

Research Article

Women Participation in Local Government: Bharatpur Metropolitan City of Chitwan District

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Abstract

The research titled "Women Participation in Local Government: A Study of Women Members from Bharatpur Metropolitan City of Chitwan District" investigates the extent of women's political engagement and their leadership capabilities within the specific context of Bharatpur Metropolitan City, Chitwan. The research employs a combination of primary and secondary data sources, primarily utilizing interview schedules with 61 female local-level leaders. The study's focal points include the challenges faced by women leaders, their capacity to assume leadership roles, and their backgrounds in political and social work. The findings reveal that women in political leadership roles are gradually developing their leadership skills despite encountering hurdles such as limited knowledge in their mandated responsibilities at the local level. These women typically lacked prior political and social work experience, primarily engaging in household and community-based activities. However, they have now transitioned into roles focused on social services, community development, and women's rights advocacy as representatives of their communities. Despite their education, they continue to grapple with societal patriarchal norms. The study also highlights the importance of leadership and women empowerment training, legal education, and the use of quotas by political parties, which have contributed to the increased presence of female political leaders at the local level. These barriers are intricately linked to societal structures and personal capacities. Interestingly, educated and socially active women leaders are actively encouraging other women in their communities to engage in politics for the broader goal of social transformation and empowerment, fostering a sense of unity among women leaders for collective community upliftment.

Keywords

Women Participation, Local Government, Political Leadership, Gender Equality, Patriarchy, Quota System, Nepal Politics

1. Introduction

Politics is very important for many parties of human life. Mostly it is imperative for the existence of statehood and the way in which people interact-how they make decisions and settle disputes. Because people live groups in groups, there is a need to make decisions-about how power or available resources to the group are to be shared out for example or how conflicts which arise within the group are to be solved. The

study of politics is the study of the how such decisions are made. It may also be the study of how such decisions should be made. Thus, we can define politics in two ways; first politics can be considered as the study of power and secondly as the study of the conflict's resolutions [13]. To put in other words a modern philosopher, Michael Oakeshott, who was attracted by the original Greek roots of the word *politiki*,

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meaning the affairs of the state, defined politics as a merely organization of the running of the state [3]. Politics relates the power struggle of the state. It is thus, concerned with power and the way in which power is distributed among the society (or groups). While power is mostly obviously held by the government and its agents [15].

Political participation involves various democratic activities, from voting to protests, giving citizens a voice in governance. Women's active engagement is crucial for gender-sensitive policies and sustainable development. Yet, cultural biases and institutional resistance often hinder women's participation, especially in male-dominated political parties. In Nepal, despite comprising half the population, women's contributions are undervalued, limiting their involvement in various sectors [6].

Nepal is addressing these disparities through policies in education, employment, and politics. Local government laws reserve 20% of positions for women and additional seats for marginalized groups. Initiatives are in place to boost women's participation, aiming for proportional representation. While women make up over 50% of Nepal's population, their presence in public life lags behind, emphasizing the need for equality, development, and peace efforts [9].

1.1. Women's Participation in Politics

Political participation, recognized as a fundamental human right by the UN, empowers individuals to engage in democratic processes and decision-making. Gender disparities in political participation were evident, with women facing challenges despite their potential. Men held an advantage in participatory skills due to better access to resources and networks. Despite milestones in gender inclusion, men still outnumbered women in political roles, emphasizing the need to address gender imbalances [12].

1.2. Problems of the Study

While it is clear that there are some women in political leadership positions today, it is not known how and why some women have been able to break through some of the barriers in Nepal's political environment. The need of women's representation in politics and various state organs has been realized even since 1956 A.D. However, the issues of women's participation, empowerment and inclusion have been prioritized only after the people's movement-I of 1990 A.D. The people's movement-II of 2006 A.D. has more strongly highlighted the issues of women's participation, empowerment and inclusion in politics and government mechanisms.

