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## Strategies of Gender Mainstreaming in Provincial Election of Nepal

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### Abstract

*An election brings changes in society. Both politics and gender emphasize power, prestige, and privileges. The gender gap in politics indicates the level of participation during all aspects of the election. The gender gap in the electoral system proliferates complexity in gender inequality. Gender mainstreaming is a globally accepted means to reduce gender inequality. To examine the status and strategies of gender mainstreaming in provincial level first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system, this article is prepared as the title "Strategies of Gender Mainstreaming in Provincial Election of Nepal". The analysis of this study is based on the report of provincial election published by the election commission, Nepal. A simple and systematic literature review is conducted to collect essential information to fulfill objectives. This study is based on the critical mass theory, critical act approach, and gender mainstreaming approach. There was a low level of gender mainstreaming at the provincial level FPTP electoral system in Nepal. All political parties should formulate and implement an effective strategy at the political level to increase gender mainstreaming in electoral activities. The government of Nepal must implement the Provision of sustainable development goals, the constitution of Nepal, and the international declaration of human rights regarding gender mainstreaming as soon as possible.*

**Keywords :** *gender mainstreaming, provincial election, gender gap, gender inequality, first-past-the-post, strategy*

### Introduction

Politicians hold power over all other social institutions. They can create new laws and modify existing legislation and practices. Thus, women's involvement in politics is mandatory to determine their destiny (Martin, 2004). low literacy rates, patriarchal

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social structures, poverty, unequal access to resources, gender-biased norms, and values are responsible for the low-level participation of women in political activities. The election commission of Nepal suggests various strategies to the Government of Nepal to take action for gender mainstreaming (ECN, 2017).

The term gender gap has a different meaning in different sectors. In politics, it indicates the variation of men and women in terms of their involvement in political activities. (Kittilson,2016). Being a constitutional body, the election commission of Nepal made efforts to formulate and implement various strategies for ensuring social inclusion and gender equalities in pre-electoral, electoral and post-electoral activities (ECN,2018). Electoral systems, procedures of nomination, inter and intra-party politics, political-electoral financing systems, media coverage, public campaign process, etc. directly influenced gender relations in politics and election. So concerned authority gives attention towards political-economy and socio-cultural practices in the particular countries for maintaining gender mainstreaming (Hubbard, n.d.).

Representative government beautifies democracy by ensuring effective and efficient service delivery. They can realize the holistic problems of society and its solution. Voting right for women was a milestone event for women, which opened the door of political participation around the world (Kittilson,2016). Both capitalist and socialist countries explore strategies for women's wellbeing. Compared to capitalist and socialist countries, Iversen and Rosenbluth (2006) are satisfied with the role of the socialist countries for the promotion of women's activities to the political aspects. Socialist countries create job opportunities in the public sphere, which offers paid jobs for women. There is no gender pay gap. So, women are in favor of the leftist party.

A key argument of the critical mass theory is that an increase in women's involvement in politics affects the content, style, and mechanism of politics, as compared to the patriarchal political system (Holli, 2012). The increased number of women in politics enables them to work more efficiently to promote women-friendly policy changes (Childs & Krook, 2008). The main concern of critical mass theory is to create a critical mass of women for performing critical action in favor of women. If women voters can elect a minimum of 30 % members of the provincial assembly, they can affect the political discourse in provincial governments.

Democracy requires free and fair elections. Gender equality in all aspects including electoral rights creates a strong foundation for the overall development of society (UNDP,2021). Women enter into the political spheres through voluntary or imposed quotas which enable them to participate in political parties. It would be ideal if the political parties adopt the quota system as a way of ensuring the effective participation of women in party affairs (Cornwall and Goetz,2005). Thus, this study emphasizes FPTP than the party-list representative electoral system. So, among 550 members in provincial assemblies, 330 members were selected for a detailed study.

