

Research Article

Challenges and Constraints: Examining Women Politicians' Status in Decision-Making within Political Parties

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Abstract

This study examines the challenges faced by women politicians in Nepal, focusing on their participation in decision-making processes within political parties. Despite constitutional provisions for gender equality, women are often marginalized in politics due to societal and familial constraints. Men benefit from these dynamics, as they are able to engage freely in political activities, while women are restricted by traditional gender roles and the need for family approval. This paper aims to investigate the decision-making status of women politicians and the factors that constrain them. This research article explores the status of women politicians in decision-making procedures within the political parties and the constraining factors that place the women in the position of subordination. Twenty participants were selected applying the simple random sampling method that falls under the probability sampling. Five women members were selected from each party, such as the Nepali Congress Party, CPN (UML), Maoist Party, and National Democratic Party, from the Siddharthanagar Municipal Committee using the lottery method. The semi-structured interview schedule was employed as the tool to collect the data. The study highlights that, although there is a growing presence of women in leadership positions, their opinions are often undervalued, particularly in male-dominated environments. A significant number of women (60%) report feeling neglected in discussions on gender-sensitive issues, such as reproductive rights and gender-based violence. Additionally, women face widespread distrust in their leadership abilities, with factors like gender bias, societal expectations, and financial constraints hindering their political advancement. Practices of favoritism and nepotism further limit opportunities for women.

Keywords: Decision Making; Gender Sensitive; Leadership Capacity; Nepotism; Favoritism

1. Introduction

Women are universally held in a disadvantaged position in every sphere of society. The participation of women in the decision-making process, particularly in the political sphere, has

long been a significant issue globally, and Nepal is no exception. The political sphere of Nepal has undergone a trans-formative journey, evolving from centuries of monarchy to a federal democratic republic after the declaration of the 2015 Constitution. Despite these progressive changes, the full participation of women in politics and decision-making processes remains a challenge, reflecting deep-rooted social, cultural, and institutional barriers. However, in order to increase the participation of women in the new constitution of Nepal, the concept of 33% participation of women has been established by the constitution itself. For example: In the proportional system of parliament, 33% women are mandatory, women are mandatory for Speaker or Deputy Speaker and one woman is mandatory for Mayor and Deputy Mayor (Constitution of Nepal, 2072).

However, until today there are rare examples of women reaching the highest positions in any political party. Even though the political parties have made this arrangement they have established it only as condition to comply with the constitution. The environment, family and society do not encourage women to actively participate in politics by breaking social bonds. Men joining political parties are taking advantage of it. They do not want to appoint women to executive positions, it is dependents on men to openly and actively reach out to women everywhere. Men are able to go wherever they want, while women are still under the obligation to get permission from the family and manage the household. The men in the party are directly benefiting from it. Overall, although the constitution tries to establish the principle of equality, it has not been implemented in practice.

Ashenafi (2009) focuses on the challenges and opportunities for Ethiopian women in political and public decision-making roles. It highlights structural and societal barriers, including traditional gender norms, lack of access to education, and political violence, which limit women's effective participation. The study also emphasizes the importance of legal frameworks and international agreement in promoting gender equality in Ethiopia's political sphere, despite continuous obstacles.

Kumar (2017) mentioned the global status of women in politics, highlighting male dominance in most parliaments. It points out countries with notable achievements, such as Rwanda, which leads in women's political representation. He provides a comparative analysis of the challenge's women face, including gender inequality, violence, and patriarchal norms. The study emphasizes the importance of international efforts and feminist movements in advancing gender balance in political leadership worldwide.

Julios (2022) highlights the pervasive issue of sexual harassment within the UK Parliament, noting that it mirrors the problems seen in various institutions, including Hollywood. She

points out that sexual misconduct is widespread across all political parties, referencing a dossier from the Conservative Party that identifies 36 MPs accused of inappropriate behavior. This underscores the endemic nature of sexual misconduct in political environments. This paper raises the questions like what is the status of women politicians in decision making procedure within the political parties and what are the constraining factors to place the women in the position of subordination? To address the research questions set, this paper aims to investigate the decision making status of women politicians and the factors that constrain them.

