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# The Cost of Representation: A Study of Women's Representation and Political Finance in Nepal



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The Cost of Representation: A Study of Women's Representation and Political Finance in Nepal  
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## List of Abbreviations

<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>ECN</b>	Election Commission of Nepal
<b>FPTP</b>	First-Past-the-Post electoral system
<b>HoR</b>	House of Representatives
<b>IFES</b>	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
<b>LGBTQI</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Intersex
<b>MP</b>	Members of Parliament
<b>NPR</b>	Nepali Rupee
<b>PR</b>	Proportional Representation electoral system
<b>PA</b>	Provincial Assembly
<b>USD</b>	United States Dollar

## Executive Summary

This report outlines the findings from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems' (IFES) study on women's political representation and political finance in Nepal's most recent House of Representatives (HoR) elections in 2017. IFES piloted a women's equality and political finance assessment methodology, which incorporated a literature

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*This report finds that unequal access to funds for female candidates, reinforced by patriarchal attitudes of political stakeholders, adversely affects women's political representation in Nepal.*

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review and interviews with 23 electoral stakeholders. The findings from the interviews identify differences in access to funds and patterns of spending between male and female candidates in Nepal, with interview responses indicating that the main focus of their campaign period was to raise enough funds to win both the nomination and the election. Though the 23 interviews conducted for this report do not constitute a statistically significant survey group, the findings allowed IFES to make inferences to better understand gendered differences and inequalities in political finance and how it impacts female candidates' experiences. Finally, based on the findings, the report makes recommendations for various stakeholder groups to improve women's representation in politics in Nepal, including Parliament, the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN), political parties, the media, civil society and the international community.<sup>1</sup>

Money is an essential and unavoidable part of modern-day elections, but it also creates an additional barrier for candidates from marginalized groups. Although the principle of "one voice, one vote" is essential to democratic elections worldwide, access to resources makes some voices louder than others, and this holds true for electoral candidates. Candidates with deep pockets or a greater ability to fundraise stand a better chance of winning elections than those who do not. This imbalance of funds and resources also negatively impacts the campaigns of candidates who are from marginalized communities. However, "if new political forces cannot make their voices heard because the cost of campaigning has become too high, the political system will not be able to adjust to changes in popular opinion."<sup>2</sup> For these reasons, it is essential to examine the financial barriers to women's full and equal participation in political processes as elected representatives and as candidates. Little information exists on these areas, particularly on how political finance impacts women's ability to successfully run for office. Yet, it is clear from what research does exist and from the interview findings that financing is a major barrier to women's candidacy and that women may need to raise *more* funds than their male counterparts to run competitively.<sup>3</sup>

The interviews conducted for this report point to financial and cultural barriers for women entering politics, challenges related to political finance and women's experiences in getting political party support, being nominated as a candidate and campaigning. The report outlines candidates' responses on the role of the electoral system in women's representation and potential methods of

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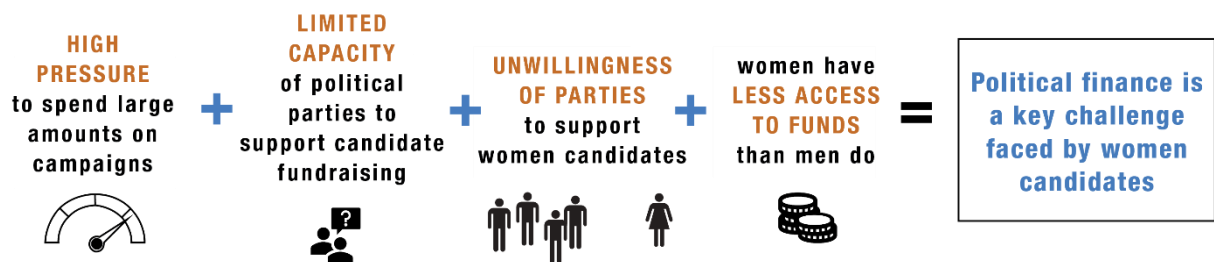
<sup>1</sup> There are no elected openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or intersex (LGBTQI) persons at the national level, nor unsuccessful LGBTQI candidates from the 2017 elections. Therefore, this report examines only the impact of political finance on women's representation in Nepal and refers to "women's equality" as opposed to the more commonly used "gender equality." Nepal's Constitution recognizes transgender persons as a distinct gender identity. However there are no specific election regulations pertaining to LGBTQI persons.

<sup>2</sup> International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2013) page 3, *Controlling Money in Politics: An Introduction*.

<sup>3</sup> International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2014) page 4, *Political Finance and Gender Equality*.

increasing women’s representation in Nepali politics. Respondents agreed that the more a candidate could spend on his or her campaign, the more favorable his or her chances for nomination by party leaders. Female candidates reported more difficulty raising and accessing funds for their campaigns compared to male candidates and that they faced a lack of support from family members and political party leaders. IFES hopes the findings and recommendations from this assessment spark discussions on the critical need for reforms and capacity-building efforts ahead of the next general elections in 2022.

