

4-19-2021

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Rai, Salina. "Analyzing and Accounting for the Gender Gap in Political Ambition among Nepali College Students." *Merge*, vol. 5, Iss. 1 2021 .

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Analyzing and Accounting for the Gender Gap in Political Ambition among Nepali College Students

Salina Rai

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Graduation Year: 2020

The gender gap in political participation continues to be an undeniable reality of every society's political structure, and until such a gap is narrowed down, the legitimacy and stability of democracy seems questionable. Although the general increase in descriptive representation—the formal and outward representation involving the number or percentage of a certain group members—of women in national legislatures and other higher levels of governance around the world has been commendable, it has not resulted in equal political engagement and substantive representation — the process of acting or speaking for the rights and interests of a certain group—of women everywhere. For instance, countries like Nepal who have higher descriptive representations of women in their Houses of Representatives than the United States' House have much lower political participation from women and rank lower than the United States on the gender equality chart (The World Bank, 2018 and UN Dispatch, 2018). So, research must address the gender gap in substantive representation and political participation of women. Since Nepal is one of those developing countries with a lower rate of women's political participation—despite the implementation of affirmative action policies like gender quotas, which require a certain number or percentage of certain group members to be in political positions—it serves as an ideal political environment to search for the possible rationale behind this discrepancy.

First, the present research project examines the gender gap in political ambition as a possible factor in the lower political engagement of women in the country. Usually, when researchers examine how gender interacts with political participation, they exclusively look for traces of gender discrimination in election processes or obsessively point toward the lack of opportunities and resources available to women who want to run. But as they hurry to pin down the structural, cultural, and institutional barriers to women's political participation on a candidate level, they often disregard “ambition,” which drives a woman to politics in the first place. It is only after developing and acting on such ambition that a woman will have to confront the impediments that arise in the course of a campaign, assuming there are some difficulties on her way to the office. A strong ambition lays the groundwork for an individual's potential emergence as a candidate for political office. A lack of ambition entirely wipes out such a possibility. So, this article emphasizes that, in order to evaluate and understand the current gender gap in political participation and representation, it is also important to comprehend and account for the gender gap in political ambition.

Secondly, this article analyzes data collected by others and seeing whether women's participation increased with the quotas. By comparing the number of women candidates running in the first-past-the-post (FPTP) parliamentary races—candidate-centered elections where voters cast their votes to the candidate of their choice, and eventually, the candidate with the most votes wins the election— among the four general elections Nepal carried out in the past three decades, this research assesses the extent to which changes in women's participation were caused by the adoption of gender quotas. This analysis will suggest if the quotas are simply surging women's numbers in parliament or are also having a significant impact on women's political participation.

The findings will clarify if researchers need to consider ambitions when accounting for the present political attitudes and participation of women.

Thirdly, this research compares the gender gap in political ambition among Nepali college students in the US and in Nepal to inspect the relative impact of Nepal's gender quotas versus high-profile female candidacies in the US on ambition and participation. Since Nepal has implemented the quota system for the parliamentary elections for quite a few years and a large student population in the United States comes from Nepal, these factors provide us with a contrasting political environment from those in Nepal. Therefore, Nepali students will be an optimum sample to determine how the change in political culture impacts an individual's political ambitions.

Hypothesis I: In general, Nepali women are less politically ambitious than men.

Hypothesis II: The gender gap in political ambition among Nepali college students in Nepal will be greater than Nepali college students residing in the United States.

Literature Review

Political Ambition:

Like voters' support, media coverage, and legal provisions, political ambition impacts an individual's decision to aim for national offices. Recent studies have shown that women are less likely to have political ambition than men regardless of their equal or even better experiences and qualifications (Fox and Lawless, 2010, p. 1-4) From their research on women and men in pipeline professions in the United States, Fox and Lawless have found significant gender differences in participants' attitudes toward their possibility of running for higher offices. Thus, it is not fundamentally the lack of political expertise that can explain the underrepresentation and lower participation of women in contemporary politics; instead, it is the lack of confidence and ambition in women that is restraining their possibilities. In fact, women do as well as their male contemporaries in "campaign fundraising and vote totals" whenever they run (Fox and Lawless, 2010, p. 25). But, to face the political opportunity structure, one must first consider candidacy, and women are far less likely than men to take this initial step.

Once research has recognized the relationship between women's ambition and their participation in politics, it is equally important to flesh out the reasons behind the gender gap in ambition. Doing so will allow us to fully comprehend and account for the contemporary construction of the political sphere and then seek possibilities to reconstruct it so that women and men will have shared authority in the political domain.

Socialization Theory:

One of the major theories behind the development of political attitudes and ambitions is the socialization process. Researchers learn political skills and traditions over time from previous studies and develop their own understandings and values around the interactions with or experience of surrounding cultures. Fox and Lawless identify "traditional gender socialization," "traditional family orientations," "masculinized ethos," and "gendered psyche" as sets of factors behind the lower or limited political ambition in women (2010, p 9-15). Women's family and community settings are major agents of the socialization process. Traditionally, young women are not as encouraged by family and society as men to pursue political careers. Research findings

indicate that, from a very young age, men's "political interest, discussion and ambition" are more stimulated and embraced than those of women (Fox and Lawless, 2014, p. 512).

Similarly, married women tend to prioritize family over careers more often than men due to the gender roles and expectations assigned to them, resulting in a complex set of choices (between their family and career) that society places on women (Fox and Lawless, 2010, p. 8-9). Men, on the other hand, don't need to worry as much about finding that balance between family and political/public aspirations, as the public domain is culturally assumed to be a well-suited space for them. Such double standards impact women's ambitions and create a gendered psyche for non-traditional fields. Contemporary studies on psychological development have shown that women exhibit lower "confidence", "desire for achievement," and "inclination to self-promote" whenever they work outside of their traditional and "appropriate realms" (Fox and Lawless, 2010, p. 12). If women feel they are to work harder than men to be deemed equally competent for any role, then they are less likely to pursue such roles and careers, including politics. Thus, to encourage women's participation in politics, family and society should validate, support, and promote their ambitions outside the traditional prescriptions.