2. Literature Review

This research investigates the challenges women encounter in politics, focusing on their experiences and insights into the issues they face. As a result, numerous feminist perspectives engage with this specific area of sociology. Mary Wollstonecraft, a key figure in liberal feminism, is known for advocating women's rights and equality in the 18th century. In her work "*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.1792*", she advocates women's education and equal opportunities with men. She believed that women were not inherently inferior to men, but that their perceived inferiority was the result of lack of access to education and opportunities. She criticized the idea that women should only focus on being wives and mothers and instead called for them to be seen as individuals with their own rights and abilities. She believed that if women were given the same opportunities as men, they could become better companions, mothers, and citizens, benefiting society as a whole. The book was a bold call for equal treatment and respect for women during a time when this idea was not widely accepted.

Mill (1869) argued for gender equality and women's rights. The idea that controls how men and women relate to each other, where one sex is legally inferior to the other is unfair and major barrier to human progress. It should be replaced with a principle of complete equality, where neither side has more power or privilege, and no one is at a disadvantage. He further states that those who believe that men have the right to lead and women must obey, or that men are suited for government and women are not need to provide strong evidence for their claim or admit that their argument has been proven wrong. Those who deny women the freedom or rights that men have are against fairness and are promoting inequality. Therefore, they should be required to provide strong evidence for their stance, and if they can't prove their case beyond doubt, they should be judged as wrong.

Murray's essay (1790) is one of the first American feminist author. She argues against the common belief that women are less intelligent than men. She states that men and women

can achieve equally. She believes any difference in abilities come from women not having the same education, not because they are less capable. She points out that society's expectations hold women back. If women received the same education and freedoms as men, they could succeed just as well. Education is a major focus of her essay. Murray argues that women deserve the same educational opportunities as men to reach their full potential. She criticizes the idea that women should only take care of the home. Limiting women's roles this way reduces their potential and keeps them from being equal. Overall, Murray's essay is a strong call for gender equality, especially in education, and challenges the traditional views of women's roles in her time.

Betty Friedan in her influential book "*The Feminine Mystique (1963)*", which is often credited with sparking the second wave feminism in the United States, she challenged the widely held society's belief in the 1950s and early 1960s that women's fulfillment came primarily through domesticity-marriage, motherhood, and homemaking. She argues that this expectation, which she calls the "feminine mystique," limited women's opportunities and kept them from pursuing their own identities and ambitions outside of the home. The book encourages women to seek education, careers, and independence, challenging traditional roles and highlighting the need for gender equality. Ultimately, it calls for a reevaluation of women's roles in society.

She revisits her original ideas with a new introduction, reflecting on the progress and challenges of the feminist movement. She argues that while the first wave of feminism achieved significant victories, such as increased job opportunities and legal rights for women, the movement now needs to evolve into a "second stage" of feminism, emphasizing that while women fought for equal rights and opportunities, they also needed to address the complexities of balancing work, family, and personal fulfillment. Friedan criticizes traditional gender roles that expect women to only be wives and mothers. She believes these roles limit women's opportunities and happiness. At the same time, she points out that some parts of the feminist movement have overlooked the different experiences of women from various backgrounds. She argues that feminism should be more inclusive, acknowledging that women can be mothers, workers, and individuals with their own dreams and goals. She stresses the need for the society to support women in all these roles, advocating for changes in policies that would help women achieve true equality. This means creating an environment where women can thrive both home and in their careers, allowing them to find fulfillment in every aspect of their lives.

