, including 327,433 men, 311,511 women, and 8 individuals classified as other. Convenience sampling is employed

to capture a diverse and representative sample of voters. The sample size is calculated with the help of the standard formula for the finite population, N= $\frac{Z^2*P*(1-p)}{E^2}$ where, N = Sample size, Z = Z score to the desired confidence level (Z 1.96), P = Standard of deviation (0.5), and E = margin of error (0.05 for 5% error of margin). So, the recommended sample size was approximately 385 individuals. Similarly, the primary tool for collecting quantitative data in this study was a structured questionnaire.

Results and Analysis

Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Of the 385 respondents, the largest age group is between 42-49 years (26.23%), while the smallest group is aged 66-73 (6.23%), with most individuals falling within the 18-25 and 34-41 age ranges and fewer in the 26-33 and 58-65 ranges. Gender distribution is relatively balanced, with 45.71% female and 54.29% male participants. Ethnically, the most respondents (57.66%) identify as Madeshi, with 42.34% identifying as hill-originated. Caste-wise, Dalits represent 21.04% of the sample, while the "Others" category, including minorities such as Muslims and Christians, accounts for the largest share at 29.87%. Brahmins (19.48%), Indigenous (16.36%), and Chhetris (13.25%) are also represented. Additionally, 82.60% of respondents identify as Hindu, followed by smaller groups of Muslims (10.13%), Christians (2.86%), Buddhists (2.08%), and others (2.34%). Education levels among respondents vary, with 34.55% having education below SLC, 23.90% holding intermediate qualifications, 16.36% possessing a bachelor's degree or higher, 13.77% having no formal education, and 11.43% having completed School Leaving Certificate (SLC). In terms of occupation, 25.19% are unemployed, while 24.16% are engaged in agriculture, and 16.36% are involved in business. Income distribution shows that the largest group earns between NPR 25,000 and NPR 40,000 (30.39%), with 26.49% earning less than NPR 25,000. Additionally, 78.70% of respondents reside in rural areas, and 21.30% live in urban areas.

Pre- and Post-Estimation Test

Several assumptions and diagnostic tests must be satisfied to ensure the statistical validity of an ordered logit regression model. These include a range of standard statistical assessments such as normality tests, heteroskedasticity tests, and multicollinearity tests. Shapiro/Wilk W test for normality of residuals produced a W value of 0.729 indicating a significant deviation. However, in a sufficiently large sample size, the distribution of the sample mean of a random variable is approximately normally distributed, regardless of the original distribution of the variable (Kwak & Kim, 2017; Schatte, 1988). Similarly, for the heteroskedasticity test, the Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test was employed indicating no significant evidence of heteroskedasticity in the residuals. Additionally, for multicollinearity assessment, the mean VIF of 2.684 indicates that it is not severe across all variables.

Order Logit Regression Analysis

The primary analytical tool in this study is an ordered logit regression analysis. At first, the probability of voting for women candidates is examined, followed by gender and ethnicity-wise examination of the probability of voting for women candidates.

Order Logit Analysis: Probability of Voting for Women Candidates: The coefficient and odd ratio for the order logit regression model for analysis of respondents' probability of voting for women candidates are shown in Annex, Table A1. The coefficient for age is negative, with a corresponding odds ratio of 0.988, indicating a slight decrease in the likelihood of voting for women candidates as age increases. However, this effect is not statistically significant. The gender variable, Female has a statistically significant negative coefficient with an odds ratio of 0.49, suggesting that women are 51 percent less likely to vote for female candidates compared to men.

Education also shows a significant negative effect, with an odds ratio of 0.723 indicating that higher levels of education are associated with a reduced likelihood of voting for women candidates. While education is often linked to more progressive views, in this context, it may reflect the entrenched biases or educated voters may hold more rigid views about qualifications and experience, favoring male candidates who are often perceived as fitting these criteria. The coefficient for hill-originated ethnicity is negative, with an odds ratio of 0.745, though this result is not statistically significant. Urban residency shows a small and statistically insignificant effect on voting for women, with an odds ratio of 0.96 suggesting that living in urban areas does not significantly influence the probability of supporting female candidates. Urban areas, often associated with more liberal and progressive attitudes, may not offer a distinct advantage for female candidates in this context, potentially due to persistent gender biases even in more developed regions.

