

Female's Participation through First-Past-the-Post Electoral System in Provincial Election of Nepal

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Abstract

*An election produces changes in the socio-cultural arena. The gender gap is commonly used in politics to indicate voting preferences and level of participation during pre-electoral, electoral and post-electoral activities. Gender gap creates obstacles in every step of gender mainstreaming. This article was prepared based on secondary data from the election commission, Nepal (ECN). To assess the status of female's participation and to identify causes and measures of the gender gap in the provincial level **first-past-the-post** electoral system, this article was prepared as the title female's participation through first-past-the-post electoral system in the provincial election of Nepal. A simple literature review was conducted to collect essential information to meet the objective. The status of female's participation is found low at the provincial level **first-past-the-post** electoral system in Nepal. There were few numbers of nominate female candidates and elected female candidates in all 7 provinces. In Karnali province, even a single female candidate can't win the race. To meet the national commitment in gender mainstreaming and to fulfill the target of sustainable development goals, all political parties must perform effective policy to increase the number of female candidates. Through politics, women can realize discrimination and destitution over them. Active participation of women in politics boosts up their roles as voters, candidates, elected officials, electoral administrators, observers, civil society representatives, etc. All barriers regarding female participation in politics must be corrected by concerned authorities as soon as possible with the visionary and coordinating leadership of the local, provincial, and federal government.*

Keywords -province, election, gender gap, gender inequality, gender mainstreaming, patriarchy, **first-past-the-post**

Introduction

Nepal became a federal democratic republic after promulgating a new constitution on 20th September 2015. The new constitution initiated the country's transition from a unitary state to a federal state. There are 7 provinces in Nepal. Nepal government conducted the election of the Provincial assembly in two phases on 26th November and 7th December 2017. There were two electoral systems for provincial assemblies. 330 seats were elected by first-past-the-post voting and 220 by proportional representation (ECN, 2018). The first provincial election helped to materialize Nepal's transformation into a federal republic and this article is based on the election held in 2017.

In common sense, the gender gap is used to indicate differences in voting preferences and levels of political participation between males and females (Kittilson, 2016). The election commission of Nepal is committed to fostering gender mainstreaming and social inclusion in electoral activities at all levels (ECN, 2017). Social inclusiveness in elections for candidates involves paying attention to rules and practices that affect equity in men and women's ability to run for public office. It focuses on electoral systems, nominating procedures, political party practices, political-electoral financing systems, media/social media coverage (Hubbard, C., n.d.).

The status of political involvement determines the quality-of-service delivery, proportional representation, and legitimacy of the democratic process. After getting right in the election, women traditionally participated less than men in political processes all over the world (Kittilson, 2016). By comparing capitalist and socialist countries, Iversen and Rosenbluth (2006) focus on the role of the socialist countries in influencing men's and women's connections to the political sphere. Socialist countries' public sector employment offers opportunities for women's paid employment. Leftist parties get support from women in those countries which has a large public sphere.

Campaign for women in politics become successful through their interest in politics and exploring all information regarding candidates, party system, an electoral system with meaning interaction with concerned authorities. The level of women's participation in the political process is directly influenced based on their involvement in different aspects of political activities (Kittilson, 2016).

Low literacy rate, patriarchy, poverty, low access to resources, etc. are the common factors in Nepal responsible for low levels of participation of women and socially disadvantaged groups such as Dalits, Adibasi/Janjatis, Madheshis, and persons with disabilities. Political parties of Nepal have taken political action to promote social inclusion and gender equality in the political process. The government of Nepal has taken legal and policy level efforts to protect political rights and to increase access towards political participation (ECN, 2017).

Objectives

This article is prepared to meet the following two objectives:

- To assess the situation of the female's participation in a provincial level first-past-the-post electoral system in Nepal.
- To identify factors and preventive measures to maintain gender equality in politics.

Material and Methods

The election commission of Nepal is a constitutional body. It has the responsibility to register voter lists, political parties, and candidates. It conducts and monitors fair and valid elections. It also publishes reports of the election outcomes on time in Nepal. There are 7 provinces in Nepal. Nepal government conducted the election of the Provincial assembly in two phases on 26th November and 7th December 2017. Altogether there are 550

provincial seats in 7 provinces. Among them, 330 seats were elected through the first-past-the-post electoral system. This article is mainly based on the report of provincial election 2074 published by election commission Nepal. This study focused on 330 seats of the provincial assembly elected by the first-past-the-post voting system in 7 provinces. Thus, this study is based on secondary data. The required information was explored by a simple literature review via various search engines.