*Figure 1: Women’s Political Finance Pressures in Elections*

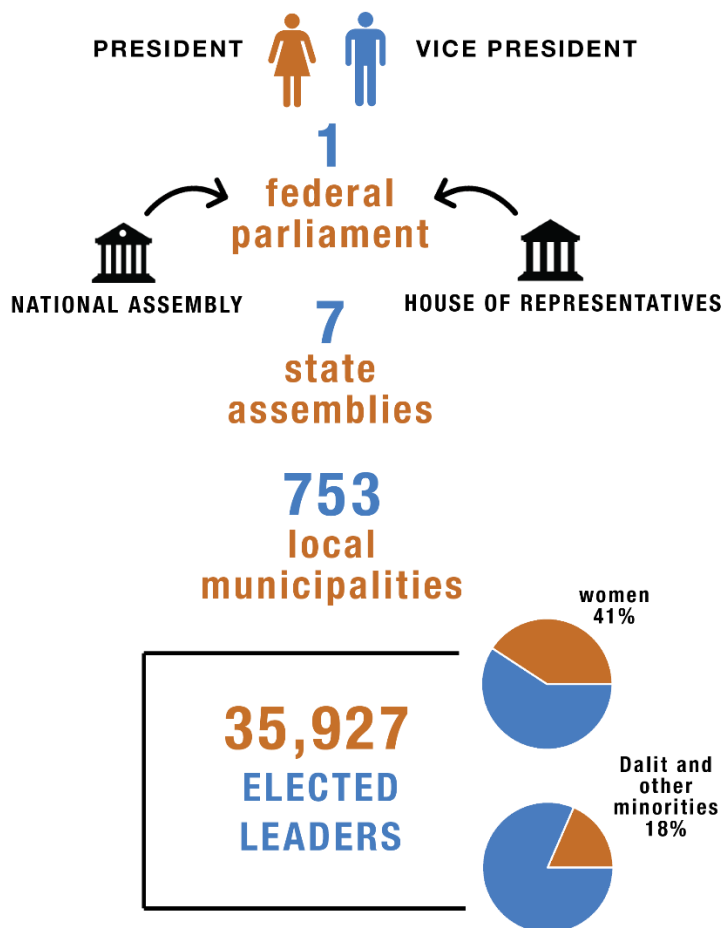


## Introduction

### Political Background and Context in Nepal

Nepal was established as a federal democratic republic with the promulgation of a new Constitution in 2015. Inclusion of marginalized communities in the government and leadership structure has been critical in Nepal's federalization process. The Constitution put in place legislated quotas for women and ethnic minorities in elected office,<sup>4</sup> marking a historic moment for political inclusion. Between 2017-18, Nepal held three tiers of elections for the federal Parliament, seven provincial assemblies (PAs), 753 municipality executives and over than 6,500 local ward councils. The bicameral federal Parliament is composed of the indirectly elected National Assembly (59 members) and the directly elected HoR (275 members). This report focuses specifically on HoR candidates in the 2017-18 elections, in which 60 percent of representatives were elected for 165 seats via first-past-the-post (FPTP) and the remaining 40 percent for 110 seats through proportional representation (PR) from closed political party lists.

*Figure 2: Federal Government Structure of Nepal*



<sup>4</sup> There are inclusion quotas at all levels of elections – federal, provincial and local – with political parties responsible for ensuring 33 percent of seats be filled by women. The quotas do not distinguish a percentage of women who must be elected through FPTP or through PR party lists to meet the quota, though at least 50 percent of parties' PR lists must be female candidates.



## Women's Equality in Nepali Politics and Elections

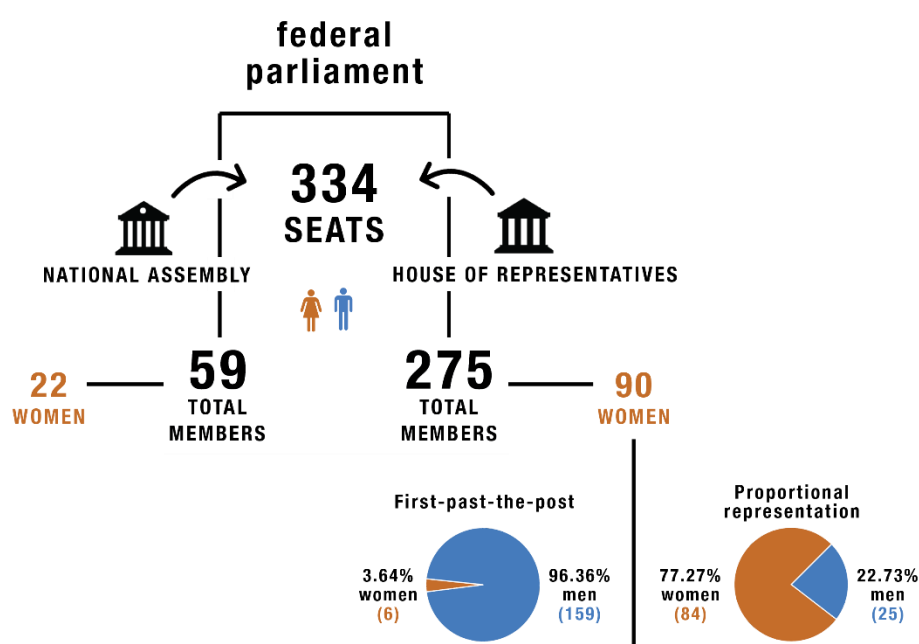
Nepal's mixed electoral system requires a nuanced understanding of the impacts of its quotas. Article 84 of the 2015 Constitution outlines that each political party must ensure that one-third of its elected members in Parliament and the PAs are women. In order to meet the one-third requirement for female members of Parliament (MP), most parties relied on the PR system to make up for the small number of female MPs elected through FPTP. The PR lists are closed party lists, with candidates ordered based on a formula that reflects the proportion of women and specific inclusion groups. In 2017, the PR lists must have had at least 50 percent female candidates and fixed percentages of candidates from the six other inclusion groups as specified in the Constitution – detailed in the table at right. To prevent a high number of female candidates from being nominated from a given inclusion group, the legal framework specifies that within each inclusion group, at least 50 percent of the candidates must be women.