Political participation is a means of gaining access to the

power structure where decisions for resource allocation and other issues of community concerns are made. Women's participation, necessary element of empowerment which is considered essential for two main reasons. Firstly, it indicates the status of women in society. Secondly, it is a means to enable women to improve their status and make meaningful contributions of national development. .

Elected women participated data was taken of local election data from the website of election commission of Nepal government. [11]. The concept of social transformation has been increasingly used to study significant political, socio-economic and cultural changes affected by individuals and groups. This book uses a novel approach from the gender perspective and from bottom up to analyze social transformation in Nepal, a country with a complex traditional structure of caste, class, ethnicity, religion and regional locality and the experience of the ten-year of People's War (1996-2006). [16].

Almost all the political parties have now been convinced for at least 33% women's representation in their various levels. Similarly, women politicians have addressed the demand of proportionate representation. But, the political parties of Nepal have yet to proceed with clear agenda for women's meaningful participation in politics. In the above context, there is lack of detailed study and research from the various agencies on women's participation in the political parties and issues thereof. This study, therefore, is focused on enhancing women's political participation. If we study the trends and parch regarding women's political participation and their status the following problems arises [14]:

- a) There is very little political consciousness among women in Nepali society.
- b) The women are lagging far behind in politics than their male counterparts.
- c) Political parties are not serious enough to formulate and implement to foster more women participation in politics.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study were to the assess increase of women in local level politics along with the increment of woman's participation and the status of women's participation, in the local level government in Chitwan. The specific objectives were as follows [8].

- 1) To find out problems of participation of women in Local level government.
- 2) To identify the specific factors those, facilitate the success of women in attaining political positions.

Table 1. Table Elected women representatives in local elections in different province.

Provinces	Political parties	Elected Male representatives in local elections	Elected Female representatives in local election
Province 1	Nepali Congress (NC)	1204	794
	Unified Markist Leninist (UML)	1894	1370
	Maoist Centre (MC)	317	189
	Sanghiya Samajwad (SS)	79	61
	Others	111	68
Province 2	NC	1042	689
	UML	711	538
	MC	665	463
	SS	610	445
	Others	857	585
Province 3	NC	1093	673
	UML	1749	1278
	MC	522	349
	SS	104	58
	Others	0	0
Province 4	NC	1053	711
	UML	950	702
	MC	208	143
	SS	0	0
	Others	104	61
Province 5	NC	948	659
	UML	1133	810
	MC	868	367
	SS	139	105
	Others	257	170
Province 6	NC	643	401
	UML	862	554
	MC	669	469
	SS	0	0
	Others	76	44
Province 7	NC	943	624
	UML	943	692
	MC	313	221
	SS	0	0
	Others	64	41

Source: (NEC, 2017 A.D.)

Despite some female representation in leadership positions, such as the President and members of various legislative bodies, Nepal's political landscape remains heavily skewed towards men, with a significant gender gap of 91.86% male

representatives to 8.13% female representatives. This underscores the persistence of power structures and hierarchies in Nepali politics.

Table 2. Elected candidates in House of Representatives (Pratinidhi Sabha) and Provincial Assembly (Pradesh Sabha) of 2017 A.D. based on the gender.

Gender	Elected House of Representatives	Elected Representatives in Provincial Assembly	Elected Representatives in National Assembly	President	Vice- President	Total	Percentage
Male	313	159	35	0	1	508	91.86
Female	17	6	21	1	0	45	8.13
Grand Total	330	165	56	1	1	553	100

Source: (NEC, 2017 A.D.)

Political parties hold significant influence in determining candidate nominations for elections, making them major gatekeepers in the political process. Their internal leadership structures have a pivotal role in either enabling or hindering women's participation in decision-making. Many studies on internal party democracy in Nepal have highlighted that these parties are often male-dominated and characterized by hierarchical decision-making processes. Women typically have limited involvement in these internal party decisions, which directly impacts candidate nominations and, consequently, the representation of women in elections.