Politics guide overall aspects of society. political participation is the strategic point to enhance power. Gender mainstreaming in politics empowers women. This study is based on the following statement of the problem. What is the situation of gender status in provincial level first-past-the-post election? What are the strategies for gender mainstreaming in the electoral system? This study focuses on correlating politics and gender. Due to patriarchy, politics try to bypass gender issues. To raise gender issues for women empowerment, gender mainstreaming in politics is mandatory.

### **Theoretical base**

The critical mass theory assumes that increasing women's involvement in political activities ensures a high level of women's political participation in a patriarchal society. To create meaningful joint efforts of women for promoting a women-friendly environment; there is mandatory to increase the number of women in politics. The main concern of this theory is to create a critical mass of women for political discourses in the public sphere. A critical mass of women indicates adequate numbers of women voters, nominated /elected women candidates, and political post holders. Various scholars and organizations agreed that 30% of politically elected posts should be occupied by women for creating a critical mass to raise women's concerns and formulate a women-friendly policy.

The critical act approach assumes that function is more important than structure. Critical mass is required but critical action in favor of women must be performed. How many women are less remarkable than how much they promote women's concern. The section of women voters requires a change in their life. Thus, the sound of action must be louder. The functionless structure is meaningless.

This article is based on the assumptions made by critical mass theory and the critical act approach. minimum 30% of the politically elected posts must be fulfilled by women in a provincial first-past-the-post election as well as provincial assemblies and provincial government to perform critical activities in favor of women. The gender mainstreaming approach made by UNESCO in 2009 is the backbone of this study which believes that women and men benefit equally from participation in political party processes.

Politics is the arena for societal decision making. Individuals who hold formal and official positions in government allocate scarce resources, e.g., tax revenues, and direct resources to some groups at the expense of others (Bratton and Ray 2002, Franceshet and Piscopo 2014)

### **Objectives**

The article makes effort to fulfill the following two objectives:

- To assess gender status in a provincial level FPTP election.
- To explore strategies for gender mainstreaming in the electoral system.

## Material and Methods

The prime concern of the election commission is to conduct all activities related to elections in Nepal. There are 550 members provincial assembly in the 7 provinces of Nepal. They are elected through two electoral systems i.e., 330 members by FPTP and 220 by party-list proportional representation. Nepal government successfully conducted a provincial election within two phases in 2017 AD. The election commission of Nepal published an authentic report of the provincial election in 2018 AD. This study used the data of the provincial election report provided by the election commission of Nepal. It analyzes the gender status of 330 members directly elected from the FPTP electoral system. It describes and analyzes data by using a simple table. To meet the requirements of objectives, the literature review was conducted simply and systematically via various search engines. to analyze the data and produce results, this study is based on the critical mass theory, critical act approach, and gender mainstreaming approach.

## Result and Discussion

### Gender Status of Candidates in the Provincial Election

The unitary system of governance was transformed into the federal system after the promulgation of the new constitution in 2015 AD. There are 7 provinces. There is a wide variation among provinces in terms of population, area, natural resources, and other socio-economic variables. The number of provincial constituencies, provincial assemblies, and councils of ministries is unequal. The very first provincial election was held in Nepal in 2017 produced the following results to elect 330 members through the FPTP electoral system.

**Table 1:** Province Wise Gender Status of Candidates in the Provincial Election

Provinces	Number of provincial constituencies	Number of candidates		Total number of candidates	Elected candidates		Total elected candidates
		Male	female		Male	Female	
<b>1. PROVINCE-1</b>							
Total	56	443	27	470	54	2	56
Percentage	100%	94.25%	5.75%	100%	96.43%	3.57%	100%
<b>2. MADHESH PROVINCE</b>							
Total	64	930	55	985	59	5	64
Percentage	100%	94.41%	5.59%	100%	92.18%	7.82%	100%
<b>3. BAGMATI PROVINCE</b>							
Total	66	561	72	633	61	5	66
Percentage	100%	88.62%	11.38%	100%	92.42%	7.58%	100%
<b>4. GANDAKI PROVINCE</b>							
Total	36	215	22	237	34	2	36
Percentage	100%	90.71%	9.29%	100%	94.44%	5.56%	100%