Role Model Theory:

The visibility and prevalence of female role models in politics is also an important part of the political socialization process, as they strongly impact women's perceptions of and ambitions for political leadership positions in general. Their presence encourages women to initiate and engage in political discussions or actions and validates their aspirations and concerns as real, important and equally possible to pursue. Woolbrecht's and Campbell's examination of cross-national studies found that young women and adolescent girls are motivated to visualize themselves as active political participants and are more likely to get involved in political activities when female politicians are present in their nations (2007, p. 94-96). Apart from seeing women in governing offices, the visibility of the process by which women gain political power is also important. Since elections have a feedback outcome, women need to see other women running successful campaigns and winning elections to understand and internalize the idea that politics is not exclusively "a man's game" (Wangnerud, 2009, 54). So, the presence of female politicians can positively influence women's ambitions and their consequent involvement in politics.

Quotas:

Owing to the above discussions, the US literature has increasingly emphasized ambition as the primary stimulator of an individual's political participation, but the comparative literature around the world has zeroed in on gender quotas as the legal and social tool to promote women's political participation. Several studies have pointed out the rise in the number of elected women through parties' adoption and implementation of gender quotas and highlighted the change in "ranking order of the countries on the basis of political participation" (Jabeen and Awan, 2017, p. 140). However, the "state-driven political inclusion might foremost be symbolic" and the number/representation shown in the political structure of such countries can be a strategic attempt to meet the international standard of representative politics with little regard for the quality and outcomes of such participation (Wangnerud, 2009, 56 -57). So, to determine women's status in a country's political structure, it matters how women are elected in parliamentary positions and other higher-level governance. It matters whether their

representation is merely limited to numbers or serves to ignite political interests among women as well.

My research attempts to bridge the gap between the exclusive studies on ambition and quotas. By focusing on Nepal, which, like many other developing countries, has adopted the female candidate quotas to increase women's representation in politics, my study intends to question whether this legal provision is enough to narrow the gender gap in political ambition and the subsequent participation of its citizens.

Electoral History of Nepal

Nepal uses parallel voting, a mixed electoral system that combines first-past-the-post (FPTP) and party-list proportional representation (PR) to elect members of Parliament. According to the Constitution of Nepal 2015, Part 8, Nepal has a total of 166 constituencies, of which 165 are allocated for FPTP and one for PR. Each of the 165 constituency districts elects one Member of Parliament (MP), who can either be a party-affiliated or independent candidate, amounting to a total of 165 members. In the case of the PR electoral system, the whole country is treated as a single constituency with 110 seats, where citizens directly vote for political parties who will get seats according to the percentage of total votes received (Constitute, 2019).

Judging from past elections, the quota system has been an effective legal mechanism to increase the number of women in Nepali politics since the early 90's. The 1990 Constitution reserved three (out of 35) Representative Assembly seats selected through proportional representation and mandated that parties nominate women in at least 5 percent of the chamber's single-member district races. The 1990 Constitution did not specify a quota for the National Assembly. (Malla, 2011, p.52) The quota was increased in the 2007 Interim Constitution, which reserved 33 percent of seats for women in both chambers of the Parliament. In 2015, the new Constitution retained the national candidate quota at 33 percent and mandated the same seats at the provincial level as well.

Among the three elections held in the 1990s, the 12 (out of 205) seats won by women in 1999 set the record in the Representative Assembly for that whole decade. Comparing that to the 32.7% of 275 parliamentary seats held by women in 2019, it is easy to conclude that Nepal's quotas have caused drastic growth in women's political participation, with descriptive representation even better than the United States itself (Malla, 2011, p. 53). However, the general visibility and popularity of female politicians is still very low compared to their male peers in the country. So, it is necessary to inspect whether the representation is coming from the mere filling-up of the quotas by party leaders or women's active campaigns for office.

Looking back at general elections in the '90s, 80 out of 1,345 (5.94%) candidates running in single-member districts were women in the 1991 general election, 86 out of 1,442 (5.96%) in 1994, and 142 out of 2216 (6.4%) in 1999—closely abiding by the constitutional requirement of at least 5% ticket allocation to women in every party (Malla, 2011, p.53). Combining both the FPTP and PR results, seven women were elected in '91 and '94, while 12 women succeeded in 1999. Since the Constitution had already reserved 3 seats for women through PR, and almost all parties' female candidates nominated for single-member district races were in accord with the 5% rule, the number of women running and winning elections outside the quota was almost negligent. So, in general, less women led independent races, and less won the single seat elections in that decade than is initially apparent. But visibly low representation during this decade can be attributed to the contemporary cultural restraints and institutional biases against

women in that decade. Moreover, the 1990's constitution seemed to reserve seats just for the sake of bare minimum inclusion of women.

When it comes to the most recent general election of 2017, the only one held after the fall of Nepal's monarchs, civil war, and the introduction of a new constitution in 2015,

Women comprised just 146 of the 1,944 candidates for the House of Representatives, amounting to 7.5% of the total; while for the provincial assemblies there were just 240 female candidates from 3,238 candidates, amounting to 7.4% of the total running candidates. Of these, just six women were elected from the 165 First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) single member districts for the House of Representatives, while 17 women were elected to the 330 FPTP seats in the seven provincial assemblies. (EU EOM, 2017, p.27)

The above results show that the average percent (7%) of women candidates running for Single-Member District seats has not seen any significant growth, considering the average was 6% almost two decades ago. So, the number of women winning the elections independent of the quota system remains strikingly low. Since Single Member District races represent the most active form of women's participation as candidates, the results suggest that women's agency as potential candidates is still far lower than that of men. However, the quota requirement drives the number of women in every assembly up to 33% of its total seats and disguises the true degree of women's engagement. Regardless of the number, it is important to note that the quota has not encouraged more women to run candidate-centered campaigns in the single-member districts.