**Figure 3: Ethnic and Religious Minority Inclusion Group Quotas for HoR PR Lists**

Inclusion Group	Percentage of Candidates on PR Lists
Dalit	13.8 percent
Adivasi Janajati	28.7 percent
Khas Arya	31.2 percent
Madhesi	15.3 percent
Tharu	6.6 percent
Muslim	4.4 percent

Due to the quotas, the 2017 elections resulted in 112 women elected to the HoR (34 percent of seats), 189 women elected to the PAs (34 percent of seats) and 14,345 women elected at the local level (41 percent of seats). For the 165 FPTP seats in the HoR, the 56 political parties contesting the elections nominated 1,944 candidates, of whom 146 were women, with only six women successfully winning seats. In order to fulfill the one-third women's quota for the HoR, the remaining 84 seats for women – 93 percent of the HoR seats held by women – were filled from PR lists. The 2017 HoR elections actually marked a regression in women's success rates in FPTP races, compared to the 2013 elections where 10 women won seats through FPTP and the 2008 elections where 30 women were elected through FPTP.

**Figure 4: Composition of Nepal's Bicameral Federal Parliament, Including Gender Distribution**



Despite high levels of women's representation due to quotas at the federal, provincial and local levels, there remain concerns on if women are empowered to meaningfully participate in decision-making processes. Nepal is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and is required to submit progress reports to the CEDAW committee every four years. In its 2018 periodic report, the government highlighted its strategies to advance women's equality, ensure women's access to leadership positions and build women's capacity to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes.<sup>5</sup> In response, the CEDAW committee's response report noted that most leadership positions for women were secondary-power positions.<sup>6</sup> For example, at the local level, 98 percent of chief positions – mayors and chairpersons – are filled by men and 98 percent of secondary-power positions – deputy mayors and deputy chairpersons – are filled by women.<sup>7</sup>

## Policy and Regulatory Environment Governing Political Finance

For the 2017 elections, the ECN published campaign spending limits in the *Nepal Gazette* as provisioned in the Directives on the House of Representatives and Provincial Assembly Elections, 2017, which are available in the table below. The ECN also placed limits on expense categories for FPTP candidates in the election code of conduct, such as a limit of NPR 100,000 (USD \$1,000) for media campaigning for HoR FPTP candidates. Additionally, the code of conduct prohibited candidates and their supporters from providing cash or in-kind incentives to voters. The ceiling on campaign spending increased dramatically from previous elections, with the ECN raising the campaign spending limits by 150 percent for the 2017 HoR elections compared to the 2013 Constituent Assembly elections.

**Figure 5: Campaign Spending Limits for the 2017 HoR and Provincial Assembly Elections (USD amounts are approximate)**

	FPTP candidates	PR candidates
House of Representatives	NPR 2.5 million (USD \$25,000)	NPR 200,000 (USD \$2,000)
Provincial Assembly	NPR 1.5 million (USD \$15,000)	NPR 150,000 (USD \$1,500)

Despite the issuance of the political finance regulations, candidate and political party expenditures lacked transparency, with domestic observers noting a lack of monitoring mechanisms, without which the ECN was unable to enforce the spending limits.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, campaign expenditure reports submitted to the ECN are not readily available to the public, limiting the transparency and public accountability of campaign income and spending. Individual candidates are permitted to raise their own campaign funds or receive financial support from their political parties, and the source of campaign contributions of over NPR 25,000 (USD \$250) must be disclosed, according to the Political

<sup>5</sup> Forum for Women, Law and Development (2018), *Concluding Observations on the Sixth Periodic Report of Nepal on CEDAW*.

<sup>6</sup> Forum for Women, Law and Development (2018), *Concluding Observations on the Sixth Periodic Report of Nepal on CEDAW*.

<sup>7</sup> The Asia Foundation (2018) page 6, *Nepal's Locally Elected Women Representatives: Exploratory Study of Needs and Capacity*.

<sup>8</sup> Nepal Election Observation Committee (2018), *Final Report of the Observation Mission 2017 Elections of the House of Representatives and Provincial Assemblies*.

Party Act, 2017. Overall, according to a domestic observer group, political parties and candidates spent an estimated NPR 131.63 billion (USD \$1.15 billion) total during the three tiers of elections held in 2017-18.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the Election Offenses and Punishments Act, 2017 forbids the abuse of state resources by candidates during the campaign period, including the use of government vehicles, property or other government resources while conducting campaign activities. Despite this, observers noted government vehicles were seen at campaign events and during door-to-door campaigning.<sup>10</sup>

There were few gender-specific regulations in the 2017-18 electoral legal framework. Candidacy fees were reduced by half for female candidates and there was a provision in the election code of conduct stating that no campaign activities should be carried out “undermining the feelings or character of women.”<sup>11</sup> While this provision was well-intentioned, the code of conduct did not specify what type of behavior this refers to nor associated punitive measures. The absence of more comprehensive political finance policies seeking to empower female candidates may have negatively affected the number of women aspiring to run for elected office and created insufficient incentives for political parties to nominate female candidates in great numbers for FPTP seats.