Result and Discussion

Koshi province

Kosho province covers 17.5% of the countries' total area. It is bordered by Tibet, China to the north, the Indian states Sikkim and West Bengal to the east, the Indian state Bihar to the south, Bagmati province, and Madhesh province to the west. There are 14 districts and 93 members of the provincial assembly. Among them, 56 members were elected through the first-past-the-post voting system.

Table 1: District wise gender status of Provincial candidates in Koshi province

Districts	Number of provincial constituencies	Number of candidates		Total number of candidates	Elected candidates		Total elected candidates
		Male	female		Male	Female	
1. Ilam	4	31	2	33	3	1	4
2. Udayapur	4	27	2	29	3	1	4
3. Okhaldhunga	2	12	1	13	2	-	2
4. Khotang	2	9	-	9	2	-	2
5. Jhapa	10	80	4	84	10	-	10
6. Taplejung	2	13	2	15	2	-	2
7. Terhathum	2	16	1	17	2	-	2
8. Dhankuta	2	13	-	13	2	-	2
9. Panchthar	2	16	-	16	2	-	2
10. Bhojpur	2	13	-	13	2	-	2
11. Morang	12	100	8	108	12	-	12
12. Sankhuwasabha	2	15	1	16	2	-	2
13. Sunsari	8	89	4	93	8	-	8
14. Solukhumbu	2	9	2	11	2	-	2
Total	56	443	27	470	54	2	56
Percentage	100 %	94.25 %	5.75 %	100%	96.43 %	3.57 %	100%

Source: election commission of Nepal

Table 1 revealed that out of 14 districts, 4 districts became nil in terms of female candidates. In 9 districts, provincial seats are greater than nominated female candidates. The provincial seats and nominated female candidates are equal numbers only in Solu-Khumbu districts. Among 470 nominations, 94.25% of nominees were male and only

5.75% of nominees were female. The gender gap is very wide in the nomination of candidates. Big and popular political parties neglect gender concerns during the nomination process. It reflects a very wide Gender gap in elected candidates. 96.43% male and 3.57% female candidates win the provincial election. Only 2 districts i.e., Ilam and Udayapur elected altogether 2 female candidates as their representatives in the provincial assembly.

Madhesh province

Madhesh Province covers 6.5% of countries' total area. It is the smallest province of Nepal in terms of Area. It is bordered by Koshi province and Bagmati province to the north, Koshi province to the east, the Indian state Bihar to the south, and Bagmati province to the west. There are 8 districts and 107 members of the provincial assembly in Madhesh province. Among them, 64 members were elected through the first-past-the-post voting system.

Table 2: District wise gender status of Provincial candidates in Madhesh province

Districts	Number of provincial constituencies	Number of candidates		Total number of candidates	Elected candidates		Total elected candidates
		Male	female		Male	Female	
1. Dhanusha	8	119	5	124	8	-	8
2. Parsa	8	107	5	112	8	-	8
3. Bara	8	101	8	109	7	1	8
4. Mahotari	8	132	12	144	5	3	8
5. Rautahat	8	137	7	144	8	-	8
6. Saptari	8	96	4	100	8	-	8
7. Sarlahi	8	126	6	132	7	1	8
8. Siraha	8	112	8	120	8	-	8
Total	64	930	55	985	59	5	64
Percentages	100%	94.41%	5.59%	100%	92.18%	7.82%	100%

Source: Election Commission of Nepal

Table 2 revealed that out of 8 districts, the Saptari district has the lowest, and the Mahottari district has the highest number of female candidates in the first provincial assembly. In 5 districts, provincial seats are greater than nominated female candidates. There is a balance between provincial seats and nominated female candidates in Bara and Siraha districts. Mahottari district has a greater number of female nominees than provincial seats. Among 985 nominations, 94.41% of nominees were male and only 5.59% of nominees were female. The gender gap is very wide in the nomination of candidates. Big and popular political parties neglect gender concerns during the nomination process. It reflects a very wide Gender gap in elected candidates. 92.18% male and 7.82% female candidates win the provincial election. Only 3 districts i.e., Bara,

Mahottari, and Sarlahi elected altogether 5 female candidates as their representatives in the provincial assembly.