The odds ratio of political status is 1.43 which suggests that respondents who are involved in politics are somewhat more likely to support female candidates, though the effect is not strong enough to be statistically conclusive. The caste variables, including Brahmin, Chhetri, Indigenous, and Dalit, do not show statistically significant effects on voting for women candidates. This suggests that, while caste remains a significant socio-political factor in Nepal, it may not be a decisive factor in shaping voter preferences toward female candidates in this model. Occupation-related variables reveal significant insights into voting behavior. Agriculture and farming have a significant negative effect, indicating that individuals working in agriculture are substantially less likely to vote for women candidates. Similarly, unemployment has a significant negative effect with an odds ratio of 0.195. Unemployed individuals may face economic insecurities that lead them to favor male candidates, who are often perceived as more capable of addressing economic concerns, reinforcing traditional views of male leadership.

Similarly, the model shows a significant negative coefficient for prior voting behavior, indicating that voters with previous electoral experience are less likely to vote for women. This may reflect entrenched voting patterns, where experienced voters continue to favor

established male candidates due to familiarity or perceived competence. However, the coefficient for experience with female leadership is positive, with a log odds ratio of 1.156, suggesting that those with prior experience working with or under female leaders are 15.6 percent more likely to vote for female candidates. Additionally, the perception of barriers for women shows a significant negative effect, suggesting that those who recognize significant barriers to women's political success are less likely to support female candidates. This reflects a cyclical dynamic where perceived obstacles reinforce the belief that women are less likely to succeed in politics, thereby diminishing voter support. The perceived likelihood of women's success in politics has a highly significant positive effect with an odds ratio of 1.706.

Similarly, the marginal effect on the likelihood of voting for women candidates is shown in Annex, Table A4.

Order Logit Analysis: Voting Probability for Women Candidates by Gender: The coefficient of the order logit regression model for gender-wise analysis of respondents' probability of voting for women candidates is shown in Annex, Table A2. Among male respondents, education has a significant negative effect on support for female candidates, with higher-educated men showing a 31.4 percent lower likelihood of voting for women. In contrast, education's influence on female respondents is not statistically significant, indicating that while men's support is shaped by educational attainment, women's voting preferences are less driven by this factor. For female respondents, ethnicity plays a crucial role, with Hill-originated women being 57.5 percent less likely to vote for female candidates. In contrast, male respondents do not show a significant ethnic effect, suggesting that cultural factors impacting voting preferences are more pronounced among women.

For male respondents, occupation and unemployment play significant roles in shaping their voting behavior. Agricultural workers are 83.3 percent less likely to vote for women, a finding that aligns with the patriarchal values common in rural areas. Similarly, unemployed men are 83.7 percent less likely to support female candidates, possibly due to economic insecurity. Interestingly, cultural beliefs among men also contribute to voting preferences; men who believe that women should focus on household responsibilities are paradoxically 25.7 percent more likely to vote for women candidates. Interestingly, female respondents' experience with female leadership has a significant positive effect, with women exposed to female leaders being 48.4 percent more likely to vote for female candidates, underscoring the importance of female role models in shaping political preferences. Support for gender quotas and political efficacy emerge as key factors influencing male voter behavior. Men who favor gender quotas are 27.6 percent more likely to vote for female candidates, demonstrating the importance of institutional mechanisms that promote gender equality in shaping voter behavior.

Additionally, male respondents with a strong sense of political efficacy are 27.1 percent more likely to vote for women, suggesting that men who believe their vote can make a difference are more inclined to challenge traditional leadership norms. For both male and female respondents, perceived barriers to women's political success decrease the likelihood

of voting for female candidates, indicating that skepticism about women's chances in politics undermines voter support. However, belief in women's potential for success significantly boosts support among both genders, with male and female respondents who view women as politically competent being 79.1 percent and 92.7 percent more likely, respectively, to vote for female candidates. This underscores the critical role of demonstrating women's political success in building broader voter confidence and support across genders.

Order Logit Analysis: Voting Probability for Women Candidates by Ethnicity: The coefficient of the order logit regression model for ethnicity-wise analysis of respondents' probability of voting for women candidates is shown in Annex, Table A3. For Hill-originated respondents, gender is a critical factor; the coefficient for female respondents is -1.263, yielding an odds ratio of 0.283, which indicates that women in the Hill-originated community are 71.7 percent less likely to vote for women candidates than their male counterparts. In contrast, gender does not significantly impact the voting decisions of Madhesi respondents, indicating a less gendered perspective in their attitudes towards female candidates.

Education plays a noteworthy role among Madhesi respondents, where a significant negative effect is observed on the likelihood of voting for women candidates, indicating that higher-educated Madhesi voters are 30.4 percent less likely to support women candidates. This trend may stem from traditional beliefs held by educated Madhesi voters regarding leadership roles. Conversely, education does not significantly influence Hill-originated respondents' voting preferences. Additionally, caste significantly shapes voter behavior for hill-originated respondents, with positive and significant coefficients for Brahmin, Chhetri, Indigenous, and Dalit respondents, indicating a strong likelihood of supporting women candidates, potentially reflecting greater awareness of gender equality in political participation among these caste groups. However, caste identity does not play a significant role for Madhesi respondents.