## Methodology

This study employed two types of information collection techniques: a literature review and key informant interviews. The literature review supported the development of questions for key interviews, which served as the foundation for the main findings and recommendations in this report. The literature review consisted of reports on women’s equality and politics in Nepal, reports on political finance globally, election observation reports and Nepali newspaper articles.

With limited information on women’s equality and political finance in Nepal, and little research on this topic globally, much of the discussion in the media on women and political finance is based on assumptions, not on the experiences of women and men in politics. IFES conducted key informant interviews to explore the personal experiences of men and women running for elected office and the opinions of civil society organizations (CSOs), political party representatives, academics and journalists on the intersection of women’s equality and political finance in the 2017 HoR elections in Nepal. A total of 23 interviews with 10 women and 13 men were conducted between January and March 2019 with the stakeholder groups in the table below. The successful female and male candidates included MPs and political party leaders, and participants represented diverse political backgrounds, various political parties and candidates running in both FPTP and PR races. Respondents’ anonymity was maintained throughout the study. While the number of stakeholders interviewed does not constitute a statistically representative sample, the variety of responses illustrate the diverse experiences men and women face in politics in Nepal and allows for conclusions to be drawn from their experiences.

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<sup>9</sup> Nepal Election Observation Committee (2018), page 8, *Final Report of the Observation Mission 2017 Elections of the House of Representatives and Provincial Assemblies*.

<sup>10</sup> Samuhik Abhiyan (2018), *Following the Money: Campaign Expense Monitoring during the House of Representatives Election, 2017*.

<sup>11</sup> ECN Election Code of Conduct (2016).

**Figure 6: Categories and Number of Respondents in Key Informant Interviews**

Category of Respondent	Number of Respondents	Comments
Women who successfully ran for parliament in 2017	8	Both FPTP and PR candidates from different political parties and parts of Nepal
Women who unsuccessfully ran for parliament in 2017 <sup>12</sup>	2	FPTP candidates from different political parties and parts of Nepal
Men who successfully ran for parliament in 2017	3	FPTP candidates from different political parties and parts of Nepal
Men who unsuccessfully ran for parliament in 2017	3	FPTP candidates from different political parties and parts of Nepal
Representatives of political parties	3	Senior representatives from different political parties
Representatives from CSOs, the media and academics	4	

The interviews consisted of semistructured questions informed by the literature review. The questions were designed to analyze candidates' experiences running for the 2017 HoR elections. They focused on funding sources, fundraising methods and spending, views of political party representatives on the candidate selection process and views of CSO representatives, the media and academics on the effect of political finance on women's representation in Nepali politics. The interview questions also covered general information about the candidate, the candidate selection process, the role of money in candidate selection and campaigning and recommendations for reform. In addition to the preset interview questions, follow-up questions provided clarity on the respondents' meaning and probed deeper into relevant issues.

## Key Findings

### Barriers to Women Entering Politics in Nepal

*"Women face difficulties raising money as well as spending money. They have less independence in monetary decision making." – Successful female candidate*

*"Women have less access to financial resources and also do not have many contacts with potential donors." – Successful female candidate*

*"...there are a lot of people who are left behind because of the inability to raise money and I think this is unjust." – Unsuccessful female candidate*

*"I formally entered politics only after I was financially capable of bearing the campaign expenses." – Successful male candidate*

### Financial Barriers and Women's Access to Money

Access to funds is undoubtedly a central part of Nepali elections and the chances for women to successfully run for office largely depend on their access to independent wealth or ability to fundraise independently. Respondents emphasized that money played an important role in their campaign experiences, with access to resources a potential barrier for those seeking nomination from a political party and to win the election. Although it is not the only factor, many said that

<sup>12</sup> Despite IFES contacting several women who unsuccessfully ran in the 2017 HoR elections, most were unwilling to be interviewed.

without access to significant funding sources – one successful female candidate referred to the “heavy dominance” of money – it is difficult for women to venture into politics.

Respondents highlighted the difficulties female candidates faced accessing funds and women’s perceived inability to fund their own campaigns. With the increasing cost of elections, female candidates are disproportionately affected due to their limited access to and control of financial resources. Consequently, many women are barred from entering politics due to the high cost of entry associated with campaigning.<sup>13</sup> One successful female candidate echoed this, stating that due to the increasing cost of running for election, she struggled with whether to contest the 2017 HoR election.

A perception commonly noted in the interviews was that the costs of campaigning in Nepal have increased in recent elections, putting a financial strain on all potential candidates, men and women alike. The interviews indicated that both women and men spent similar amounts during their campaigns to garner public support. Some of the respondents claimed to raise money for their campaigns either by selling their ancestral properties, taking loans or seeking donations from businesspersons, although these fundraising methods are more accessible to male candidates.

Structural economic inequalities continue to undermine women’s ability to participate in politics on an equal footing with men. According to the 2018 [Global Gender Gap Report](#), Nepal ranks 110 of 149 countries on the index in economic participation and opportunity, with women’s wages estimated to be 65 percent of men’s for similar work, indicating that women typically earn far less than men even in similar positions.<sup>14</sup> Many respondents also stated that women do not have access to businesspeople or networks of wealthy individuals who could donate to their campaigns. One unsuccessful female candidate stated that legally women are able to hold assets, such as property, but patriarchal norms and their families often do not allow women to make decisions on the use of these assets.