Bagmati province

Bagmati Province covers 13.79% of countries' total area. It is bordered by Tibet, China to the north, Koshi province and Madhesh province to the east, the Indian state Bihar to the south, and Gandaki and Lumbini provinces to the west. There are 13 districts and 110 members of the provincial assembly. Among them, 66 members were elected through the first-past-the-post voting system.

Table 3: District wise gender status of Provincial candidates in Bagmati province

Districts	Number of Provincial Constituencies	Number of Candidates		Total Number of Candidates	Number of Elected Candidates		Total Elected Candidates
		Male	Female		Male	Female	
1. Kathmandu	20	179	43	222	18	2	20
2. Kavrepalanchok	4	30	2	32	4	-	4
3. Chitwan	6	47	6	53	6	-	6
4. Dolakha	2	22	1	23	2	-	2
5. Dhading	4	39	-	39	4	-	4
6. Nuwakot	4	25	3	28	3	1	4
7. Bhaktapur	4	38	4	42	4	-	4
8. Makawanpur	4	36	5	41	3	1	4
9. Rasuwa	2	11	1	12	2	-	2
10. Ramechhap	2	17	-	17	2	-	2
11. Lalitpur	6	60	4	64	5	1	6
12. Sindhupalchock	4	32	1	33	4	-	4
13. Sindhuli	4	25	2	27	4	-	4
Total	66	561	72	633	61	5	66
Percentage	100%	88.62%	11.38%	100%	92.42%	7.58%	100%

Source: election commission of Nepal

Table 3 revealed that out of 13 districts, 2 districts became nil in terms of female candidates. In 7 districts, provincial seats are greater than nominated female candidates. There is an equal number of provincial seats and numbers of nominated female candidates in the Bhaktapur and Chitwan districts. Kathmandu and Makawanpur districts have greater numbers of nominated candidates than the number of provincial seats. Among 633 nominations, 88.62% of nominees were male and 11.38% of nominees were female. The gender gap is very wide in the nomination of candidates. Big and popular political parties neglect gender concerns during the nomination process. It reflects a very wide Gender gap in elected candidates. 92.42% male and 7.58% female candidates win the provincial election. Only 4 districts i.e., Kathmandu, Nuwakot, Lalitpur, and Makawanpur elected female candidates as their representatives in the provincial assembly.

Gandaki province

Gandaki Province covers 14.57% of countries' total area. It is bordered by Tibet, China to the north, Bagmati province to the east, the Indian state Bihar to the south, and Lumbini province to the west. There are 11 districts and 60 members of the provincial assembly. Among them, 36 members were elected through the first-past-the-post voting system.

Table 4: District wise gender status of Provincial candidates in Gandaki province

Districts	Number of Provincial Constituencies	Number of Candidates		Total Number of Candidates	Elected Candidates		Total Elected Candidates
		Male	Female		Male	Female	
1. Kaski	6	52	8	60	6	-	6
2. Gorkha	4	15	4	19	4	-	4
3. Tanahun	4	29	4	33	3	1	4
4. Nawalpur	4	39	3	42	4	-	4
5. Parbat	2	14	-	14	2	-	2
6. Baglung	4	16	-	16	4	-	4
7. Manang	2	4	-	4	2	-	2
8. Mustang	2	6	-	6	2	-	2
9. Myagdi	2	5	1	6	1	1	2
10. Lamjung	2	14	-	14	2	-	2
11. Syangja	4	21	2	23	4	-	4
Total	36	215	22	237	34	2	36
Percentage	100%	90.71%	9.29%	100%	94.44%	5.56%	100%

Source: election commission of Nepal

Table-4 revealed that out of 11 districts, 5 districts became nil in terms of female candidates. Only one district i.e., Kaski has a greater number of nominated female candidates than provincial seats. The number of provincial seats and the number of nominated female candidates are equal in Gorkha and Tanahun districts. 3 districts i.e., Nawalpur, Myagdi, and Syangja have a lower number of female nominations than the number of provincial seats. Among 237 nominations, 90.71% of nominees were male and 9.29% of nominees were female. The gender gap is very wide in the nomination of candidates. Big and popular political parties neglect gender concerns during the nomination process. It reflects a very wide Gender gap in elected candidates. 94.44% male and 5.56% female candidates win the provincial election. Only 2 districts i.e., Tanahun and Myagdi elected female candidates as their representatives in the provincial assembly. Although Myagdi has only one female nomination, it produces good results.

