

Policy Brief

Gender Quotas, Party Behavior, and Women's Representation in Nepal

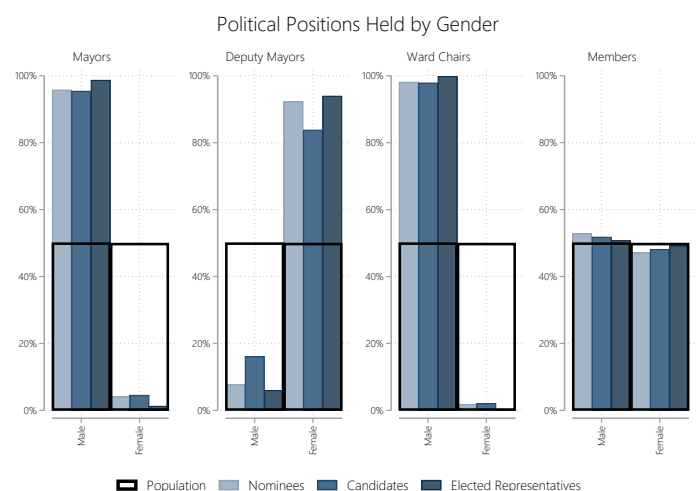
Gender quotas brought an unprecedented wave of women into elected office in Nepal's 2017 local elections. Parties had to field a woman for either the mayor or deputy mayor (DM) position in each palika; two out of four ward members must be women, one of them from the Dalit caste. Some local governments also have laws stipulating a one-third quota for women on user groups and that there be at least one woman among the chairperson, secretary, and treasury of committees.

There is existing evidence that quotas increase women's political representation in the short-term and can reduce gender discrimination in the long-term as voters come to see women as capable of holding leadership positions. Quotas may raise women's political aspirations (Beaman et al 2009) and make women more likely to voice their preferences as citizens (Beaman et al 2010). As men's and women's policy preferences are divergent, greater inclusion of women can enable substantive changes in policy-making (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004).

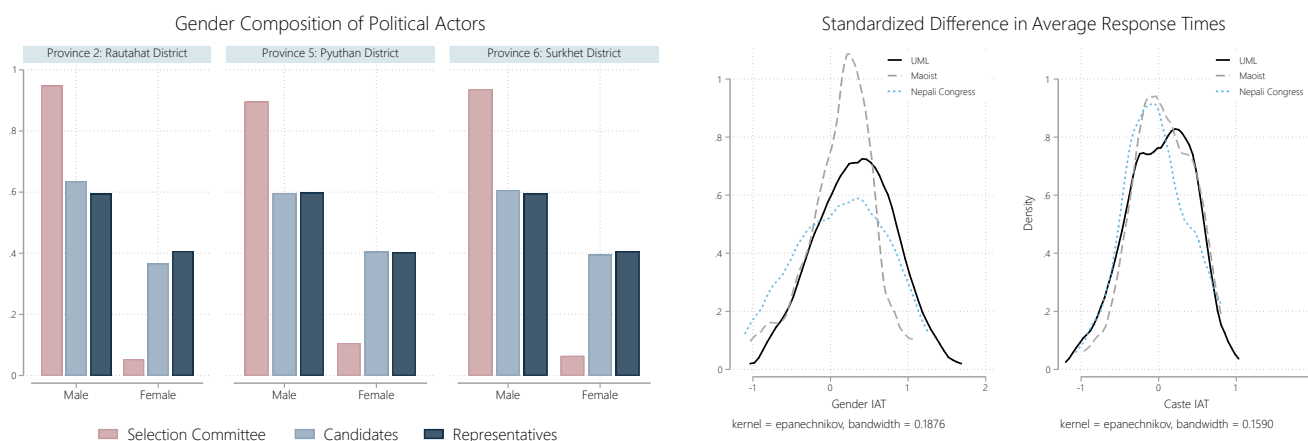
Drawing on findings from a) a dataset of over 30,000 politicians across 11 districts, matched to a population census and b) scoping research conducted across provinces 2, 5, and 6, this brief reviews what we know about the impact of gender quotas on voter and party behavior and, in turn, on women's representation in Nepal, as well as downstream effects on policy-making.

1.) Selection of elected officials on gender

Figure 1 shows that the quota followed by party selection resulted in male mayors and female deputy mayors. Despite quota-driven gender parity on ward committees, ward chair positions are held almost entirely by men. This is consistent with experience from other contexts: party leaders often respond strategically and limit the impact of gender quotas (Pande and Ford, 3). Quotas, thus, may not provide an onramp to positions of higher authority, and complementary investments may be needed for a genuinely representative politics.