The above discussion hints toward three aspects of Nepal's political reality: first, the gender gap in candidates running for every type of election in the country is still present; second, the current number of women in elected office does not necessarily equate to women's active political participation; and third, the number of women elected outside the quota system is still very low. Hence, at this point, it is important to go beyond the tag of 33% women in assemblies and study women's participation from the grassroots level. In this case, political ambition is very important to consider because, the more women are politically ambitious, the more they will participate and run; the more they run, the higher their chances are to win the elections. So, to boost women's participation and representation in politics, researchers should address not only quota requirements but also women's ambitions and the origins behind them.

Methodology

The total number of participants from the United States was 80 with 34 male and 44 female students, while from Nepal it was 91 participants with 49 male and 42 female students.

As mentioned above, Nepal is a country that has implemented gender quotas to increase female representation in governing bodies, and while their impact on women's descriptive representation is fairly visible, the foregoing analysis casts doubt on the extent to which this preferential policy is helping to increase women's political ambitions.

I, therefore, examined political ambition among Nepali students pursuing their college degrees both in Nepal and the United States. I chose to assess the student group for two particular reasons; first, they consisted of the youngest group of the electorate population, meaning they were still in their formative years of political socialization, which would soon amount to rigid political attitudes and consequent choices like their degree and manner of political participation. So, if the current affirmative action of the country affects ambitions in any way, it should be the strongest in young people. Secondly, the large number of Nepali students pursuing their college degrees in the United States allows me to compare students in two different political environments, through which I tap into the possible changes in political

ambitions and participation caused by exposure to the more egalitarian and liberal political culture of the United States. The United States has many more high-profile women candidates with coverage in the press and social media than Nepal. Therefore, I expected to see the effect of these female role models in the survey results, with a smaller gender gap in political ambition among Nepali students studying in the US.

For data collection, I used my Facebook account. Since I already had at least 100 college students from different Nepali Colleges in my friend-list, I could easily contact quite a few numbers through my Facebook messenger. I also had the option to add more students through my mutual friends if a bigger sample size was required. In the case of Nepali students in US universities, I contacted them through a Facebook page, Us-Nepal Help Network (UNHN), which has 26K members, most of which were college students. If they agreed to volunteer in my research, then I would send out the link to my survey via Facebook messenger. Each participant would have to log in through their email in order to open and submit the survey. I sent out the surveys to as many students as possible and ensured that the number of male and female participants in both countries was fairly close.

My survey attempted to grasp the early political socialization of the participants, their current political attitudes and engagement, and their ambitions for future political involvement. To test the students' cognitive accessibility of role models and track the relative visibility of female candidates or office holders in Nepali and US politics, I asked the participants to name their top three political role models. Respondents had the option not to identify any role model, in which case the political interest of the participant would be quite obvious. Moreover, the question did not mention gender, which increased the likelihood that participants would give the names of politicians who they thought had been the most successful or had more influence. Their answers helped me understand whether the younger generation had enough exposure to female role models in politics for men and women to foster similar ambitions for offices.

The other way to predict an individual's level of political consciousness and ambition was to look at their current activity. There is an ongoing argument that women are perhaps not participating less but participating in a different manner. Traditionally, the political gender gap research focuses on the institutional forms of participation such as voting, working on a campaign, and joining a party organization. But, in the Western world, the way people participate in politics has been changing slowly. Unlike the traditional forms of participation, citizen-initiated and policy-oriented activism have exemplified the new influential form of political participation. With broader approaches to studying political participation, it has become clearer how people with different genders might express, engage, and emphasize their political concerns differently (Coffe and Bolzendahl, 2010). Women were found to be actively and increasingly involved in informal political efforts, while men have been geared more towards the formal/institutional forms of political engagement. And studies supported this argument. While men were more likely to become party members, women turned towards private activism (boycotting goods, signing petitions) as they felt less worthy or qualified for higher level participation and showed lower trust in government than men (Coffe and Bolzendahl, 2010, p. 325). No such studies had been done in Nepal. So, I intended to see if this alternative explanation for women's political ambition and participation is applicable in Nepal as well. I, therefore, asked the participants if they had participated in select forms of political participation, and they were allowed to select as many options as applicable. Thus, I compared their rates of participation across a range of activities.

Before testing the socialization and role model theories and studying the participants' current political engagement, I wanted to see what their current political ambitions were. So, I asked the participants whether they saw themselves running for office sometime in the future. This question was followed by a subjective short answer question, ("Why or why not?") where the participants were given the opportunity to explain their stance.

Socialization theory supported the idea that, if individuals were exposed to politics early on by their families, they would develop higher ambitions. So, to test this theory, I asked the participants to identify how often their parents discussed politics in their home environments by introducing a Likert scale question in the survey. This particular question allowed us to explain the nature of participants' political ambitions based on their families' influences.

I also intended to see if they had any role-model from their families or close communities while growing up. So, I asked if anyone from the participant's family or close community had run for local, regional or federal offices while growing up or recently. Comparing these results to that of the previous question—whether they had considered running for an office—I was able to conclude how effective role models were in a participant's life.

While having a role model that an individual was related to might leave strong imprints in a person's ambitions in life, not all people have identified them as political inspirations. In such cases, I assumed the frequency of female candidates running or winning elections might inspire women to have higher political desires and self-confidence. I thought it would normalize the political arena for women and psychologically help them visualize their own places in politics. Malla asserts that it matters how an individual gets acquainted with a political system, which is why women are less likely to be politically ambitious compared to men in societies where male figures dominate and validate the political culture (2011, p. 8-14). So, I asked the participants to identify how often they had seen or heard of female candidates running for local, regional and parliamentary election in their personal experiences.

Since Nepali students were well aware of the implementation of gender quotas in higher provincial and parliamentary bodies, it mattered how they felt about the quotas themselves. Studies had shown that affirmative action policies such as the gender quotas could also reinforce gender stereotypes of women being naturally less competent for leadership roles than men (Leslie, Mayer, & Kravitz, 2014). This would in turn impact women's political attitudes and ambitions for office. So, I introduced a Likert scale question asking how likely they thought it was for a woman candidate to win an election independent of the quota system in Nepal. Since the question could potentially trigger the participant's own prejudice or sensitivities, it was placed at the end of the survey.