In Nepal, women, despite being nearly half of the population, face gender disparities in various aspects of life. They are often relegated to domestic roles, while politics is predominantly male-dominated. Achieving gender equality in local government is gaining importance through legislative efforts. This study examines the relationship between gender issues in local government and the performance of women representatives. Women's political participation involves factors like knowledge, interest, engagement, competence, and past experiences, with motivations often stemming from engagement in student politics and community activism.

2. Woman and Politics

Table 3. Distribution of the Respondents by Reasons for Entering Politics.

Reasons	No. of Respondents	Percent
Involved with student politics, community works and had political discussions at family since childhood	13	22.0
Involved with student politics and union movements	20	34.0
Involved with social justice issues	15	25.5
Worked for unions, used to work for many politicians in campaign	11	18.5
Total	59	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2022 A.D.

Table 3 indicates that 15 women entered politics due to dissatisfaction with their social activities, while an additional 15 were motivated by their engagement in community social

justice initiatives. Furthermore, 11 women were inspired by existing political unions.

2.1. Type of Seats for Women

In Nepal, women can choose to run for general positions or seek reserved seats. Only 36 women directly won in elections, while others opted for reserved seats due to the competitiveness of general seats. Selection for reserved seats occurs after national elections when parties invite interested female candidates to apply, followed by interviews to justify their nominations.

Reasons for Women's Political Participation:

Recent recognition of strong local governments as vital for good governance has spurred women's political engagement in Nepal. Despite the perception of politics as male-dominated, women have become increasingly politically active over the past two decades. Amendments in Nepalese laws aim to ensure gender representation in local government, but societal change also requires conscious efforts to empower women [2].

2.2. CEDAW and Women's Rights

Nepal, a signatory of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), guarantees women's political and civil rights. National policies and programs strive to improve women's lives. Although local government in Nepal is required to consult and involve women, this isn't always gender-specific.

2.3. Social and Cultural Challenges

Women in Nepal face underrepresentation in local government. However, there is a growing awareness of their roles, mobility, and contributions to development. Gender issues have gained prominence globally since the 1975 A.D. World Conference on Women in Mexico, influencing development discourse [5].

A. Family: Nepalese society traditionally relies on a rigid family structure that defines women's roles, responsibilities, and social status. Women primarily maintain the family's economic and social aspects and ensure future generations through childbearing and child-rearing. Changing dynamics and poverty are altering women's roles and family support.

B. Patriarchy: Nepal's traditional patriarchal society is marked by class and gender divisions. Male figures, often fathers or male kin, hold decision-making power and economic control within the family. Inheritance customs reinforce this patriarchal tradition by passing property control to men.

C. Gender Discrimination: Family responsibilities, especially childcare, pose significant barriers to women's political participation in Nepal. Balancing family and politics can be challenging, with limited support and childcare facilities. Societal pressures and traditional gender roles limit women's education and career opportunities, reinforcing their roles as caregivers and homemakers.

Women's Contribution in Election Campaigns: In Nepal,

women play significant roles in election campaigns, organizing public events, mobilizing voters, and canvassing for their party candidates. Special arrangements like separate election booths for women have increased women's voter turnout during elections [1].

Legal Rights and Political Participation: Nepal's constitution grants equal rights to women and men in public life. Various laws have been enacted and amended to protect women's rights. Despite cultural barriers, women have become more politically visible, with quotas ensuring their presence in local government and the national Parliament.

Women in Political Parties: Women's involvement in political parties has been increasing, although specific membership data is lacking. While women occupy some leadership positions, they are still underrepresented in higher party hierarchies. Nepal has seen a growing influence of money in politics, which can hinder women's participation due to limited access to financial resources.

Women in Top Political Party Leadership: Women do not hold the top leadership positions in the two largest political parties in Nepal, the Nepal Communist Party and Nepali Congress. However, women leaders have emerged during crisis periods and played vital roles in their parties. They have the potential to serve as positive role models for women in Nepal but need to promote gender equity by involving more women in their parties and government.

Vision for Local Governance: Research on local governance in Nepal has led to the development of a vision statement emphasizing the integral role of local government, inclusion of all social groups, self-governance, and recognizing the capabilities of individual Nepalese. Women's equal participation in politics is crucial for the overall advancement of women and the achievement of gender equality and development goals.