Occupational status and cultural beliefs further inform the complexities of voter behavior in these communities. Among Madhesi respondents, those employed in agriculture exhibit a significant negative impact on their likelihood to vote for women candidates. Agricultural workers are 95.3 percent less likely to support women candidates. On the other hand, for Hill-originated respondents, cultural beliefs that endorse traditional gender roles contribute positively to the likelihood of voting for women candidates, evidenced by a statistically significant coefficient of 0.238 and an odds ratio of 1.269. Additionally, both groups share a common perception that barriers exist for women in politics, negatively affecting their likelihood of supporting female candidates. The coefficients indicate that Madhesi respondents have a coefficient of -0.262, while hill-originated respondents have a coefficient of -0.206. However, both ethnic groups demonstrate a positive likelihood to vote for women candidates when they perceive the potential for women's success in politics, with coefficients of 0.588 for Madhesi respondents and 0.559 for Hill-originated respondents both being statistically significant.

Discussions

The results of the ordered logit regression analysis provide valuable insights into the socio-demographic and attitudinal factors influencing voter support for women candidates in Nepal. Several key variables, including gender, education, occupation, and perceptions of women's political success, significantly shape voting behavior.

Firstly, the finding that women are less likely to vote for female candidates than men is striking, which does not align with the findings of Brians (2005) that female candidates gain marginally greater support from their gender. This suggests that internalized gender stereotypes may influence women's political preferences, particularly in male-dominated political contexts. The significant negative impact of education on support for female candidates is also noteworthy, indicating that more educated individuals may hold more rigid views about leadership, potentially favoring male candidates due to traditional perceptions of competence. In contrast, the perception of women's potential for success in politics emerged as a strong positive factor, highlighting the importance of changing societal attitudes toward female leadership.

Occupation-related variables also played a significant role. Agricultural workers and the unemployed were less likely to support female candidates, possibly due to economic insecurity and traditional views on male leadership, which aligns with the findings of Haavio-Mannila, (1979). Interestingly, prior experience with female leadership had a positive effect, particularly at higher levels of support. This result is consistent with the findings of Baskaran and Hessami, (2018) suggesting that exposure to women in leadership roles can help shift attitudes and increase support for female candidates.

Ethnicity and caste also influenced voting behavior, though these effects varied across groups. Among hill-originated respondents, caste was positively correlated with support for women candidates, while for Madhesi respondents, education and occupation had a stronger influence. These ethnic differences highlight the role of cultural norms in shaping political preferences.

Overall, the results suggest that while structural factors such as education, occupation, and ethnic background influence voting behavior, attitudinal factors, particularly the belief in women's political success, play a crucial role in determining voter support. Addressing these perceptions, through education and exposure to female role models, could be key to increasing support for women candidates and fostering gender equality in political representation.

Conclusion and Implications

This study decisively analyzes the socio-cultural, institutional, and political barriers that obstruct women from attaining electoral success in Nepal. It examines voter perceptions, shaped by gender stereotypes, caste, ethnicity, education, and occupation, which significantly impact the chances of female candidates in different-level elections. One of the most

unexpected findings is that female respondents exhibit a lower likelihood of supporting female candidates, suggesting the persistence of internalized biases or societal expectations about gender roles. Male respondents, while generally more supportive, also show varied levels of bias influenced by factors such as education and occupation. The findings reveal that voters often view women as less capable leaders, especially within certain ethnic and caste groups, with Hill-originated and Brahmin respondents exhibiting stronger biases against female candidates. Educated voters and those involved in agriculture are less likely to support women, reflecting deeply ingrained societal norms about gender roles. The influence of patriarchal norms is evident in the strong negative association between beliefs in traditional gender roles and support for women in politics. However, positive influences such as social media engagement and prior exposure to female leadership indicate that increased visibility of women in leadership can shift public attitudes over time. Despite these obstacles, the research highlights the positive role of gender quotas, prior voting behavior, and political efficacy in fostering greater voter support for female candidates.