Anticipated Findings/Results:

- 1) Gender Gap: Female Students, in general, are less politically active/ambitious compared to their male contemporaries.
- 2) Candidate Exposure: The gender gap in political ambition is narrower among students in the US than Nepal, stressing the positive impacts of increased political exposure and opportunities for both genders alike.
 - a) NULL: The gender gap in political ambition is almost the same between students in Nepal and the US, suggesting the negligible impact of increased political exposure on gendered psyche.

Results

Out of nine questions in the survey, only two questions showed a significant gender gap in both Nepali student populations residing in the United States and Nepal. Based on their responses to these two questions, the relevant results of this research can be summarized as follows:

The first takeaway from the study is that the United States' political environment provides more exposure to female role models because of the higher number of female candidates in its state and national elections.

Role Models

First off, the data show that the gender gap in students' ability to name valid politicians as their role models—either male or female and from anywhere around the world—is much higher in the United States than in Nepal.

Taking fig. 1 into account, it is clear that male college students both in the States and Nepal could name a higher number of valid politicians compared to the female student participants. Men in the US can list an average of 2.6 valid politicians while those in Nepal can name about 2.4 politicians on average, still higher than the average of 1.7 and 1.9 politicians named by women in the US and Nepal, respectively.

The patterns uncovered when considering the average number of politicians named by each group are similar to those revealed by analyzing what percentage of respondents in each category was able to name a valid politician. As shown in fig. 2, 94.12% of the total male student participants from the United States could name at least one valid politician, while 83.67% from Nepal could do so. Although only 77.27% of female participants from the States could name one valid politician, 80.95% of female participants from Nepal could do so. Curiously, the numbers are quite the opposite for male and female participants in Nepal and the States.

Despite the fact that male students in the States were better at this task than their counterparts in Nepal, female students in the US were significantly less capable of identifying valid political role models. As shown in fig. 3, the gender gap of 16.85% is clearly larger among the Nepali student population in the United States than the disparity of 2.72% for those in Nepal. Statistically speaking, the data shows significant differences only among the student population in the United States (P value 0.04) but not in Nepal (p value of 0.73).

The research initially predicted a consistent rise in the cognitive accessibility of both men and women in the United States, resulting in a narrower gap compared to those in Nepal. However, the visible inconsistency (the higher number of males and the lower number of females among participants in the US able to name valid politicians) along with the wider gap between male and female US-residing Nepali student participants in the survey responses seem to undermine the research hypothesis.

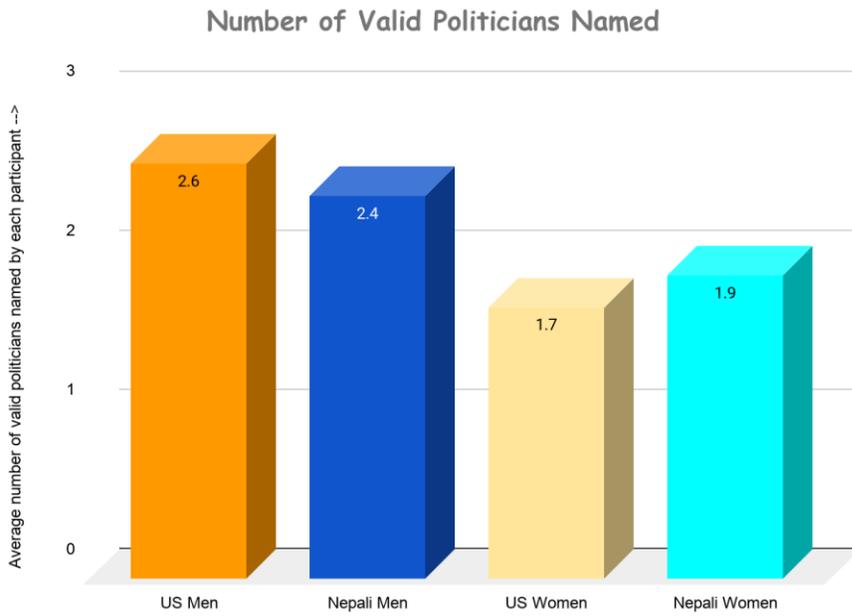


fig. 1 - The average number of valid politicians named by each category of participants (each participant could name 3 political role models in total)

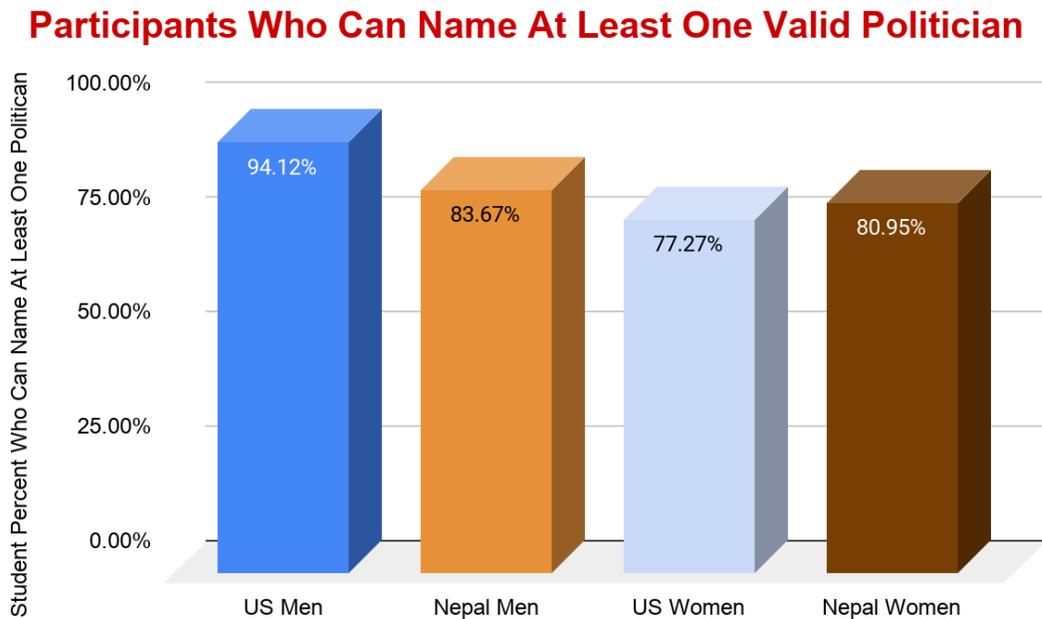


fig. 2 - Proportion of participants who can name at least one valid politician.