3. Participation of Women Members in Various Activities in Local Level

The participation of women members in various development activities are given below:

- a) Infrastructural development, constructions of road, bridges culvert etc.
- b) Relief and rehabilitation.
- c) Health and environment improvement.
- d) Women and child development, public health.
- e) Social justice, decision making in village court, arbitration and
- f) Communication with public and private sectors etc.

3.1. Behavioral Pattern: Male Members

Traditional Patriarchal Society: In Nepal's traditional patriarchal society, decision-making power and economic control are primarily held by men, reinforcing gender divisions [4].

Lack of Confidence: Many women lack confidence in participating in the public sphere and political work due to their limited experience in these areas [4].

Resistance to Female Representatives: Both men and women in rural areas find it challenging to accept women as representatives because it doesn't align with traditional gender roles, further complicating the behavior of male counterparts towards female representatives [4].

Table 4. Distribution of the Respondents by Behavior of Male Members.

Category	No. of Respondents	Percent
Not Fair	10	17.0
Fair	15	25.5
Satisfactory	18	30.5
Good	16	27.0
Total	59	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2022 A.D.

Attitude of Male Counterparts: Women representatives reported varying attitudes from their male counterparts. About 17% found the behavior of male counterparts "not fair," 25.5%

considered it "fair," 30.5% deemed it "satisfactory," and 27% described it as "good." However, discrimination against women representatives by male members was a common issue.

Male-Dominated Environment: The male-dominated political environment within local government discourages women's participation. Few women in decision-making roles face acceptance challenges in this society dominated by men. Many male members hold biases against women running for general seats and diminish the value of reserved seats.

Lack of Cooperation: Lack of cooperation from men in local politics hinders women's effectiveness in decision-making. This lack of cooperation manifests through various disrespectful behaviors, including verbal abuse, exclusion from committees, and confrontational relationships with male counterparts and chairmen. Women representatives often struggle to gain support, sympathy, and cooperation from their male counterparts.

3.1.1. Women Member's Experiences of Participation

Most of the female members have been elected for the first time acknowledged that the training is important and necessity for them. The training has developed their understanding of the role and function of politics, and improved basic managerial skills. The following table shows the experience of participation scenario of women in the local government elections [10].

Table 5. Women Members' Experience in Local Level Election.

Category	No. of Respondents	Percent
First time participated in politics	44	74.5
Previously participated in politics	15	25.5
Total	59	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2022 A.D.

Among the women members, 74.5% participated in local-level elections for the first time, with only 25.5% being re-elected. The limited number of women running for general seats is a concern, and how communities perceive these women representatives can impact their social legitimacy.

Male-Dominated Politics: Politics in both Australia and Bangladesh has been historically dominated by men, creating a legacy of gender inequality and lower female participation.

Lack of Party Support: Women representatives often face a lack of support from political parties, making it challenging for them to thrive in the political arena.

Limited Political Networks: Women have limited access to political networks, which can hinder their political progress.

Lack of Mentorship and Training: The absence of mentoring and training systems, especially for young women, is a significant barrier to their political involvement.

Sexism and Misogyny: Sexist comments and attitudes from male politicians can create a hostile environment for women in politics and deter their participation.

Table 6. Distribution of the Respondents by the Barriers in Politics.

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percent
Lack of education	19	32.0

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percent
Patriarchy	15	25.5
Lack of awareness about women's right	25	42.5
Total	59	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2022 A.D.

Education Barriers: About 32.0% of women identified lack of education as a major barrier to women's limited participation in politics. Education is a crucial factor that empowers women and influences their engagement in political activities.

Patriarchy System: Approximately 25.5% of women reported that Nepal's patriarchal system was a significant factor restricting women's political participation. Patriarchy, deeply embedded in society, enforces norms and laws that limit women's access to resources and information, affecting their self-confidence and political involvement. Despite having equal political rights, women can face active discouragement in practice.