Political parties play a dual role, facilitating and restricting women's participation, depending on their internal policies and the support extended to female candidates. The study also underscores the limitations of current gender quotas and affirmative actions, which, though beneficial, require stronger implementation to ensure genuine political empowerment for women. Similarly, institutional mechanisms, such as gender quotas, and recognition of barriers to women's political success, positively influence voter support for female candidates. Addressing these systemic biases through targeted interventions is critical to transforming voter attitudes and achieving gender equity in Nepal's political landscape. To improve women's electoral success and address systemic biases in Nepal, the following recommendations are proposed based on the study findings:

▸ Expand mandatory gender quotas across all government levels, ensuring compliance with penalties for violations, to enhance female political representation.
▸ Reserve leadership positions for women within political parties to empower them in decision-making roles.
▸ Establish subsidized leadership and training programs tailored to women within political parties to strengthen their political participation and capabilities.
▸ Conduct public awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes and promote the value of gender equality in leadership.
▸ Integrate gender-focused education into school curricula to cultivate positive attitudes toward female leadership from an early age, fostering long-term cultural change.

Limitations and Further Research

First, the research is largely dependent on self-reported data from surveys, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Second, the study focuses on a specific cultural and political context in Nepal, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other countries or regions with different socio-political environments. Another limitation is the cross-sectional

nature of the study, which captures voter attitudes and perceptions at a single point in time. This approach does not account for changes in attitudes due to shifting political dynamics or exposure to gender equality initiatives over time. Finally, the study focuses primarily on voter perspectives, potentially overlooking other critical factors that influence women's electoral success, such as party dynamics, campaign strategies, and media representation. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings and their implications for policy and practice.

Similarly, future research can explore generalized ordered logit models or alternative frameworks to address limitations of the proportional odds assumption and improve robustness. Incorporating longitudinal data or diverse datasets would enhance the understanding of dynamic relationships and ensure broader generalizability. Additionally, integrating non-linear effects, latent variables, or machine learning approaches could provide deeper insights and stronger predictive capabilities.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no competing interests

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Annex

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Table A1
Order Logit Analysis: Probability of Voting for Women Candidates

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LIK_VOT_WMN	Coef.	Log odd ratio
AGE	-.012	0.988
	(0.01)	(0.009)
Female	**-.712****	**0.491****
	(0.281)	**(0.138)**
EDU	**-.325****	**0.723****
	(0.154)	(0.111)
Hill-originated	-.295	0.745
	(0.303)	(0.226)
Urban	-0.04	0.96
	(0.309)	(0.297)
Politician	0.358	1.43
	(0.353)	(0.505)
Brahmin	-0.067	0.936
	(0.344)	(0.322)
Chhetri	0.266	1.305
	(0.433)	(0.566)
Indigenous	0.124	1.132
	(0.349)	(0.395)
Dalit	-0.074	0.929
	(0.302)	(0.281)
Agri and Farming	**-1.377***	**0.252***
	(0.818)	**(0.206)**
Business	-1.074	0.342
	(0.827)	(0.282)
Government service	-1.319	0.267
	(0.832)	(0.223)
Private sector	-1.25.8	0.286
	(0.835)	(0.239)
Unemployment	**-1.633****	**0.195****
	(0.797)	**(0.156)**
Average Household Income	-0.129	0.879
	(0.151)	(0.132)
POL_AW	0.026	1.026
	(0.059)	(0.061)
POL_AF	0.053	1.054
	(0.052)	(0.054)
SOC_CA	-0.021	0.979
	(0.058)	(0.057)
CUL_BF	0.085	1.089
	(0.055)	(0.06)
EXP_FM_LR	**0.145***	**1.156***
	(0.079)	**(0.092)**
ME_IF	0.094	1.099
	(0.072)	(0.079)

LIK_VOT_WMN	Coef.	Log odd ratio
STY_ME	0.02	1.02
	(0.068)	(0.07)
SOC_EG	0.024	1.025
	(0.056)	(0.058)
EG_GDE_PM	0.093	1.098
	(0.064)	(0.07)
IMP_GDE_PM	0.08	1.084
	(0.075)	(0.081)
TRS_GMT	0.082	1.085
	(0.061)	(0.066)
POL_EFF	0.008	1.008
	(0.061)	(0.062)
HIS_CON	0.053	1.054
	(0.074)	(0.078)
ECO_STA	0.02	1.02
	(0.038)	(0.039)
PRV_VOT_BH	**-0.151*****	**.86*****
	(0.056)	**(0.048)**
SAT_CWP	0.053	1.054
	(0.068)	(0.072)
SUP_GDQ	0.072	1.075
	(0.064)	(0.068)
PRF_VOT	-0.121	.886
	(0.076)	(0.067)
BAR_WMN	**-0.189*****	**.828*****
	(0.073)	**(0.061)**
TWA_CEP	-0.063	.939
	(0.052)	(0.049)
PRB_WMN_SUC_POL	**0.534*****	**1.706*****
	(0.074)	**(0.127)**
cut1	-2.23	-2.23
	(1.635)	(1.635)
cut2	-1.702	-1.702
	(1.629)	(1.629)
cut3	1.019	1.019
	(1.636)	(1.636)
cut4	1.441	1.441
	(1.638)	(1.638)
cut5	2.453	2.453
	(1.641)	(1.641)
cut6	3.378	3.378
	(1.643)	(1.643)