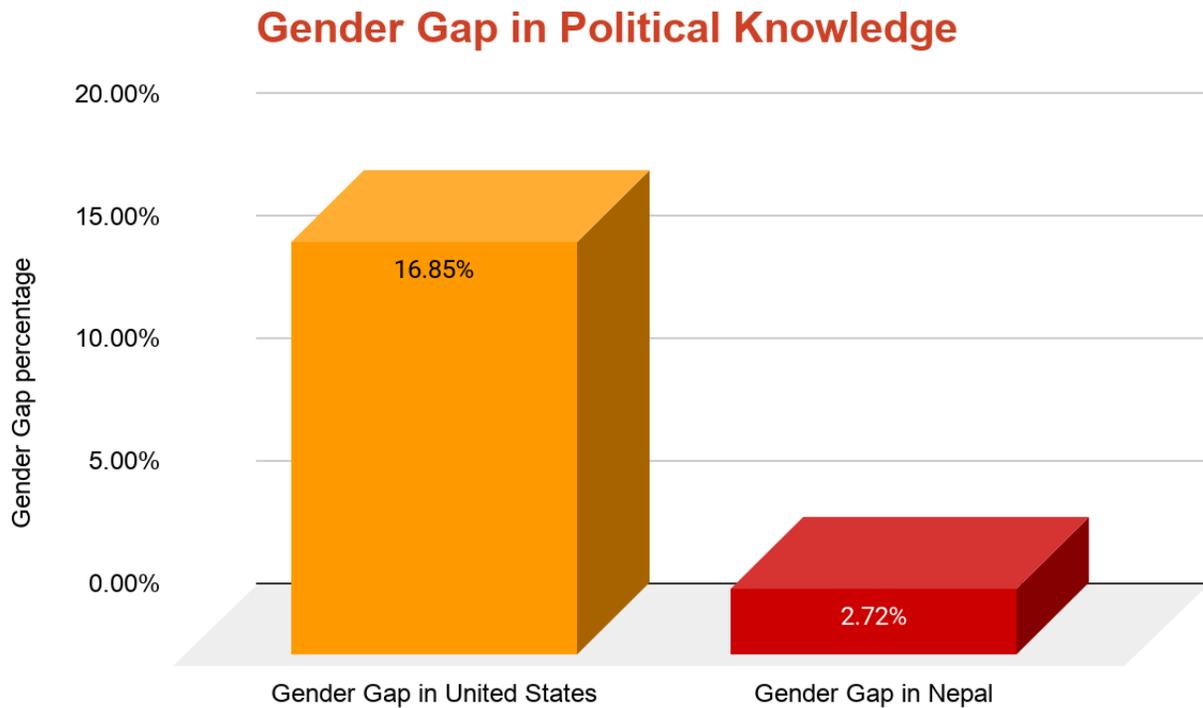


fig. 3 - Gender gap in ability of students to name at least one valid politician

Putting together fig. 1, 2, and 3 and generalizing their implications, Nepali male college students can be said to have better cognitive accessibility of political role models than female college students regardless of the country of residence. However, the result might be affected by other factors, ranging from students' (male or female) reluctance to name politicians, their lack of interest in politics, or their lack of politicians who they view as role models. Hence, students' failure to list valid politicians cannot be accurately deduced as their inability to recognize politicians and role models.

Female Role Models

- a) When asked to name their top three political role models, it was clear enough that a higher number of Nepali college students in the United States were able to identify at least one valid female politician than their corollaries residing back in Nepal. Fig. 4 also shows that female students in both countries were more likely than men to name a female politician.

Percent of students who named at least one female politician vs. Categories

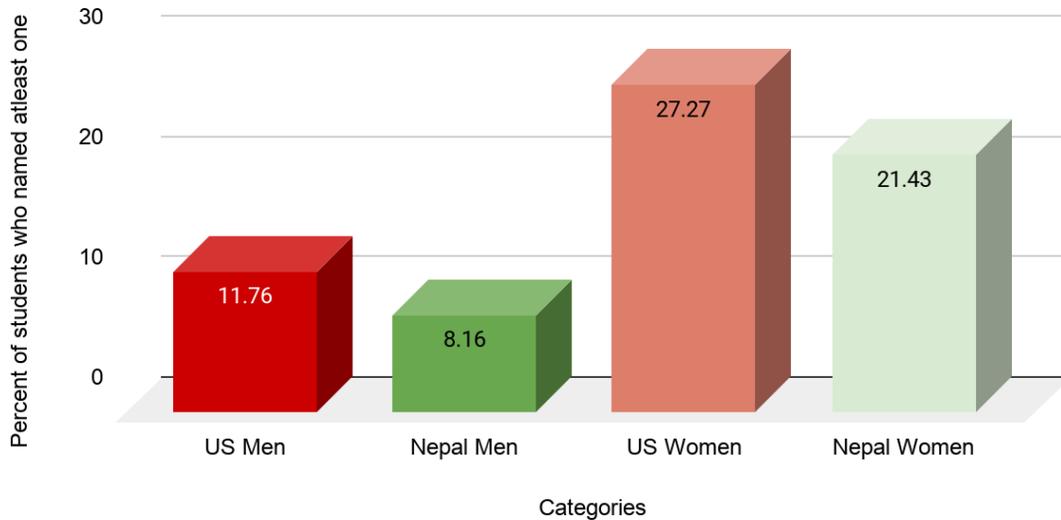


fig. 4 - Student participants who could name at least one female politician. To be more precise, in the United States, 27% of women named at least one female role model, whereas only 12% of men did so. This is a large gender gap of more than 15 points, though it does not rise to conventional levels of statistical significance (p value 0.09). Likewise, in Nepal, there is a 13-point difference between the percentage of women and men naming female politicians as role models, though it is uncertain whether such a result would be found in studying the larger population (p value 0.07).