3.1.2. Removal of Barriers

Women representative are of the opinion that there are many barriers for the women to effectively participate and function properly in the activities of the local government. Following table gives an impression of the views expressed by them to alleviate the barriers:

Table 7. Distribution of the Respondents by Removal of Barriers.

Category	No. of Respondents	Percent
Remove quota system	5	8.5
Specific duties to be given	15	25.0
Free from political influence	5	8.5
Active participation	14	24.0
Equal distribution of work	20	34.0
Total	59	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2022 A.D.

Quota System Opinion: Only 8.5% of women representatives favored the removal of the quota system, which is considered a historic step for women's empowerment in Nepal and the region.

Clear Roles and Responsibilities: About 25.0% of women recommended that specific duties should be assigned to women members in order to ensure their meaningful partici-

pation in various functions of local government. Roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined in local government manuals and ordinances.

3.1.3. Problems Faced by the Women

Intimidating Nature of Politics: Participants widely acknowledged the intimidating and confrontational nature of politics as a significant barrier to women's political participation.

Perception of Politics as a "Man's Game": Women often view politics as a male-dominated, competitive, and combative sphere that doesn't align with their preferences and family responsibilities.

Table 8. Distribution of the Respondents by Various Problems.

Problems	No. of Respondents	Percent
Family issue	36	61.0
Health	12	20.5
(judgment)	2	3.5
Dowry	3	5.0
Others	6	10.0
Total	59	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2022 A.D.

Women representatives face numerous challenges but remain committed and gain valuable experience. They actively participate in health, environmental, and awareness-building activities, focusing on issues like violence prevention and financial assistance for vulnerable women. They also play a crucial role in resolving disputes related to marriage, divorce, polygamy, and dowry, given their deeper understanding of women's issues in their communities.

3.1.4. Difficulties Created by the Male Counterparts

A local women politician stated: Politics is full of conflict and unfair competition. Men do not leave space for women; women have to fight to secure their place. The political environment, the image of political leaders, rampant corruption all discourage women to get involved here (Interview).

Table 9. Facing Difficulties by the Male Counterparts.

Difficulties Responses	No. of Respondents	Percent
In some cases,	26	44.0
More	4	7.0

Difficulties Responses	No. of Respondents	Percent
Never	23	39.0
Frequently	6	10.0
Total	59	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2022 A.D.

Local women members faced nomination challenges related to social status and manipulation by the elite. Nominated women often had rural elite backgrounds and were less active. Some elected women encountered difficulties, with 7% facing opposition from male counterparts during their election. In contrast, 39% reported no problems, while 10% faced consistent criticism from male counterparts. A few mentioned facing various issues.

3.1.5. Initiatives Taken by the Women Members for Local People

On the issue to raise participation of women in local politics, women had expressed with dissatisfaction that they had not been able to do anything as per their abilities and they have not participated in the meetings in Local level politics.

Table 10. Distribution of the Respondents by Initiatives Taken.

Initiatives Taken	No. of Respondents	Percent
To raise political empowerment	9	15.0
Too aware on women rights	10	17.0
To increase women education	15	25.5
To safe womanhood	10	17.0
To generate decision making policy	15	25.5
Total	59	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2022 A.D.

Some women representatives couldn't fully utilize their abilities and participation in local government meetings. Others focused on improving female education (25.5%) through community education committees, promoting women's safety (17.0%), and contributing to decision-making policies (25.5%). They reported assisting divorced women and widows, providing safe water and sanitation facilities to schools, raising awareness against dowry and early marriage, and more.

3.1.6. Quota System for Participation of Women

The reserved seat system has positively impacted the social status of many women, allowing them to speak publicly and be heard. A significant proportion (29.0%) of women representatives believe that the quota system is essential for women's political empowerment.

Table 11. Distribution of the Respondents by the Essential of Quota System.

Responses	No. of Respondents	Percent
Political empowerment	17	29.0
Increase number of participants	13	22.0
Develop women's situation	21	36.0
Step towards mainstream Politics	8	13.0
Total	59	100.0

Sources: Field Survey, 2022 A.D.