Note (s). Standard error in parenthesis *** p<.01; ** p<.05; * p<.10

Table A2
Order Logit Analysis: Voting Probability for Women Candidates by Gender

LIK_VOT_WMN	Male respondent		Female respondent	
	Coef.	Odd ratio	Coef.	Odd ratio
AGE	0.01	1.01	-0.02	0.98
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.019)	(0.018)
EDU	-0.377*	0.686*	-0.373	0.689
	(0.216)	(0.148)	(0.276)	(0.19)
Hill-originated	0.219	1.245	-0.856*	0.425*
	(0.443)	(0.551)	(0.516)	(0.219)
Urban	-0.14	0.87	0.409	1.505
	(0.418)	(0.364)	(0.61)	(0.918)
Politician	0.149	1.161	0.735	2.086
	(0.467)	(0.542)	(0.648)	(1.351)
Brahmin	-0.167	0.846	0.362	1.436
	(0.452)	(0.382)	(0.672)	(0.965)
Chhetri	-0.794	0.452	1.339*	3.814*
	(0.608)	(0.275)	(0.733)	(2.797)
Indigenous	0.005	1.005	0.226	1.253
	(0.541)	(0.543)	(0.516)	(0.647)
Dalit	-0.761	0.467	0.326	1.386
	(0.481)	(0.225)	(0.456)	(0.632)
Agri and Farming	-1.788*	0.167*	-0.377	.686
	(0.917)	(0.153)	(0.476)	(0.327)
Business	-0.892	0.41	-1.082	.339
	(0.905)	(0.371)	(0.835)	(0.283)
Government Service	-0.932	0.394	-0.108	.898
	(0.915)	(0.361)	(0.612)	(0.549)
Private Sector	-0.565	0.568	-.349	0.706
	(0.915)	(0.52)	(0.758)	(0.535)
Unemployment	-1.815**	0.163**		1
	(0.859)	(0.14)		
Average Household Income	0.044	1.045	(-.451	0.637
	(0.194)	(0.203)	0.274)	(0.175)
POL_AW	0.028	1.029	0.08	1.083
	(0.091)	(0.093)	(0.09)	(0.098)
POL_AF	0.065	1.068	0.099	1.104
	(0.078)	(0.083)	(0.08)	(0.088)
SOC_CA	-0.047	0.954	0.059	1.061
	(0.095)	(0.091)	(0.092)	(0.098)
CUL_BF	0.229***	1.257***	0.057	1.058
	(0.083)	(0.104)	(0.089)	(0.094)
EXP_FM_LR	-0.119	0.888	0.395***	1.484***
	(0.114)	(0.101)	(0.135)	(0.2)
ME_IF	0.07	1.072	0.058	1.06
	(0.103)	(0.111)	(0.122)	(0.13)