The issue of property ownership was also raised by several respondents. Many respondents stated that some candidates took loans against their properties to fund their campaign activities. One successful female candidate noted that while the Nepali Constitution guarantees women property rights and the government has instituted tax exemptions for properties in women’s names, this has not been widely implemented and several respondents noted that women generally do not have personal property or control over property belonging to their families. A 2016 survey by the International Organization for Migration found that women’s property ownership is below 50 percent and numbers are even lower among women from marginalized groups, with less than 8 percent of Dalit women owning property.<sup>15</sup> The study also found that despite the increase in women’s property ownership, this is not indicative of women’s decision-making power over the use of the property, its revenues or major expenses.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, as women continue to face unequal

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<sup>13</sup> Dhakal (2015) page 51, *Contesting patriarchy: The gender gap and gender-based violence in Nepali politics and the Constituent Assembly election 2013*.

<sup>14</sup> World Economic Forum (2018) page 201, *The Global Gender Gap Report, 2018*.

<sup>15</sup> International Organization on Migration (2016) pages 19-20, *Barriers to Women’s Land and Property Access and Ownership in Nepal*.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, pages 19, 25-26.

access to property rights, they consequently have less control over the funds generated from property ownership, adversely affecting their access to funds for political activities.

With access to personal wealth and funding networks being a decisive factor for political success, findings from this study demonstrate that women face greater challenges raising funds for political means and greater restrictions in making autonomous decisions about spending these funds compared to men.

### **Societal and Cultural Barriers**

For women aspiring to run for elected office, patriarchal mindsets can be barriers for women aspirants, in addition to lack of access and control of funds. Female respondents stated they had comparatively less control over family resources and that they do not have autonomy over spending decisions, even in their own campaigns. Women reported having to ask permission from husbands, fathers or other male family members to raise and spend campaign funds. Control over finances exerted by male family members suggests that female candidates may face economic violence or the threat of withholding funds intended for campaigning.<sup>17</sup> Several female candidates noted that they did not have input on decisions on the use of their or their families' properties – i.e., taking loans against the property or selling property to fund election campaigns – or that they were financially dependent on male family members. It is interesting to note, though inconclusive, that all the interviewed *successful* candidates said that they had family support, including financial, during the elections. One unsuccessful female candidate said she had no support from her family and another unsuccessful candidate said that her family had only reluctantly provided assistance toward the end of her campaign.

Several female respondents noted freedom of mobility to conduct fundraising and campaigning activities as a barrier to aspiring to elected office. Respondents noted that, as women, engaging in evening activities was perceived as inappropriate and that male party cadres felt uncomfortable campaigning or traveling alone with female candidates.

Though female candidates may face distrust from voters and political party leaders, generally, women who have strong family support or are members of well-known political families have a comparatively easier time being accepted. However, respondents stated that both women who are new to politics and those who are from political families are often met with distrust by parties, voters and potential donors on the basis of their gender. Women from powerful families may be accused of having an easy entry point into politics or being proxies for male family members. One successful PR female candidate expressed that she faced difficulties establishing her political career and being nominated primarily because her father was an influential party leader and she felt pressured to meet the standards he set. Interestingly, both an unsuccessful and a successful female candidate from political families – with the unsuccessful female candidate's mother and the successful candidate's husband involved in politics – reported that their parties initially relegated them to secondary positions in the candidate nomination process, even though both were well

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<sup>17</sup> International Foundation for Electoral Systems *Violence Against Women in Elections Framework* (2018). Economic violence is defined as the denial or constant threat of denial of resources or services or unlawful control and monitoring of the use and distribution of resources or access to services.

connected politically through their families. This is related to stigmas reflecting broader social norms around traditional gender roles, especially around hierarchies of power and women's authority.

As women in Nepal often lack autonomy over their or their families' resources and even over funds they raise for campaigning, their ability to independently design and implement a campaign strategy is curtailed. This is an often overlooked but critical aspect of every individual's right to run for elected office and may pose an insurmountable barrier to some women aspirants.

## **Importance of Political Party Support in Candidate Nomination for Women**

*"[Political party leaders] have the attitude that women cannot win a direct election. This is the result of a patriarchal mindset. Our party does have a women's equality policy, but it hasn't been implemented." – Successful female candidate*

*"...it is a bitter truth that money is the primary factor for wishing to be a candidate of the party. People spend a lot just for candidacy let alone winning an election. Because of this, many women cannot contest in FPTP elections despite having the ability and courage to fight against social ills." – Successful female candidate*

*"There are many candidates I know who have submitted money to the party to get a candidacy. Money is given more priority than the capability of the candidate to bring about change." – Successful female candidate*

*"Candidates are evaluated on the basis of their ability to raise and spend money." – Successful male candidate*

## **Political Parties' Perception of Women's Representation**

Unsurprisingly, the political party representatives interviewed stated that their party was supportive of women's equality, although one admitted that the issue has only arisen recently. However, all party representatives indicated that their parties do not have any specific policies in place to advance women's equality among party officials or candidates. This conflicts with the Political Party Act, 2017, which mandates that one-third of party members on all official committees are women. Therefore, the underrepresentation of women in elected bodies is further compounded by the lack of women's leadership in political party structures. For instance, only 75 of the 441 members of the central committee of the ruling Nepal Communist Party are women, or 17 percent of total members.