4.5 Lumbini province

Lumbini Province covers 15.1% of countries' total area. It is bordered by the Gandaki and Karnali provinces to the north, Gandaki and Bagmati provinces to the east, the Indian states Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to the south, and sudurpashcim province to the west. There

are 12 districts and 87 members of the provincial assembly in Lumbini province. Among them, 52 members were elected through the first-past-the-post voting system.

Table 5: District wise gender status of Provincial candidates in Lumbini province

Districts	Number of Provincial Constituencies	Number of Candidates		Total Number of Candidates	Elected Candidates		Total Elected Candidates
		Male	Female		Male	Female	
1. Arghakhanchi	2	12	1	13	2	-	2
2. Kapilvastu	6	118	9	127	6	-	6
3. Gulmi	4	30	2	32	4	-	4
4. Dang	6	47	4	51	6	-	6
5. Parasi	4	60	3	63	4	-	4
6. Palpa	4	28	4	32	4	-	4
7. Pyuthan	2	9	2	11	2	-	2
8. Bardiya	4	31	3	34	4	-	4
9. Banke	6	61	7	68	4	2	6
10. Eastern Rukum	2	6	-	6	2	-	2
11. Rupandehi	10	140	11	151	10	-	10
12. Rolpa	2	13	-	13	2	-	2
Total	52	555	46	601	50	2	52
Percentage	100%	92.3%	7.7%	100%	96.2%	3.8%	100%

Source: election commission of Nepal

Table 5 revealed that out of 12 districts, 2 districts became nil in terms of female nomination. In 5 districts, provincial seats are greater than nominated female candidates. The provincial seats and nominated female candidates are an equal number in Palpa and Pyuthan districts. In 3 districts female nomination is greater than provincial seats. Among 601 nominations, 92.3% of nominees were male and only 7.7% of nominees were female. The gender gap is very wide in the nomination of candidates. Big and popular political parties neglect gender concerns during the nomination process. It reflects a very wide Gender gap in elected candidates. 96.2% male and 3.8% female candidates win the provincial election. Only one district i.e., Banke elected 2 female candidates as their representatives in the provincial assembly.

4.6 Karnali province

Karnali Province covers 18.97% of countries' total area. It is bordered by Tibet, China to the north, the Gandaki and Lumbini provinces to the east, Lumbini province to the south, and sudor Paschim province to the west. There are 10 districts and 40 members of the

provincial assembly. Among them, 24 members were elected through the first-past-the-post voting system.

Table 6: District wise gender status of Provincial candidates in Karnali province

Districts	Number of provincial constituencies	Number of candidates		Total number of candidates	Elected candidates		Total elected candidates
		Male	Female		Male	Female	
1. Kalikot	2	11	-	11	2	-	2
2. Jajarkot	2	9	-	9	2	-	2
3. Jumla	2	10	-	10	2	-	2
4. Dolpa	2	6	-	6	2	-	2
5. Dailekha	4	23	-	23	4	-	4
6. Mugu	2	6	1	7	2	-	2
7. Western Rukum	2	7	-	7	2	-	2
8. Salyan	2	15	-	15	2	-	2
9. Surkhet	4	37	2	39	4	-	4
10. Humla	2	6	-	6	2	-	2
Total	24	130	3	133	24	0	24
Percentages	100%	97.7%	2.3%	100%	100%	0%	100%

Source: election commission of Nepal

Table-6 revealed that out of 10 districts, 8 districts became nil in terms of female nomination. In 2 districts i.e., Surkhet and Mugu provincial seats are greater than nominated female candidates. Among 133 nominations, 97.7% of nominees were male and only 2.3% nominees were female. The gender gap is very wide in the nomination of candidates. Big and popular political parties neglect gender concerns during the nomination process. It reflects a very wide Gender gap in elected candidates. 100% male candidates win the provincial election.

4.7 Sudurpaschim province

SudurPaschim province covers 13.22% of countries' total area. It is bordered by Tibet, China to the north, and the Indian states Uttara khanda to the west, the Indian state Uttar Pradesh to the south, and Karnali and Lumbini provinces to the east. There are 9 districts and 53 members of the provincial assembly. Among them, 32 members were elected through the first-past-the-post voting system.