LIK_VOT_WMN	Male respondent		Female respondent	
	Coef.	Odd ratio	Coef.	Odd ratio
STY_ME	0.114	1.121	-0.123	0.884
	(0.089)	(0.1)	(0.118)	(0.105)
SOC_EG	-0.076	0.927	0.169*	1.184*
	(0.081)	(0.075)	(0.097)	(0.115)
EG_GDE_PM	0.078	1.081	0.125	1.133
	(0.096)	(0.104)	(0.101)	(0.115)
IMP_GDE_PM	-0.023	0.977	0.039	1.039
	(0.135)	(0.132)	(0.102)	(0.106)
TRS_GMT	0.071	1.073	0.107	1.113
	(0.094)	(0.101)	(0.093)	(0.103)
POL_EFF	0.24***	1.271***	-0.125	0.882
	(0.089)	(0.113)	(0.099)	(0.087)
HIS_CON	0.131	1.14	0.05	1.051
	(0.113)	(0.129)	(0.106)	(0.112)
ECO_STA	-0.072	0.931	0.023	1.023
	(0.056)	(0.052)	(0.059)	(0.06)
PRV_VOT_BH	-0.22***	0.802***	-0.089	0.915
	(.081)	(0.065)	(0.096)	(0.088)
SAT_CWP	0.081	1.084	0.086	1.089
	(0.098)	(0.106)	(0.118)	(0.128)
SUP_GDQ	0.244**	1.276**	-0.009	0.991
	(0.1020	(0.13)	(0.096)	(0.095)
PRF_VOT	-0.081	0.922	-0.177	0.838
	(0.1120	(0.103)	(0.122)	(0.102)
BAR_WMN	-0.228*	0.796*	-0.213*	0.808*
	(0.12)	(0.095)	(0.11)	(0.089)
TWA_CEP	-0.127*	0.881*	-0.026	0.975
	(0.076)	(0.067)	(0.085)	(0.083)
PRB_WMN_SUC_POL	0.583***	1.791***	0.656***	1.927***
	(0.104)	(0.187)	(0.133)	(0.257)
cut1	-3.91	-3.91	0.668	0.668
	(2.324)	(2.324)	(2.26)	(2.26)
cut2	-1.524	-1.524	0.768	0.768
	(2.136)	(2.136)	(2.259)	(2.259)
cut3	1.304	1.304	4.323	4.323
	(2.147)	(2.147)	(2.299)	(2.299)
cut4	1.97	1.97	4.637	4.637
	(2.154)	(2.154)	(2.301)	(2.301)
cut5	3.485	3.485	5.372	5.372
	(2.16)	(2.16)	(2.309)	(2.309)
cut6	4.145	4.145	6.814	6.814
	(2.161)	(2.161)	(2.334)	(2.334)

Note (s). Standard Error in Parenthesis *** p<.01; ** p<.05; * p<.10

Table A3
Order Logit Analysis: Voting Probability for Women Candidates by Ethnicity

LIK_VOT_WMN	Madhesi		Hill-originated	
	Coef.	Odd ratio	Coef.	Odd ratio
AGE	(-0.02)	0.98	-0.013	0.987
	0.014	(0.013)	(0.018)	(0.017)
EDU	-0.138	.871	-1.263**	0.283**
	(0.394)	(0.343)	(0.493)	(0.139)
Hill-originated	-0.362*	0.696*	-.112	0.894
	(0.212)	(0.148)	(0.305)	(0.272)
Urban	0.389	1.475	-.478	0.62
	(0.611)	(0.902)	(0.424)	(0.263)
Politician	0.95*	2.585*	-0.697	0.498
	(0.529)	(1.366)	(0.583)	(0.29)
Brahmin	-0.093	0.911	3.712**	40.949**
	(0.448)	(0.409)	(1.836)	(75.176)
Chhetri	-0.26	0.771	3.658**	38.77**
	(1.672)	(1.289)	(1.825)	(70.773)
Indigenous	-0.141	0.868	4.004**	54.838**
	(0.475)	(0.412)	(1.851)	(101.531)
Dalit	-0.204	0.815	3.812**	45.247**
	(0.35)	(0.285)	(1.823)	(82.469)
Agri and Farming	-3.067**	0.047**	-0.934	0.393
	(1.468)	(0.068)	(1.26)	(0.495)
Business	-0.963	0.382	-1.841	0.159
	(1.518)	(0.58)	(1.178)	(0.187)
Government Service	-2.96**	0.052**	-1.449	0.235
	(1.478)	(0.077)	(1.274)	(0.299)
Private Sector	-2.5*	0.082*	-1.76	0.172
	(1.515)	(0.124)	(1.261)	(0.217)
Unemployment	-3.456**	0.032**	-1.353	0.259
	(1.463)	(0.046)	(1.155)	(0.299)
Average Household Income	-0.598***	0.55***	0.181	1.199
	(.221)	(0.122)	(0.254)	(0.304)
POL_AW	0.026	1.027	0.027	1.028
	(0.083)	(0.086)	(0.101)	(0.104)
POL_AF	0.144*	1.155*	-0.005	0.995
	(0.074)	(0.086)	(0.089)	(0.089)
SOC_CA	0.126	1.135	-0.236**	0.79**
	(0.083)	(0.094)	(0.109)	(0.086)
CUL_BF	-0.032	0.969	0.238**	1.269**
	(0.076)	(0.073)	(0.098)	(0.124)
EXP_FM_LR	0.107	1.113	0.081	1.084
	(0.115)	(0.128)	(0.14)	(0.152)
ME_IF	0.022	1.022	0.1	1.106
	(0.114)	(0.116)	(0.113)	(0.125)
STY_ME	0.029	1.03	-0.017	0.983
	(0.098)	(0.1)	(0.117)	(0.115)