Several political party representatives shared that some party leaders believe female candidates must choose between the party and their families and, aware of this perception, some female candidates reported that they chose not to disclose their marital status to political party leaders. Nepal's patriarchal society and a belief within political parties that women are not able to win elections were commonly cited as reasons for the parties' unwillingness to nominate female candidates in FPTP seats. One unsuccessful female candidate noted that it was sometimes difficult to exert her authority with male candidates or party representatives, as many believe that women should not be in positions of authority, referencing a Nepali saying that "a chicken should not crow like a rooster." Some women discussed how male peers were unwilling to work for them and that, as politicians, women are seen as having competing priorities between their parties and their families.

It is clear from the interviews that political parties in Nepal expect candidates to largely fund their own campaigns. Political party representatives interviewed stated that party financial contributions were modest, which corresponded with the answers given by the interviewed candidates. Indeed,



one party representative noted that candidates had on occasion supported fundraising efforts for the political party that nominated them, rather than the other way around. One political party representative said that party cadres expect financial compensation for time spent supporting campaign activities more than they did in the past, intensifying the financial burden on candidates. It is worth noting that none of the candidates interviewed, women or men, reported receiving trainings or guidance from their political party on fundraising for election campaigns. Based on international experience, political parties should provide training to candidates on fundraising, bookkeeping and cost-efficient campaigns. Similar assistance could also be provided by Nepali civil society groups or international organizations on a multiparty basis, with a focus on women aspirants or candidates.

Most of the women interviewed stated they were aware of the cost implications of getting involved in politics before becoming candidates. However, even with this awareness going in – such as a woman who remembered her father's financial challenges when he was involved in politics – many said that women, particularly women running for FPTP seats, were highly scrutinized for their ability to raise and spend money, more so than men aspiring for the same FPTP seats.

### Candidate Nominations

As 164 out of the 165 seats in the HoR elected through FPTP were won by candidates nominated by political parties, it is evident that support from political parties is critical to being elected. In many countries, it is common practice for those wishing to be a candidate to pay a formal fee to the political party for the nomination.<sup>18</sup> In this study, all the respondents agreed that such practices are not used by Nepali parties. This contrasts with other countries, where politicians have reported that they spent more money to get the nomination than on the campaign itself.<sup>19</sup> There are several possible explanations for this. One reason may be that there are fewer *safe seats* in Nepal than in some other countries, where those with access to funds may be willing to spend a lot of money to gain the nomination.<sup>20</sup> Another reason may be the legal provision to nominate a certain percentage of women, which means that political parties needed to submit PR lists with at least 50 percent female candidates, reducing the level of competition for PR seats and thereby the incentive for candidates to pay political parties for the nomination.

There does however, seem to be a strong indirect link between financial capacity and the candidate nomination process, as respondents noted that people perceived as having good chances of running a wide-reaching and well-financed campaign are more likely to be nominated. As the chances of winning an election in Nepal, as elsewhere, are connected to access to financial resources, this also

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<sup>18</sup> In some cases, the fees that aspirants have to pay to participate in the candidate selection process can be substantial. For the 2019 elections in Nigeria, anyone wishing to be considered for nomination as a candidate of the two major parties had to pay the equivalent of \$175,000 (USD). Interestingly, one of the main parties halved this fee for women, while the other parties waived the fee altogether for women. Sunday Times (2018), *Huge fees for Nigerian election hopefuls under fire*.

<sup>19</sup> International IDEA (2015) page 17, *Political party financing and equal participation of women in Kenyan electoral politics: a situation overview*.

<sup>20</sup> "Safe seats" refer to seats in places where being nominated by a particular party in a constituency all but guarantees electoral success. The notion of safe seats is closely related to electoral competitiveness in individual electoral districts. Unfortunately, as Kayser and Lindstädt have pointed out, "no valid measure of electoral competitiveness exists that applies across different electoral and party systems." Kayser and Lindstädt (2015) "A Cross-National Measure of Electoral Competitiveness".



means that money is important for being chosen as a candidate by a political party, especially in a winnable seat. The male candidates interviewed agreed that money is an important part of the candidate selection process, although they were less clear about the impact of money on female candidates. One respondent emphasized this, saying, "there are some candidates who are nominated based upon their financial position. The frequent nomination of business persons and contractors as candidates is a testimony to this."

Though both male and female aspirants seeking nominations face funding issues, respondents asserted that political party leadership may not even nominate women unless they are known to have easy access to funds. As one successful female candidate summarized, "women are heavily bearing the brunt of [the increased costs of electoral politics in Nepal]" as they typically have limited access to funds compared to male candidates.

## Election Campaign

*"Even for campaigning, they [women] require support from male members of the party and family." – Successful male candidate*

*"Even though I won the election, I am having difficulties repaying the loan that I took for the election. My salary as a lawmaker is not enough to pay back the loan. As per the party decision, the winning candidate has to donate a certain portion of their salary to the party. So, I am not in a position to repay the loan I took for election campaigning." – Successful female candidate*

*"When it comes to female candidates, they face problems such as harassment and character assassination. This comes from men within the party as well as women from opposition parties who question the character of a woman contesting the election." – Successful female candidate*

The interviewed female and male candidates gave varying responses to how they raised the funds used for the election campaigns. While several of the men interviewed stated they had raised funds either from their own businesses, from business contacts or by taking loans, the women interviewed stressed that they had chiefly received funds and resources from their families and networks of friends.<sup>21</sup> The overall approach to campaigning and campaign spending does not seem to have differed significantly between women and men. Most focused on door-to-door campaigning and print media advertising and some used social media.