Fraser (2013) argues that mainstream feminism has become too connected to capitalist interests. Instead of focusing on helping everyone achieve social justice, it often emphasizes individual success. This shift has changed feminist goals, concentrating on women's empowerment within a capitalist system instead of challenging the inequalities that capitalism creates. She advocates for a feminist politics that emphasizes economic equality, solidarity among diverse women, and a critical stance toward capitalism. By redefining feminist goals to include broader social transformations.

Judith Lorber (2001) a well-known sociologist who studies gender and feminist theory, in her book *"Gender Inequality: Feminist Theories and Politics"*, she looks at how gender is created by society and how this leads to unequal treatment of people based on their gender. Lorber explains different feminist theories, like liberal, radical and socialist feminism, and how they view power and women's roles. She stresses the importance of political action to challenge traditional gender roles and support policies that promote equality. Lorber also considers how factors like race, class, and sexuality affects women's experiences of inequality. Her work aims to help us understand how gender influences society and encourages meaningful change.

Dworkin (1987) an American radical feminist writer in her looks at how both the political right and left can be harmful views about women. She argues that, even though they approach things differently, both sides can create a culture that disrespect and harms women. Dworkin notes that the right often supports traditional gender roles and limits women's rights, while the left may say it supports women but sometimes ignores their real needs. She stresses the need to directly confront these issues and calls for everyone, regardless of their political view, to be more dedicated to fighting for women's rights and respect. Her works helps people understand how society's views on women can lead to discrimination and violence, urging them to take action against it.

Echols (2016) talks about the complex relationship between feminism and sexual freedom. She looks back at the feminist debates from the 1980's, where some feminists argued that sexual liberation was empowering, while others worried that it could lead to more harm and exploitation of women. Echols highlights the tension between pleasure and danger, explaining that it's not easy to balance the desire for sexual freedom with the need to protect women from violence and exploitation.

Empirical literature highlights the social, political and economic barriers for the women in active participation in public life. Lack of education is one of the obstacles for women to effective participation in political and other development spheres. The literacy rate in Nepal

also differs according to the regional dimensions and rural and urban areas. The female from rural areas are less educated than in urban areas which lead them to be in domestic spheres.

In some rural areas the number of girls and women involvement in education program is also affected by co-education system, early marriage, and daughter being less priority for getting education over son. Because of lack of education Nepal is facing to get a capable female leader and a skilled citizen who can fight for her rights. The effective knowledge of politics and importance of civic society also encourage women to cast their vote in election and equally participate in decision making process (Rai, 2015).

We have many obstacles faced by women in Nepal's political landscape. It highlights the significant strides Nepali women have made in gaining political representation, especially following the country's shift to democracy and the adoption of affirmative policies like quotas. However, the text also discusses the persistent challenges women face including patriarchal attitudes, social and cultural barriers, lack of political experiences, and limited access to resources and networks. The authors emphasize that despite these hurdles, Nepali women continue to strive for greater inclusion and equality in the political sphere. (Upreti et al., 2020).

Sapkota (2024) analyzes the status and dynamics of women's political leadership in Nepal, particularly following the local elections of 2022. He highlights the significant progress made in terms of women's representation in local governance, attributed to constitutional mandates and quotas that encourage female participation. Despite this progress, Sapkota critically observes that women politicians still face substantial challenges, ingrained patriarchal norms, discrimination, and limited access to resources and decision-making power. The study underscores the importance of not just increasing numbers but also ensuring that women in leadership positions can effectively influence policy governance. He calls for sustained efforts to empower women through capacity-building initiatives and societal change to create a more inclusive political empowerment. The article presents a distinct view of the landscape of women's political leadership in Nepal, balancing recognition of advancements with the acknowledgment of ongoing barriers to equality.

Patel(2005) addresses the significant challenges and barriers that women encounter in political participation and decision-making roles. Despite existing legal frameworks aimed at promoting gender equality, women remain underrepresented in politics. She stresses that women's participation is crucial for fostering equitable governance and ensuring that political decision reflects diverse perspectives. He also discusses strategies to enhance women's political involvement, including affirmative action, capacity-building initiatives, and the

creation of supportive networks. Patel calls for grassroots mobilization and policy reforms to empower women, advocating for a more inclusive democratic process that allows women's voices to be heard in political arenas.