Gender gap in the ability to name at least one valid female politician

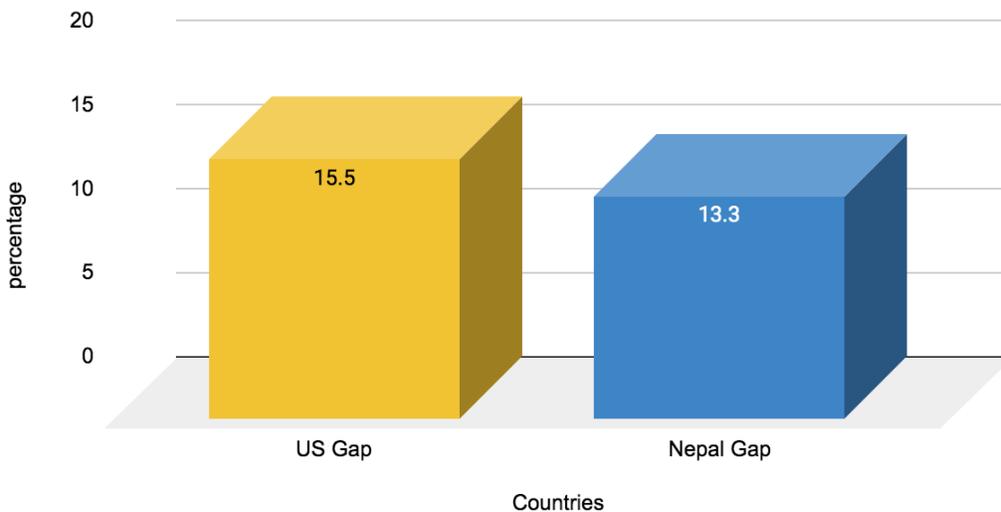


fig. 5 - Gender gap among Nepali College Students in the US and Nepal in their ability to name at least one valid female politician.

Female Population who name at least one female politician

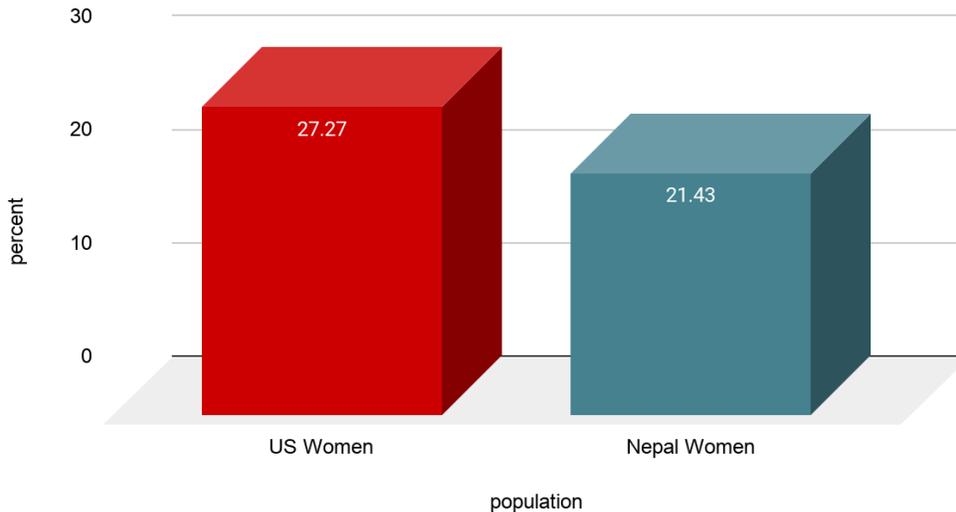


fig. 6 - Nepali female college students in the United States and Nepal who can name at least one female politician.

Statistically, two population groups (Nepali female students in the United States and Nepal) bear a significant difference (p value < 0.01).

- b) The above figures suggest that, despite the lower number of women being able to identify valid politicians *in general*, in both the United States and Nepal, they are more likely to identify valid *female* politicians/role models. This can potentially mean that women are more attentive to the presence of female candidates than men are.
- c) Since a higher number of women in the States were able to list female role models than any other population from both locations, the finding does support the idea that greater exposure to better egalitarian political environment increases women's familiarity to politics.

In a nutshell, it appears that, despite male participants being able to list higher number of valid politicians, which potentially signifies their better cognitive accessibility of politicians as compared to their female counterparts regardless of the country of residence, Nepali women in the United States were still better able or more likely to list female politicians compared to the rest of the population samples. These results hint that the stronger presence of female candidates in the American democracy has certainly impacted the political outlook of Nepali women attending college in the United States. So, this finding suggests that a higher number of female candidacies in the United States provide Nepali college women with more role models to identify with than the gender quotas implemented back in their home country.

Political Ambition

I also want to determine whether the increased visibility of female candidates impacts women's ambitions for political offices. Unfortunately, this study does not indicate that the increase in Nepali women's ability to identify female politicians in the United States correlates to

an increase in their current desire for political offices. So, the second takeaway from the research is that the greater number of female political role models does not necessarily equate to higher political ambition in women pursuing their degrees in the United States.

When the survey asked participants about their future ambition for political offices, Nepali women in the United States (6.81%) were less likely to consider running for office than women back in Nepal (28.67%). The disparity also rises to the level of statistical significance (P value < 0.01), further reinforcing this conclusion.