According to the table, 22% believe that increasing local-level participation has improved women's political situation. Additionally, 36% see this system as enhancing women's formal political involvement, and 13% view it as a step toward mainstream politics. Some respondents mention that women quotas are not consistently met, and there is debate and opposition to the quota system due to perceptions of passive representation.

3.1.7. Women's Capacity to Perform in Local Level Politics

Reserved seats in Local Government face challenges due to gender norms and Hindu practices, hindering women's participation. Local politics is seen as male-dominated, and family support is crucial for women due to the election system's cost. Male members often have personal incomes, giving them an advantage over women representatives.

3.2. Hindrances to Women Participation in Local Government

- Patriarchal values and norms in society discourage women's political participation by contradicting traditional gender roles. Lack of family support can hinder women's political careers, as they often require permission and encouragement from male relatives.
- Social and cultural views that underestimate women's capabilities and intelligence contribute to their political underrepresentation.

- c) Limited access to education and awareness impedes women's ability to engage in politics effectively.
- d) Economic dependency on their families often leaves women without the financial resources to pursue political careers.
- e) Additional obstacles include low literacy and political awareness among women, a lack of credible female role models, and growing political corruption.
- f) Weak civil society and divisive tendencies among women's groups can further hinder women's political empowerment.

Way forward for women empowerment for vibrant political participation [7].

- a) Address societal factors hindering women's political participation through attitude change and institutional engagement.
- b) Enhance women's political skills and exposure before entering politics.
- c) Promote social transformation to sensitize the public about women's inclusion in politics.
- d) Encourage women to join community organizations, showcasing their capabilities and forming advocacy groups.
- e) Establish women's networks and cooperation to collectively overcome barriers.
- f) Recognize women's vital role in governance and state-building.
- g) Combat tribalism through media and awareness programs highlighting its negative impact.
- h) Socialize children to understand gender roles, cultural interactions, and environmental aspects for a more inclusive political future.

4. Research Methods and Objectives

The study titled "Women Participation in Local Government" focused on assessing the increasing involvement of women in local politics and their status in Chitwan's Bharatpur Metropolitan City. Primary data was gathered through questionnaires and direct interviews with 59 elected women leaders from the major political parties in the city who participated in the local elections of 2022 A.D. Thematic analysis was employed to categorize and interpret the data, and the findings were presented using tables and graphical representations. Descriptive tools like frequencies and percentages were applied for data analysis, shedding light on critical issues emerging from the discussions.

5. Major Findings

Women's participation in Nepali politics is influenced by various factors. Some enter politics due to dissatisfaction or a commitment to social justice, but family commitments often hinder them. Discrimination by male counterparts is a com-

mon issue. Patriarchy, deeply rooted in Nepalese society, remains a major barrier, alongside obstacles like limited education and job market access, domestic roles, violence, and lack of political party support. Modernization brings changes but also pressure on women to adopt masculine traits. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including changing societal attitudes, fostering family support, and implementing affirmative strategies for women in politics.

6. Conclusion

In Nepal, traditional customs and patriarchal norms limit women's rights and roles, both culturally and legally. Societies prioritize women's roles in childbearing and rearing, while post-industrial societies emphasize economic and political participation. Political parties play a vital role in promoting gender equality, but some, like NC, NCP, and RPP in Nepal, are hesitant to nominate women for general seats. Financial barriers also hinder women's political participation, as men often have better access to funds through personal networks and inheritance laws. To promote gender equality, parties should provide support, training, and mentorship to women, and laws should ensure a minimum of 33% women candidates. Addressing financial constraints with initiatives like a common fund is essential for women's political participation.

Abbreviations

AD	Anno Domini (In the year of the Lord)
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
MC	Maoist Centre
NC	Nepali Congress
NCP	Nepal Communist Party
NEC	National Electrical Code
RPP	Rastriya Prajantra Party
SS	Sanghiya Samajwad
UN	United Nation
UML	Unified Markist Leninist

Author Contributions

Mahendra Prasad Adhikari is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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