**5. LUMBINI PROVINCE**

Total	52	555	46	601	50	2	52
Percentage	100%	92.3%	7.7%	100%	96.2%	3.8%	100%

**6. KARNALI PROVINCE**

Total	24	130	3	133	24	0	24
Percentage	100%	97.7%	2.3%	100%	100%	0%	100%

**7. SUDURPASCHIM PROVINCE**

Total	32	164	15	179	31	1	32
Percentage	100%	91.6%	8.4%	100%	96.9%	3.1%	100%

**PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLIES IN NEPAL (FPTP)**

<b>Grand total</b>	<b>330</b>	2998	240	3238	313	17	330
Percentage	100%	92.59%	7.41%	100%	94.84%	5.16%	100%

**Source:** election commission of Nepal

In province 1, out of 470 nominations, 443 (94.25%) nominees were male and only 27 (5.75%) nominees were female. The ratio of the gender gap between females to males (1:16) is very wide in the nomination of candidates. Out of 56 provincial constituencies, 54 (96.43%) male and 2 (3.57%) female candidates won the provincial election. The ratio of the gender gap between females to males (1:27) is very high in elected candidates. People of Ilam and Udayapur districts elected altogether 2 female candidates as their representatives in the provincial assembly. Out of 14 districts, only 2 (14.3%) districts had coverage of elected female candidates. The success rate of male candidates was 12.18% and female candidates were 7.4% in the FPTP electoral system. Thus, the success rate of male candidates was higher than female candidates. To create a critical mass of females at a provincial assembly in province-1, at least 30% (17 seats) of elected posts must be occupied by females. There is only a 3.57% (2 seats) mass of elected female candidates. So, Province-1 is unable to create a critical mass of elected female candidates to perform critical activities in favor of women-friendly policy formulation.

In Madhesh province, out of 985 nominations, 930 (94.41%) nominees were male and only 55 (5.59%) nominees were female. The ratio of the gender gap between females to males (1:17) is very wide in the nomination of candidates. Out of 64 provincial constituencies, 59 (92.18%) male and 5 (7.82%) female candidates won the provincial election. The ratio of the gender gap between females to males (1:12) is very high in elected candidates. People of Bara, Mahottari, and Sarlahi districts elected altogether 5 female candidates as their representatives in the provincial assembly. Out of 8 districts, 3 (37.5%) districts had coverage of elected female candidates. The success rate of male candidates was 6.34 % and female candidates were 9% in the FPTP electoral system. Thus, the success rate of female candidates was higher

than male candidates. To create a critical mass of females at a provincial assembly in Madhesh province, at least 30% (19 seats) of elected posts must be occupied by females. There is only a 7.58% (5 seats) mass of elected female candidates. Although the success rate of female candidates is satisfactory, madhesh province is unable to create a critical mass of elected female candidates to perform critical activities in favor of women-friendly policy formulation.

In Bagmati province, out of 633 nominations, 561 (88.62%) nominees were male and 72 (11.38 %) nominees were female. The ratio of the gender gap between females to males (1: 8) is very wide in the nomination of candidates. Out of 66 provincial constituencies, 61 (92.42 %) male and 5 (7.58 %) female candidates won the provincial election. The ratio of the gender gap between females to males (1:12) is very high in elected candidates. People of Kathmandu, Nuwakot, Lalitpur, and Makwanpur districts elected female candidates as their representatives in the provincial assembly. Out of 13 districts, only 4 (30.7 %) districts had coverage of elected female candidates. The success rate of male candidates was 11% and female candidates were 7% in the FPTP electoral system. The position of the female in every aspect of the provincial election was weaker than the male counterpart. To create a critical mass of females at a provincial assembly in Bagmati province, at least 30% (19 seats) of elected posts must be occupied by females. There is only a 7.58% (5 seats) mass of elected female candidates. So, Bagmati province is unable to create a critical mass of elected female candidates to perform critical activities in favor of women-friendly policy formulation.