Percentage of Students Who Want to Run vs. Categories

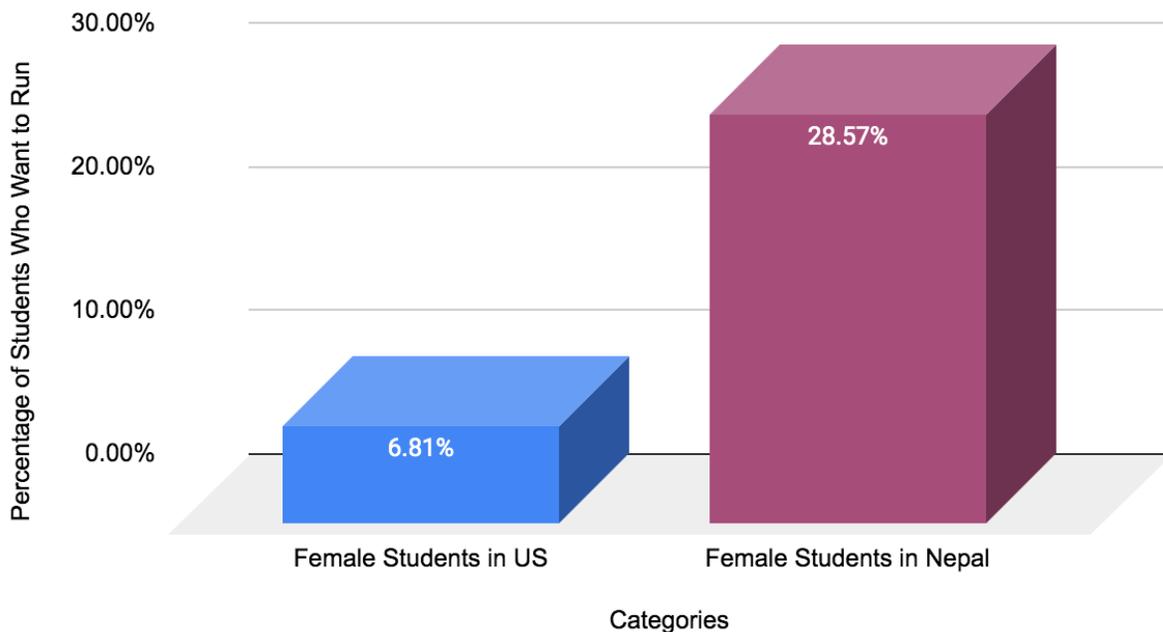


fig no. 7 - Percentage of female student participants who want to run.

Thus, it is hard to claim that the exposure to more women candidates in American politics has made any significant impact on Nepali women's desires to pursue politics in any way. That being said, there may be complicating factors involved.

Immigrant Dynamics:

There could be a number of reasons behind this inconsistency, but the obvious one that I have also observed from my personal experience as an immigrant is the possibility that the Nepali student population residing in the US intends to stay in the country and, thus, has no ambition for political office back home. Further, since they have not yet given up their citizenship and are not integrated far enough into the American political system, they have not developed any aims for politics here, either.

Supporting this interpretation is the data on Nepali men's political ambitions. In looking at fig. 8, it becomes obvious that not just women but men also tend to exhibit lower political ambitions in the United States. 40.81% of male student participants in Nepal want to run for office while only 26.47% of Nepali male participants in the US want to do so. Statistically, there

is a significant difference between these two populations (p value of 4.09×10^{-5}) as well. Thus, a gap of 14.34 percentage points among men, though less compared to the 21.76 percentage point gap among women, is consistent with the conclusion that student participants are less likely to aim for political offices in general when they migrate to foreign countries, especially those with advanced infrastructures and career opportunities suited to their academic pursuits, like the United States.

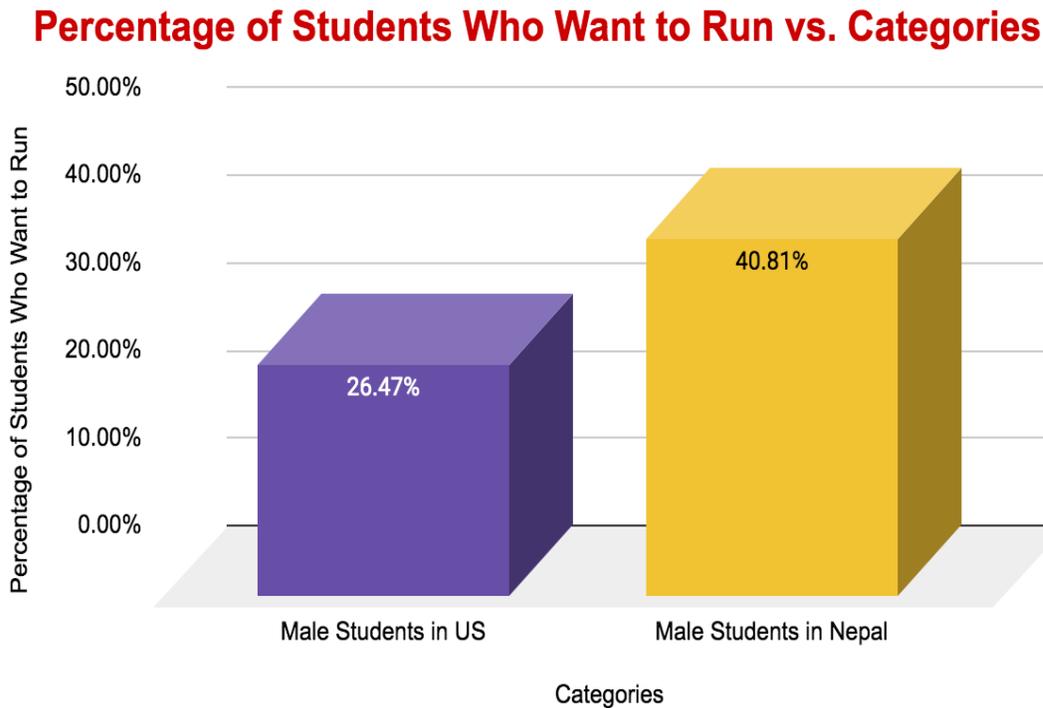


fig. 8 - Percentage of male student participants who want to run.

Coming back to the research hypothesis, survey results do not support the expectation that the gender gap in political ambition among Nepali college students in the United States would be less than among Nepali college students back in Nepal. As seen in fig. 9, the gap in ambition among men and women is 19.66% in the United States and 12.24% in the case of Nepal. However, it is uncertain whether this result will be applicable for the broader population given the fact that only the US Nepali student population shows a significant gender difference (p value of less than 0.01), while the Nepali student population does not rise to any significance (p value of 0.12).