The respondents indicated that the lack of enforcement of political finance regulations, and the absence of gender-specific financial provisions to support women's campaigns created significant financial barriers for female candidates.<sup>22</sup> The lack of enforcement of political finance regulations allowed candidates to spend well beyond published limits without punitive action. This disproportionately affected female candidates, who were limited in their ability to raise and spend funds independently. While there are various campaign provisions in Nepal that are not gender-specific, reforms are needed to reduce the role of money in campaigning and to level the playing

<sup>21</sup> One interviewed female candidate stated that her political party provided funding for her election campaign. Interestingly, the interviewed political party representative from the same party argued that the party had provided only "minimal" assistance to their candidates.

<sup>22</sup> On gender-specific regulations, see page 5 above. On the importance of enforcement of political finance regulations, see page 13.

field between male and female candidates. This may include providing discounted campaign materials for female candidates and free or low-cost access to the media for candidates, giving preference to women.

Harassment or the threat of violence impacts women's mobility and ability to spend money in their campaigns. About half of the respondents – women and men – reported that they had been victims of harassment during their campaigns, though only female respondents stated the issues they faced were based on their gender. The interview responses were in line with existing reports on violence against women in elections, which stress that such violence varies in terms of physical, sexual or psychological harm, including threats or acts of "coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty within the family and at the inter-or-intra political party levels."<sup>23</sup> One unsuccessful female candidate reported experiencing character assassination on social media even from men officially supporting her campaign, making disparaging comments about the type of lipstick she wore and saying the candidate should get married and have children instead of pursuing politics. Some female candidates also experienced harassment from opposition female candidates through personal attacks on their character.

Despite instances of harassment and threats of violence, no respondents reported spending additional resources to address security concerns. Although election violence or the threat of violence does not seem to have resulted in increased security spending for women, it can be presumed to have limited women's ability to spend funds, as they may have been unable to conduct campaign activities at night, independently or in areas that may be deemed unsafe.

As shown above, access to resources greatly impacts a candidate's ability to be nominated and run a successful election campaign. Most respondents argued that spending large amounts of money played a major role in the electoral process, though it was not the only factor, as some who lost the elections also spent significant amounts of money.

## Role of the Electoral System

*"...in FPTP it all depends on the ability of the candidate to spend money. Unless FPTP is removed, the country will never get rid of the taint of corruption." – Successful male candidate*

The interviews indicate that the pressures on access to financial means and spending are less prominent in PR elections and that this can benefit female candidates. In line with this, some respondents supported the notion of Nepal exclusively using a PR system for future elections, arguing that this may increase the share of women elected.<sup>24</sup> Some respondents, including women elected through PR elections who have previously served or are currently serving as MPs, argued that such PR-elected MPs are taken less seriously than those elected through FPTP. As PR races are less competitive than FPTP and with so few women nominated for and winning FPTP seats, there is a tendency in Nepal to consider those elected through PR to be "second-tier" MPs, because they competed on a party list rather than as individuals. In fact, representatives elected through FPTP

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<sup>23</sup> Dhakal, Rajju Malla, Morrice, Adrian and Pokharel, Bhojraj (2012) page 17, *Electoral Violence and Mitigation Assessment, Nepal, Final Report*.

<sup>24</sup> Christensen and Bardall (2014) page 23, *Gender Quotas in Single-Member District Electoral Systems*.

may simply have more access to funds and resources to directly interface with voters or the support of a major political party that helped them secure the election.

It also seems clear that political parties often see positions on PR electoral lists as more suited for women, making FPTP seats effectively earmarked for men.<sup>25</sup> However, some respondents expressed that it was difficult for women even to be chosen as PR candidates, at least partly because of their perceived inability to raise funds. Some respondents argued in favor of reserved seats, which would also apply to FPTP. However, in countries where they are used, these systems also can lead to the other seats being effectively reserved for men.<sup>26</sup> To address this imbalance between candidates elected through the two different systems, the ECN may consider giving campaign rebates to parties in exchange for fielding more women FPTP candidates.

As shown through existing research about quotas used in parliamentary elections, there is no ideal electoral system to increase the meaningful participation of women in politics.<sup>27</sup> Nomination quotas for only the PR seats in the HoR, as exists in Nepal, ensure that women are on the ballot and have the possibility to get elected.<sup>28</sup> However, Nepal's mixed electoral system has the unintended effect of political party leaders being reluctant to nominate women in FPTP elections and relying on PR lists to ensure quotas for women's representation are met. As discussed above, party leaders' reluctance is connected to the high spending expectations for FPTP candidates and potential female candidates' limited access to resources. Simple changes to nomination requirements, coupled with improved regulation of campaign income and expenses, could help address this inequity.

## Increasing Women's Representation in Politics

*"We already have favorable laws and policies; however, their implementation is of major concern." – Successful female candidate*

*"Regulating abuse of state resources will certainly level the playing field for female candidates. It will control corruption and create an equal situation for female candidates as well." – Successful female candidate*

All respondents provided ideas about how the role of money in Nepali elections can be reformed to advance women's equality, although there were significant variations in the reforms proposed. Despite the lack of consensus on necessary reforms and inclusion measures, this section will present some key themes from the key informant interviews to support increased women's representation in Nepali politics and provide recommendations based on international best practices.

Many stressed the need to effectively monitor compliance and enforce existing regulations on political finance. As discussed above, there are nominally gender-neutral regulations that could indirectly support women's equality, such as donation and spending limits, spending limits on advertising and financial reporting requirements.<sup>29</sup> However, compliance with these regulations is not consistently monitored in Nepal, and no sanctions were imposed against any political actors for

<sup>25</sup> Women on the PR lists were three times as likely to be elected than men on the lists due to the quota.