LIK_VOT_WMN	Madhesi		Hill-originated	
	Coef.	Odd ratio	Coef.	Odd ratio
SOC_EG	0.022	1.022	0.012	1.012
	(0.082)	(0.084)	(0.102)	(0.103)
EG_GDE_PM	0.11	1.117	0.205*	1.227*
	(0.091)	(0.102)	(0.113)	(0.139)
IMP_GDE_PM	0.046	1.048	0.193	1.213
	(0.105)	(0.11)	(0.131)	(0.158)
TRS_GMT	0.045	1.046	-0.021	0.979
	(0.086)	(0.09)	(0.114)	(0.112)
POL_EFF	0.016	1.016	0.128	1.136
	(0.081)	(0.082)	(0.119)	(0.135)
HIS_CON	0.298***	1.347***	-0.157	0.855
	(0.106)	(0.142)	(0.127)	(0.108)
ECO_STA	-0.016	0.984	0.062	1.064
	(0.054)	(0.053)	(0.069)	(0.073)
PRV_VOT_BH	-0.219***	0.803***	0.042	1.043
	(0.08)	(0.064)	(0.1)	(0.105)
SAT_CWP	0.1	1.106	-0.008	0.992
	(0.092)	(0.102)	(0.133)	(0.132)
SUP_GDQ	0.181*	1.199*	-0.111	0.895
	(0.094)	(0.112)	(0.106)	(0.095)
PRF_VOT	-0.108	0.898	-0.115	0.892
	(0.1)	(0.09)	(0.138)	(0.123)
BAR_WMN	-0.262**	0.769**	-0.206*	0.814*
	(0.104)	(0.08)	(0.12)	(0.098)
TWA_CEP	-0.103	0.902	0.049	1.05
	(0.071)	(0.064)	(0.092)	(0.096)
PRB_WMN_SUC_POL	0.588***	1.801***	0.559***	1.749***
	(0.096)	(0.173)	(0.152)	(0.266)
cut1	-4.351	-4.351	2.062	2.062
	(2.419)	(2.419)	(3.049)	(3.049)
cut2	-3.383	-3.383	2.319	2.319
	(2.394)	(2.394)	(3.052)	(3.052)
cut3	-.368	-.368	5.46	5.46
	(2.391)	(2.391)	(3.108)	(3.108)
cut4	.059	.059	5.981	5.981
	(2.392)	(2.392)	(3.115)	(3.115)
cut5	1.15	1.15	7.091	7.091
	(2.395)	(2.395)	(3.123)	(3.123)
cut6	1.92	1.92	8.535	8.535
	(2.396)	(2.396)	(3.129)	(3.129)