The texts reviewed above largely talk about the challenges of the women in partaking in social space, including in the political sphere. However, this article particularly explores the causes of the constraints that the women encounter in political parties in spite of their remarkable contribution for decades. This paper also explores what actually stops women in engaging in political activities as their male counterparts do.

3. Materials and Methods

This study is based on the women politicians working in Siddharthanagar Municipal committee of four different parties- Nepali Congress, CPN (UML), Maoists and National Democratic Party. Among the total 80 women cadres in Municipal Committee of four different parties- Nepali congress has 20, CPN UML has 20, CPN Maoists had 25 and National Democratic Party has 15 members. 20 participants were selected applying the simple random Sampling method that falls under the probability Sampling. 5 women members were selected from each party using lottery method. The semi-structured interview schedule was employed as the tool to collect the data. In course of interviewing the participants, the researcher approached each individual participants at the location they favored which was confirmed by the telephone call receives upon the request to the Chairman of concerned party's committee. Some of the participants initially expressed their hesitation to communicate with the researcher, However, they became ready after some days of continuous engagement.. The interview was conducted between the months of Shrawan, Bhadra and Aswin this year. This paper has incorporated both qualitative and quantitative nature of data.

4. Result and Discussion

Recognition of opinions in parties

Women politicians often find it difficult to have their opinions and ideas recognized and valued within political parties by male leaders, resulting in their exclusion from decision-making processes. In some cases, women might be part of party discussions but are treated as symbols rather than being given significant roles, which diminishes their contributions. Gender stereotypes can create biases against women's opinions, causing some party members to see them as less credible or authoritative compared to their male counterparts.

The recognition of women's opinions often depends on the leadership style of party leaders. Supportive leaders can encourage and make welcoming environment that values multiple opinions.

Kunovich and Paxton (2005) explore how political parties play a relevant role in shaping women's political representation and the recognition of their opinions within party structures. The text also emphasizes that political parties serve as gatekeepers to political power and either support or obstruct women's access to decision-making positions. The extent to which women's voices are acknowledged within parties greatly influences their political representation at national level. Parties with traditional or conservative ideologies often marginalize women's voices, whereas more progressive parties are more likely to support gender equality and recognize women politician's contributions. Within parties, women's opinions are often sidelined due to male-dominated hierarchies, even in parties that publicly support gender equality. The recognition of women's views is dependent on internal party culture and leadership.

In this study, the recognition and validation of women politician's opinion by male leaders in their party committee have also been studied. Where 25 percent respondents said 'yes' that they do have a discussion in significant issues and come up with mutual conclusion. On the other hand, 5 percent of the respondents' opinions are heard but not implemented. Likewise, 5 percent of respondents stated that "they take opinions, but in order to implement them we have to argue and fight a lot, but despite of the conflict we make our decision valid". Whereas, 5 percent of respondents mentioned that their opinion are heard but seldom implemented.

On the contrary, remaining 60 percent respondents said 'no' that their opinion on significant issues are not taken by male leaders in their committee. When they were further asked that why is it so? One of them articulated that core committee decide themselves, they just declare their decision and they are asked to sign on their decision. The respondent furthermore stated that she suggests her decision personally rather than in the mass though they are not implemented. SO called male thinks they are superior and they are the one who are always right. She feels that women are marginalized and are ignored.

The other respondent mentioned that because of male dominating society they are facing such circumstances. Another respondent states that their counterpart throws the decisions without any discussion. Likewise, one of the respondents expressed that there is a group-ism among the committee party members where she lacks approach to hierarchy.

Similarly, the next respondent addressed that it follows the traditional structure where women are taken as the second-class citizen of the society. Women are oppressed by the male-

dominated society, they think women are good for nothing and they lack knowledge was mentioned by the other respondent. They show their concern only during the time of elections, after the elections they don't bother was expressed by the next respondent.