In Gandaki province, among 237 nominations, (215) 90.71% of nominees were male, and (22) 9.29% of nominees were female. The ratio of the gender gap between females to males (1: 10) is very wide in the nomination of candidates. 94.44% (34) male and 5.56% (2) female candidates win the provincial election. The ratio of the gender gap between females to males (1:17) is very high in elected candidates. The people of Tanahun and Myagdi elected female candidates as their representatives in the provincial assembly. Although Myagdi has only one female nomination, it produces good results. Out of 11 districts, only 2 (18%) districts had coverage of elected female candidates. The success rate of male candidates was 16% and female candidates were 9% in the FPTP electoral system. To create a critical mass of females at a provincial assembly in Gandaki province, at least 30% (11 seats) of elected posts must be occupied by females. There is only a 5.56% (2 seats) mass of elected female candidates. So, Gandaki province is unable to create a critical mass of elected female candidates to perform critical activities in favor of women-friendly policy formulation.

In Lumbini province, among 601 nominations, 555 (92.3%) of nominees were male and only 46 (7.7%) of nominees were female. The ratio of the gender gap



between females to males (1: 12) is very wide in the nomination of candidates. 96.2% (50) male and 3.8% (2) female candidates win the provincial election. The ratio of the gender gap between females to males (1:25) is very high in elected candidates. The people of Banke district elected 2 female candidates as their representatives in the provincial assembly. Out of 12 districts, only 1 (8.3 %) district had coverage of elected female candidates. The success rate of male candidates was 9 % and female candidates were 4% in the FPTP electoral system. To create a critical mass of females at a provincial assembly in Lumbini province, at least 30% (15 seats) of elected posts must be occupied by females. There is only a 3.8% (2 seats) mass of elected female candidates. So, Lumbini province is unable to create a critical mass of elected female candidates to perform critical activities in favor of women-friendly policy formulation.

In Karnali province, among 133 nominations, 130 (97.7%) of nominees were male and only 3 (2.3%) nominees were female. The ratio of the gender gap between females to males (1:43) is very wide in the nomination of candidates. It also reflects a very wide ratio of the gender gap in elected candidates. 24 (100%) male candidates win the provincial election. Out of 10 districts, no one district had coverage of elected female candidates. The success rate of male candidates was 5.5 % and female candidates were 0 % in the FPTP electoral system. To create a critical mass of women at a provincial assembly in Karnali province, at least 30% (7 seats) of elected posts must be occupied by females. There is a 0% (0 seats) mass of elected female candidates. So, Karnali province is unable to create a critical mass of elected female candidates to perform critical activities in favor of women-friendly policy formulation. Among 7 provinces, Karnali province is very poor in terms of gender mainstreaming in the provincial election.

In the sudurpaschim province, among 179 nominations, 91.6% (164) of nominees were male and 8.4% (15) of nominees were female. The ratio of the gender gap between females to males (1: 11) is very wide in the nomination of candidates. It also reflects a very wide ratio of the gender gap between females to males (1:31) in elected candidates. 96.9% (31) male and 3.1% (1) female candidates win the provincial election. The people of the Bajhang district elected female candidates as their representatives in the provincial assembly. Out of 9 districts, only 1 (11.11 %) district had coverage of elected female candidates. The success rate of male candidates was 19% and female candidates were 7% in the FPTP electoral system. To create a critical mass of women at a provincial assembly in sudurpaschim province, at least 30% (10 seats) of elected posts must be occupied by females. There is only a 3.1% (1 seat) mass of elected female candidates. So, Sudurpaschim province is unable to create a critical mass of elected female candidates to perform critical activities in favor of women-friendly policy formulation.

Regarding provincial assemblies in Nepal, among 3238 nominations, 92.59% (2998) of nominees were male and 7.41% (240) of nominees were female. The ratio of the gender gap between females to males (1: 12) is very wide in the nomination of candidates. 94.84% (313) male and 5.16% (17) female candidates win the provincial election. There is a very wide ratio of the gender gap between females to males (1:18) in elected candidates. Out of 77 districts, only 13 (17%) districts have coverage of elected female candidates in provincial assemblies. To create a critical mass at provincial assemblies in Nepal, at least 30% (99 seats) of elected posts must be occupied by females. There are only 17 (5%) provincial constituencies got female representatives. So, regarding provincial assemblies, Nepal is unable to create a critical mass of elected female candidates to perform critical activities in favor of women-friendly policy formulation.