Note (s). Standard error in parenthesis *** p<.01; ** p<.05; * p<.10

Table A4
Marginal Effect on Likelihood of Voting for Women Candidates

LIK_VOT_WMN	Pr (O=1)	Pr (O=2)	Pr (O=3)	Pr (O=4)	Pr (O=5)	Pr (O=6)	Pr (O=7)
	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.001
AGE	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.00)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.001)
	0.030**	0.014**	0.086**	0.001**	-0.016**	-0.030**	-0.085**
Female	(0.0130)	(0.007)	(0.034)	(0.002)	(0.007)	(0.012)	(0.034)
	0.014**	0.007**	0.0039**	0.000**	-0.007**	-0.014**	-0.039**
EDU	(0.007)	(0.004)	(0.018)	(0.001)	(0.004)	(0.007)	(0.018)
	0.012	0.006	0.035	0.000	-0.007	-0.012	-0.035
Hill-originated	(0.013)	(0.006)	(0.036)	(0.001)	(0.007)	(0.013)	(0.036)
	0.002	0.001	0.005	0.000	-0.001	-0.002	-0.005
Urban	(0.013)	(0.006)	(0.037)	(0.000)	(0.007)	(0.013)	(0.037)
	-0.015	-0.007	-0.043	-0.001	0.008	0.015	0.043
Politician	(0.015)	(0.007)	(0.042)	(0.001)	(0.008)	(0.015)	(0.042)
	0.003	0.001	0.008	0.000	-0.002	-0.003	-0.008
Brahmin	(0.015)	(0.007)	(0.041)	(0.001)	(0.008)	(0.014)	(0.041)
	-0.011	-0.005	-0.032	-0.000	0.006	0.011	0.032
Chhetri	(0.018)	(0.009)	(0.052)	(0.001)	(0.010)	(0.018)	(0.052)
	-0.005	-0.003	-0.015	-0.000	0.003	0.005	0.015
Indigenous	(0.015)	(0.007)	(0.042)	(0.001)	(0.008)	(0.015)	(0.042)
	0.003	0.001	0.009	0.000	-0.002	-0.003	-0.009
Dalit	(0.013)	(0.006)	(0.036)	(0.000)	(0.007)	(0.013)	(0.036)
	0.058*	0.028*	0.165*	0.002*	-0.032*	-0.057*	-0.164*
Agri and Farm	(0.037)	(0.019)	(0.099)	(0.003)	(0.021)	(0.035)	(0.097)
	0.045	0.022	0.129	0.002	-0.025	-0.045	-0.128
Business	(0.036)	(0.018)	(0.100)	(0.003)	(0.020)	(0.035)	(0.098)
	0.056	0.027	0.158	0.002	-0.030	-0.055	-0.157
Govt. Service	(0.037)	(0.019)	(0.101)	(0.003)	(0.021)	(0.036)	(0.098)
	0.053	0.025	0.150	0.002	-0.029	-0.052	-0.149
Private Sector	(0.037)	(0.019)	(0.101)	(0.003)	(0.021)	(0.036)	(0.099)
	0.069**	0.033**	0.196**	0.002**	-0.038**	-0.068**	-0.195**
Unemployment	(0.036)	(0.019)	(0.097)	(0.004)	(0.021)	(0.035)	(0.094)
	0.005	0.003	0.016	0.000	-0.003	-0.005	-0.015
Avg. Hou Inc	(0.006)	(0.003)	(0.018)	(0.000)	(0.003)	(0.006)	(0.018)
	-0.001	-0.001	-0.003	-0.000	0.001	0.001	0.003
POL_AW	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.007)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.007)
	-0.002	-0.001	-0.006	-0.000	0.001	0.002	0.006
POL_AF	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.006)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.006)
	0.001	0.000	0.003	0.000	-0.000	-0.001	-0.002
SOC_CA	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.007)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.007)
	-0.004	-0.002	-0.010	-0.000	0.002	0.004	0.010
CUL_BF	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.007)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.007)
	-0.006*	-0.003*	-0.017*	-0.000*	0.003*	0.006*	0.017*
EXP_FM_LR	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.009)	(0.000)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.009)
	-0.004	-0.002	-0.011	-0.000	0.002	0.004	0.011
ME_IF	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.009)	(0.000)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.009)
	-0.001	-0.000	-0.002	-0.000	0.000	0.001	0.002
STY_ME	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.008)	(0.000)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.008)
	-0.001	-0.000	-0.003	-0.000	0.001	0.001	0.003
SOC_EG	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.007)	(0.000)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.007)
	-0.004	-0.002	-0.011	-0.000	0.002	0.004	0.011

LIK_VOT_WMN	Pr (O=1)	Pr (O=2)	Pr (O=3)	Pr (O=4)	Pr (O=5)	Pr (O=6)	Pr (O=7)
EG_GDE_PM	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.008)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.008)
	-0.003	-0.002	-0.010	-0.000	0.002	0.003	0.010
IMP_GDE_PM	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.007)	(0.000)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.009)
	-0.003	-0.002	-0.010	-0.000	0.002	0.003	0.010
TRS_GMT	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.007)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.007)
	-0.000	-0.000	-0.001	-0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001
POL_EFF	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.007)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.007)
	-0.002	-0.001	-0.006	-0.000	0.001	0.002	0.006
HIS_CON	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.009)	(0.000)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.009)
	-0.001	-0.000	-0.002	-0.000	0.000	0.001	0.002
ECO_STA	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.005)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.005)
	0.006***	0.003***	0.018***	0.000***	-0.003***	-0.006***	-0.018***
PRV_VOT_BH	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.007)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.007)
	-0.002	-0.001	-0.006	-0.000	0.001	0.002	0.006
SAT_CWP	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.008)	(0.000)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.008)
	-0.003	-0.001	-0.009	-0.000	0.002	0.003	0.009
SUP_GDQ	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.008)	(0.000)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.008)
	0.005	0.002	0.015	0.000	-0.003	-0.005	-0.014
PRF_VOT	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.009)	(0.000)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.009)
	0.008***	0.004***	0.023***	0.000***	-0.004***	-0.008***	-0.023***
BAR_WMN	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.009)	(0.000)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.009)
	0.003	0.001	0.008	0.000	-0.001	-0.003	-0.008
TWA_CEP	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.006)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.006)
	-0.023***	-0.011***	-0.064***	-0.001***	0.012***	0.022***	0.064***
PRB_WMN_SUC_POL	(0.006)	(0.004)	(0.008)	(0.001)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.009)

Note (s): Standard error in parenthesis *** p<.01; ** p<.05; * p<.10