In the same way the next one quoted that she hasn't got an opportunity to give her suggestion as she hasn't reached in higher level of decision taking position. Another respondent reasoned that "We accepted their decision and move on, unable to give them more time or approach them at that point". An additional respondent asserted that, "They simply disregard our advice, which could be because I am a novice with no prior expertise. "In the same manner, one of the respondents stated that, "Since we are straight forward, they neither accept nor put our ideas into practice. Only the ideas made by the praise singers are taken into consideration."

One more respondent reported that, "they reject their recommendation due to group-ism, women themselves do not support other women." The final respondent stated that, "the suggestion is ignored by the male politicians of their committee they simply make a decision and throw it however I disagree with their choice and my opinion are not taken into consideration".

Negligence on gender sensitive issues by male counterparts

Negligence towards women politicians regarding gender-sensitive issues is a vital concern in contemporary politics. Despite the increasing presence of women in leadership roles, male counterparts often overlook or undermine their contributions, particularly when addressing issues like reproductive rights, gender-based violence, and workplace equality. This disregard not only diminishes the voices of women but also prolongs systemic inequalities that obstruct progress toward gender equality. Such negligence reflects a broader societal bias that prioritizes male perspectives and dismisses the importance of diverse viewpoint in shaping policies that affect all members of society. Recognizing and addressing this imbalance is crucial for fostering a more inclusive political environment where women's issues receive the attention they deserve.

In text "*Gender Sensitive*", Pincha(2008) highlights the troubling trend of negligence towards gender-sensitive issues by male counterparts in various sectors. Despite the growing acknowledgement of women's rights and gender equality, many male leaders often sideline discussions that relate to women's health, safety, and empowerment. This ignorance not only grow systemic inequalities but also undermines the efforts of women activists and policymakers who aim to address these critical issues. By failing to actively engage with support gender-sensitive initiatives, male counterparts contribute to a political and social

environment that marginalizes women's voices, ultimately restricting progress towards true gender equality. Pincha's work serves as a call to action for greater awareness and accountability among all leaders regarding the importance of gender-sensitive approaches.

This study further encompasses the survey on whether women politician feel neglected in gender sensitive issues by male leaders in decision-making which is shown in the below table.

Table 1: *Negligence on Gender Sensitive issues*

Felt Neglected	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	12	60
No	8	40
<i>Total</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>100</i>

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Here in the above table 60 percent of respondents feel neglected in gender sensitive issues by male leaders in Decision making. On the contrary 40 percent of respondents does not feel neglected in gender sensitive issues by male leaders.

Trust over Leadership Capacity

Women often face disbelief and lack of trust when it comes to holding leadership positions, such as chairing committees. This distrust stems from longstanding gender biases that question women's competence and authority, despite their qualifications and expertise. As a result, women may be overlooked for leadership roles in favor of their male counterparts, reinforcing a cycle of under-representation in decision making processes. This not only limits women's opportunities for advancement but also deprives committees of diverse perspectives that are essential for effective governance. Building trust in women leaders is crucial for fostering inclusive and equitable environments where all voices are valued.

Kanel (2014) highlights the challenges women face in gaining trust regarding their leadership capacities. Despite their significant contributions and qualifications, women often encounter ignorance from male counterparts and society at large, which undermines their authority and effectiveness. This mistrust not only affects women's ability to lead but also perpetuates gender disparities in political representation. Kanel emphasizes the importance of nurturing a supportive environment that recognizes women's capabilities and promotes their involvement in decision-making processes, ultimately contributing to more inclusive governance in Nepal.