Table 7: District wise gender status of Provincial candidates in sudurpaschim province

Districts	Number of Provincial Constituencies	Number of Candidates		Total Number of Candidates	Elected Candidates		Total Elected Candidates
		Male	Female		Male	Female	
1. Achcham	4	11	-	11	4	-	4

2. Kanchanpur	6	32	6	38	6	-	6
3. Kailali	10	70	6	76	10	-	10
4. Dadeldhura	2	8	-	8	2	-	2
5. Doti	2	10	1	11	2	-	2
6. Darchula	2	10	-	10	2	-	2
7. Bajhang	2	8	2	10	1	1	2
8. Bajura	2	8	-	8	2	-	2
9. Baitadi	2	7	-	7	2	-	2
Total	32	164	15	179	31	1	32
Percentage	100%	91.6%	8.4%	100%	96.9%	3.1%	100%

Source: election commission of Nepal

Table-7 revealed that out of 9 districts, 5 districts became nil in terms of female nomination. In 2 districts, provincial seats are greater than the number of nominated female candidates. The number of provincial seats and the number of nominated female candidates are equal in Kanchanpur and Bajhang districts. Among 164 nominations, 91.6% of nominees were male and 8.4% of nominees were female. The gender gap is very wide in the nomination of candidates. Big and popular political parties neglect gender concerns during the nomination process. It reflects a very wide Gender gap in elected candidates. 96.9% male and 3.1% female candidates win the provincial election. Only one district i.e., Bajhang elected female candidates as their representatives in the provincial assembly.

Obstacles of female’s participation in the election.

Different levels of elections such as national, provincial, and local are essential to promote women’s participation in the political process. There must be the provision of legal and policy-level-specific measures to eradicate the barriers of gender discrimination. Women candidates have gaps in multiple sectors that prevent them to compete effectively (UN women, n.d.). There are various constraints for effective participation in politics as a candidate, a party member, and a political activist for women. Traditional gender roles, gender-based stereotypes, discriminatory attitudes, male-dominated model of politics, lack of party support, gender blind legal framework, unfavorable electoral system, lack of campaign fund, lack of financial resources to be full-time members of political parties, lack of political education, limited access to information, lack of political experiences, the burden of domestic work, lack of media coverage, bias in the media, perception of politics as ‘dirty game’, violence from within and outside the party are the common constraints faced by women all over the globe(ace project, n.d.).

Measures to promote women participation in the election

Fair and free elections are prerequisites for the existence of democracy, and equality of rights of women and men, including electoral rights, are the foundation for the successful development of society (UNDP, 2021). By applying the following measures, women’s participation can be promoted in the election and political involvement: Gender

equality in voter registration. Gender equality in nomination. Gender equality in civic and voter education. Provision of support system for candidates in the electoral campaign. Gender equality in the voting process. Gender equality in conflict resolution mechanism in the election (ace project, n.d.). Increasing the representation of women in political parties by introducing a quota system within political parties and ensuring the accession of women to strategic decision-making positions. Conducting advocacy with the leaders of political parties to enhance awareness of the needs of a significant voting bloc. Enhancing women's access to the media as a tool to rally public opinion. Empowering women through education, training, and increased access to information. Introducing a formal quota with enforcement mechanisms to increase the number of women members of the legislature (international IDEA, 2005)

Conclusion

Women are human. Women's rights are human rights. Respect women in all areas of social life. We all have led a battle in favor of the social, cultural, economic, and political rights of women. Politics influences all policies in a state. Political participation can upgrade the miserable condition of women. Through politics, women can realize discrimination and destitution over them. Active participation of women in politics boosts up their roles as voters, candidates, elected officials, electoral administrators, observers, civil society representatives, etc.

In the context of Nepal, domestic violence, illiteracy, lack of political education, gender-biased media coverage, gender-biased nomination in the election, gender blind legal system, patriarchal political system, patriarchy in political parties, lack of family supports, lack of political campaign fund, gender-biased political behaviors restricts women to involve in politics.

Political parties, Mass media, and civil society can play a vital role in promoting gender equality in the political process. They can promote women's empowerment in the long run. They can play the role of advocates for increasing meaningful participation of women in pre-electoral, electoral, and post-electoral periods. They can develop and implement gender-sensitive policies. They can initiate people's movements against gender exclusion and violence against women.

The involvement of women in the political process produces results faster than any other mechanism for gender mainstreaming. Thus, by realizing facts and figures about gender inequality in the first-past-the-post voting system in the provincial election in 2074 BS, all political parties, mass media, and civil society must play a leading role to increase the active participation of women in the coming provincial election shortly. Proportional representation is a passive form of gender mainstreaming and the first-past-the-post voting system is the active form of gender mainstreaming. Thus, all political parties of Nepal must increase the nomination rate of women in all tiers of election for the creation of multiplier effects not only in women's lifestyles but also in the social arena.

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