### **Gender Mainstreaming**

Feminist development practitioners coined the term gender mainstreaming during the 1970s. It became a vital strategy to explore the gender concern in development discourses (Walby, 2005). In 1995, The UN Fourth World Women's Conference in Beijing set the agenda for gender mainstreaming for maintaining gender equality and the empowerment of women (Moser, 2005). Gender mainstreaming focuses on both genders. It is only a means but not an end. The strategic goal of gender mainstreaming is to maintain equal status between males and females. Thus, it concerns the formulation and implementation of policies regarding positive action to upgrade the status of women in all aspects of social life (Council of Europe, 2016). The provision of gender-friendly issues in the constitution, raising awareness about politics, Transparency in the electoral system, accountability in the election commission and other constitutional bodies, coverage of gender issues by social media, etc., creates opportunities in Nepal for gender mainstreaming.

### **Obstacles for Gender Mainstreaming in the Election**

Patriarchy in politics, Tribalism in politics, Personality based politics, Impunity, neglect of the rule of law, political violence, limited access to funds for female candidates, equal nomination charge for males and females, lack of family support system, lack of civic education, lack of coordination between civil society and political parties to forward gender agenda, etc. creates challenges for gender mainstreaming in Nepal.

Not only election issues but also socioeconomic issues are responsible for gender inequality. Microanalysis is required to overcome the barriers of gender discrimination. Women candidates face multisectoral problems (UNWOMEN, n.d.).



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 creates a barrier for gender mainstreaming (ace project, n.d.).

### **Strategies of Gender Mainstreaming in Election**

Political parties, Mass media, and civil society must be accountable for the issues of gender mainstreaming. They can create multi-sectoral influence for gender mainstreaming. The following strategies help to maintain gender equality in politics: training of gender equality rapporteurs; public awareness about gender issues; formulation of gender-friendly policy; developing e-learning tools illustrating good practices of gender mainstreaming; promoting the use of gender-sensitive indicators and statistics; review of the gender equality situation in politics (The Council of Europe,2016).

Gender equality in all activities of the electoral system such as voter registration; candidate nomination; civic and voter education; provision of the electoral campaign; voting process; conflict resolution mechanisms, etc. is the notable strategy for gender mainstreaming (ace project, n.d.). 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, etc. promote gender mainstreaming (international IDEA,2005).

Social movement should be called upon to form an inclusive and representative government, to implement the provision of gender mainstreaming, to make political parties accountable for their manifestos, constitutions, and the Political Parties Act, and to create a chain reaction by political parties and influence change from within (Ekonga,2013).

### **Conclusion**

The population of women is higher than males in Nepal. Women constitute close to half of the total Nepalis electorate. A bitter truth is that women remain underrepresented at the polling booth. The nomination ratio in the election is very low. Female participation in politics and female representation in politics are different

but interrelated factors. Female participation ensures female representation and vice versa. Thus, to raise the concern of women, it is essential to increase the level of women's participation and representation in politics. Proportionate representation boosts the beauty of Nepalese democracy.

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. Representation of women leaders in the local, provincial, and federal governments has created an environment for the collectivization of women. This environment enables women to realize discrimination and destitution over them. Through collective efforts, they can raise common problems and its solution by enlarging the definition of politics and democracy.

Proportional representation is a passive form of gender mainstreaming and the FPTP voting system is the active form of gender mainstreaming. Thus, all political parties of Nepal must increase the number of female nominees and decrease the nomination fees for women. Family support systems and positive attitudes towards female politicians bring positive results in gender mainstreaming. Thus, by realizing facts and figures about gender inequality in the FPTP 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 in the near future.

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