In the study, the trust over hierarchical leadership capacity of women politician is also studied. Where respondents gave different explanation like, the first one mentioned that 'as a result of favoritism and nepotism, due to gender biased mindset and lack of family support. She

further stated that due to women's quota system men are forced to include women in politics. Women are unable to give time in comparison to men. And men have always ignored the knowledge and capabilities of women.' Same way second respondent mentioned that, because of gender discrimination and the dominant masculine mindset in society, women being busy with domestic duties and lack of financial support women are not trusted in higher position in politics.

The third respondent said that, because of the mentality that discriminates against women. Women have to always fight for their rights they are not given anything easily. In addition, for being treated as second class citizens and also women are also seen as financially weak. Therefore, they are not trusted as chairing the high position in politics. Similarly, the fourth respondent stated that due to a mindset that discriminates against women, which include favoritism and nepotism. Even only their own well-known members in the various program are honored. The wealthy are granted the particular privilege. Favoritism and nepotism are on the rise. If a spouse or other known individual is on the committee, it is convenient to them be considered for a higher position.

Due to a mindset that discriminates against women, the pursuit of money and a lack of time, women are unable to voice their opinions in appropriate forums was stated by the fifth respondent. The sixth respondents quoted that due to both gender discrimination and a lack of confidence in women they are not trusted to chair the higher rank in politics. Because of the provision made by the government that 33% women must be included therefore women are in the scene otherwise there would have been no search for women in politics were specified by the seventh respondents.

Likewise, the eighth respondent said that, the male members believe that women are incapable of formulating plans and policies. In comparison to men, women are considered as second-class citizen. She herself is unable to give time because of lot of family and household commitments. She always thinks about saving money where for higher position person must have spending capacity but she doesn't want to spend money. There is no family support and also due to society viewpoint. The ninth respondent stated that men think that women lack physical and mental strength, there is nothing they can do. Though women are capable and honest but they are disregarded. Men are always superior in our society. However, there is some little changes seen in society moreover the viewpoint of men has changed as well.

Another respondent the tenth one also mentioned that only because of women's quota women are in the scene otherwise there would be no place for women in politics. Only during the time of election there is in search of women. Favoritism, nepotism and financial power are the main

factor to put women back. Men disregard the possibility that the woman is worthy and has potential. There has been a significant change from before in the society, still it is too hard for women.

The next eleventh res-ponder reasoned that because of male dominated society, discrimination against women, nepotism and favoritism. Women are incapable of making independent decisions, that's because there isn't enough money and family support. Three of the respondents stated that due to lack of knowledge and education they are not trusted. Another respondent mentioned due to gender bias mentality, male only wants them to rule, only the old members' voices are listened. Nepotism and favoritism and also the game of money due to which women are pushed back. The next two respondents mentioned that there is not a suitable environment for women, only those who are financially strong are taken forward and the whole game is of nepotism and favoritism. Similarly, one of the respondents mentioned that she herself is unable to be more active because of her busy work schedule and she further stated that politics is the game for rich people and the one who is nearest and dearest of the authority.

5. Conclusion

The findings highlight significant challenges faced by women politicians in having their opinions recognized, addressing gender-sensitive issues, and gaining trust in leadership capacities within male-dominated political environments. Despite some progress in political representation, systemic biases, favoritism, and traditional societal norms hinder women's active participation and decision-making roles. The survey results reveal that a majority of women feel excluded from significant discussions and that their ideas are often ignored or undervalued. This marginalization, rooted in gender stereotypes and discriminatory mindsets, perpetuates the belief that women are less competent than their male counterparts, further entrenching gender disparities in political institutions.

To overcome these barriers, transformative changes in party structures, societal attitudes, and leadership approaches are essential. Male leaders and political parties must actively support and foster an inclusive environment where women's contributions are valued and implemented. Addressing issues like favoritism, nepotism, and financial inequities, alongside providing mentorship and resources, can empower women politicians. Furthermore, building trust in women's leadership capacities and recognizing the importance of diverse perspectives are vital steps toward achieving equitable governance. Such efforts will not only enhance women's political representation but also ensure that policies are more inclusive, effectively addressing the needs of all members of society.

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