Now, even though the research hypothesis does not align with the survey results, it may still be the case that female role models or higher female representation in politics impact the political attitudes/ambitions of women. The data collected in this research may simply miss these effects.

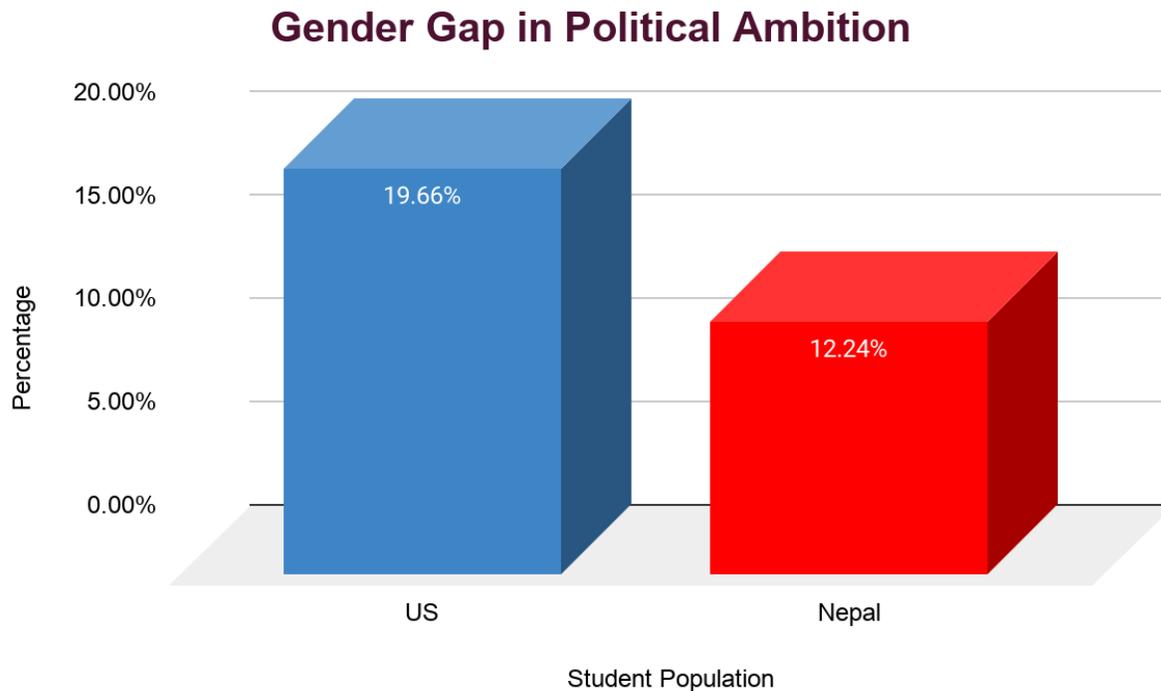


fig. 9- Gender gap in political ambition among Nepalese student Population in the United States and Nepal.

Conclusion

This article theorizes that quotas do not provide as many role models as single-member-district (SMD) campaigning does, and that role models have the largest impact on an individual's political ambition for office. These survey results support the first mechanism – SMDs in the US do seem to provide more role models for women to look up to since the percentage of female participants able to list the female politicians was highest in the States compared to other population samples in the US and Nepal. However, the collected data did not support the second mechanism that exposure to higher number of female candidacies or role models would translate to higher ambition of women for political offices. So, the higher percentage of female participants from the US with higher cognitive ability, or likelihood to name female role models, did not result in greater political ambition or a reduced gender gap in ambition among the Nepali student population in the United States, either. Instead, the gender gap in political ambition among the Nepali student population in the United States appeared to be much higher than in Nepal and, thus, served to undermine the research hypothesis. This can mean that researchers need to rely on other variables than female political role models to determine the impact on women's political ambition.

The interesting twist to this finding is that the reduced ambition was not only visible in female participants but also in the male participants in the United States. Now, the fact that the majority of the Nepali student population in the United States, regardless of the participants' gender, is less likely to seek a future in politics might result from the fact that many international students, especially those with lower career opportunities back in their home countries, seek permanent residence in the US. Thus, it might be the case that the immigrant dynamic has influenced the female students so that their ambitions are not consistent with their exposure to

the strong female presence here in the American political scene. However, it is still an assumption that needs to be fleshed out through further research.

The other possibility for this inconsistency is that quotas may nurture ambition in ways other than providing role models. Still, this possibility extends the frame of focus used by current research. Whatever the reason may be, the fact that the greater exposure of Nepali college students to female activism in American politics has not translated into a significant rise in political ambition of female participants begs for further theories and research.

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Appendix A:
List of Survey Questions

Purpose: The purpose of this questionnaire is to inspect the gender gap in political ambitions of Nepali college students in two different political settings and learn what might be the possible factors impacting such ambitions.

Survey Questions:

1. How do you identify your gender?
 - Male
 - Female
 - Other
2. What's your major field of study?
3. Assuming you have any, who are your top three political role models?
 - 1...
 - 2...
 - 3...
4. Have you participated in any of the following activities? Select all that apply.
 - Voted
 - Volunteered/campaigned for a candidate
 - Participated in a boycott/petition
 - Participated in Strikes
 - Attended Political Meeting
 - Contacted/Interacted with elected Official
 - Served on a non-profit board/organization
 - Others
5. Would you ever consider running for office someday? Why or why not? Explain your reason in a few words.....
6. How often did your parents discuss politics when you were growing up?
 - Very Often
 - Sometimes
 - Never
 - Don't Know
7. Has anyone from your family or close community run for local, regional or federal offices while you were growing up or recently?
 - Yes, he/she is my
 - Yes, but I didn't know them personally.
 - No, no one.
 - Don't know.
8. How often have you heard or seen a female candidate run for local, regional or parliamentary election in your personal experience?
 - Often
 - A few times
 - I am not aware of any

- I don't know

9. How likely do you think it is that a woman candidate can win an election in Nepal independent of the quota system?

- Very likely
- Somewhat Likely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely
- I don't know