2.) Party selection of candidates



Party selection committees are male-dominated - much more so than the pool of candidates they select to run. Only 9% of selection committee members are women, compared to 40% of politicians. **Figure 2** shows the gender composition of party selection committees compared to candidates and representatives across provinces 2, 5, and 6. Implicit association tests indicate that committee members are slower to associate women with leadership qualities (**Figure 3**). This suggests that gender bias contributes to parties' reluctance to put women forward beyond quota requirements. This is consistent with previous experience, which suggests that it takes time for parties to adjust to quotas through changing candidate selection processes to adequately back female candidates (Pande and Ford, 24).

3.) Education of elected women representatives

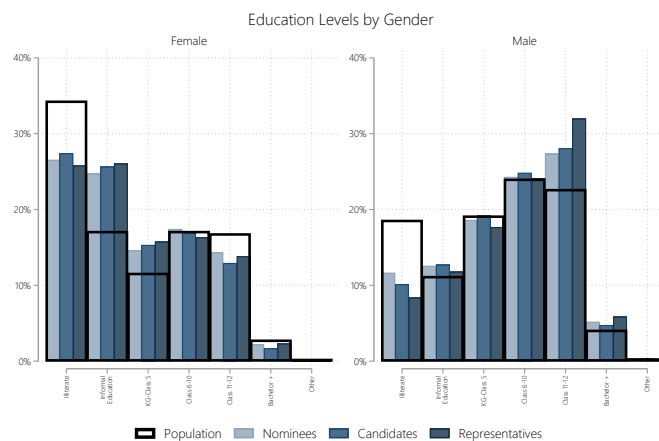


Figure 4 shows that while elected representatives are positively selected on education, women representatives are less educated on average than their male counterparts. This could mean that women deputy mayors and ward chairs may struggle to influence policy-making processes, when faced with mayors and ward chairs who are more male, more highly-educated, and hold more powerful offices within palikas. That said, Beaman et. al. (2010) and Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) suggest that a lack of experience does not preclude women from being effective policymakers.

4.) Policy implications of women's representation

Men and women often differ in policy preferences. The absence of women from leadership means that women's interests are underrepresented in policy decisions. Equally, greater representation of women can increase investment in goods favored by them (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004). In interviews, several DMs cited policy goals related to women's empowerment, such as child marriage and gender-based violence - a preliminary indication that political inclusion of women may change policy prioritization at the local level

5) Impact of the gender quota on women's leadership aspirations

In our scoping research, DMs we interviewed aspire to run for mayoral positions in the future. This could suggest that they perceive a lack of decision-making power in their DM roles, or that they believe citizens are satisfied with their performance. This is consistent with previous evidence suggesting that quotas have raised women's leadership aspirations (Pande and Ford, 24).

"I have the capacity to run for mayor but the party has to make decisions. I need to advocate myself to the party [for the next elections]."

"There aren't any women in decision making positions or as the ward heads which is quite sad. I believe women should be in a leading role."

Policy implications: This research suggests a menu of policy interventions. Capacity-building for women representatives could help them negotiate and perform well in office. Publicizing information about their performance may show voters that they are performing better than voters' biases would suggest. In the longer-term, quota laws could be tweaked to reduce bias in positions for which women are nominated.

The good news is that, over the course of subsequent elections, seeing women in leadership positions may lead parties and voters to lower their biases against women candidates. Quotas can also raise women's political aspirations. In India - where village council head seats are reserved for women in one-third of panchayats on a rotating basis - the proportion of female candidates running for unreserved seats increased by 3.3 percentage points after two rounds of reservation (Beaman et. al. 2009).

Further research: There is less evidence on how women in elected office will influence policy-making in a system like Nepal's; the best previous research comes from India, where panchayat heads have some autonomy over funding. How will women influence policy processes from their positions as deputy mayors? Our scoping research found that deputy mayors generally reported good relationships with mayors, though it is possible that given the gender dynamic, they feel some pressure to be accommodating.

This suggests multiple research questions. How can deputy mayors build and exercise influence within the municipality? Are deputy mayors who come from powerful families able to negotiate more influence? When do mayors absorb powers that are legally designated to deputy mayors?

References

Pande, Rohini; Ford, Deanna. 2012. Gender Quotas and Female Leadership. Washington, DC: World Bank. World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/9120> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.