<sup>26</sup> International IDEA (2015) page 22, *Political party financing and equal participation of women in Kenyan electoral politics: a situation overview*.

<sup>27</sup> Christensen and Bardall (2014) page 23, *Gender Quotas in Single-Member District Electoral Systems*.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, page 18.

<sup>29</sup> See additional information on page 4.

violating these rules in the 2017 elections.<sup>30</sup> Respondents maintained that increased enforcement of political finance regulations would support both female and male candidates, and many of the female respondents argued that increased enforcement would especially benefit women, given their limited access to funding. One successful female candidate reported that because of the lack of formal monitoring “candidates spent rampantly, and female candidates bore the brunt of this,” while another said that the insufficient enforcement of spending limits benefits “male candidates who are financially strong and are closer to power structures.”

Legal reform may be needed to ensure political finance regulations can be enforced effectively. This may include increased reporting requirements and a strengthened mandate for the ECN to monitor compliance. In addition, the ECN should devote increased time and resources to the planning and implementation of effective oversight of political finance regulations. Most respondents argued that enforcing existing political finance regulations would help to level the electoral playing field and make it easier for challengers to compete effectively, noting that most incumbent MPs are men. Another potential area of reform for political finance not mentioned by any of the respondents is the need to regulate campaign income. Limiting contribution amounts per individual, banning corporate contributions and publishing amounts and sources of campaign income would likely reduce the overall cost of campaigning and help level the playing field between male and female candidates.

Some respondents argued in favor of providing public funding to political parties, by arguing it could reduce the pressure to raise funds privately and increase opportunities for women to participate. One respondent further suggested that public funding could be given directly to female candidates. Those against this reform argued that it is not feasible given Nepal's economic situation, and that the existing lack of enforcement may mean that public funding would be undermined by uncontrolled inflows of private funds into campaigns. Should public funding be introduced in Nepal, global comparative experience indicates that connecting the level of funding to the level of women's representation among both PR and FPTP candidates, as an incentive for political parties to field more women, could address female candidates' challenges in accessing funds.<sup>31</sup>

As the interviewed candidates identified training support as a gap, some respondents noted that trainings on campaign strategy development and fundraising would be beneficial, particularly for female candidates. Political parties or CSOs could provide these trainings. Respondents also suggested that the ECN introduce more incentives and discounts for female candidates for campaign activities. For example, the ECN could print or offer a special discount for publicity materials for female candidates to reduce their financial burden. Others recommended the media organizations provide discounts on campaign coverage for female candidates, such as discounted radio or television advertisements.

In providing recommendations for what needs to change to improve women's meaningful participation in politics, most respondents focused first on ways to first strengthen political finance monitoring for all candidates and second on ways to reduce the financial burden on female candidates. Strengthening political finance regulations and monitoring would benefit all candidates

<sup>30</sup> In its report about campaign spending in the 2017 elections, CSO Samuhik Abhiyan recommended that the “ECN should introduce a strong and effective mechanism for monitoring campaigns.” Samuhik Abhiyan (2018) page iii, *Following the Money: Campaign Expense Monitoring during the House of Representatives Election, 2017*.

<sup>31</sup> International IDEA (2018), *Gender-Targeted Public Funding, a Comparative Analysis*.

by reducing pressures to spend such large amounts on campaigns and benefit women in particular as they have less access to private funds than male candidates. Coupled with this, strategies to provide financial support to female candidates through public funding, fundraising trainings and discounted campaign activities could substantially decrease the financial burden on female candidates and incentivize political parties to nominate more women.

## Final Comments

The findings from this report reinforce the notion that the more a candidate spends on a campaign, the better his or her chances of winning the election. Due to unequal access to funds, a lack of strong, gender-inclusive political finance regulations and political parties' belief that women will be less competitive candidates than men, the Nepali political finance environment places higher funding pressures on women running for elected office.

The Constitution of Nepal ensures that women comprise a minimum of one-third of the federal and provincial Parliaments elected through a mixed electoral system. However, systemic and social barriers limit the ability of women to be nominated as candidates for FPTP seats and to run successful campaigns against men. As a result, almost all women elected to the HoR come from PR party lists, with 77 percent of PR seats held by women. By their nature, candidates for PR races do not campaign as much as candidates for FPTP races and the costs of these campaigns are much lower. Winners of FPTP contests are therefore typically men who have the capacity and access to key networks to raise more money than women. PR seats are therefore considered less important as they are mostly held by women and the campaigns do not generate as much money for the political parties.

The lack of transparency and regulation around campaign income and expenditures advantage men, who are more likely than women to own land and have independent wealth and networks with political and business leaders. To level the playing field between female and male candidates, it is important to reform political finance to make campaign income more transparent, limiting or banning corporate contributions and monitoring and applying sanctions to candidates who violate campaign spending rules. Additionally, political parties should be compelled to observe the gender quotas for their central committees, which will increase women's ability to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. Finally, increasing the number of female candidates in FPTP races through legislation or financial incentives would increase the numbers of women elected directly and diminish the stigma of PR seats as "women only."

## Recommendations

The interviews conducted for this study and the analysis of existing research and data point to several recommendations for reform and changed behavior. There is no single change that can remove the gender-related financial challenges faced by women running for office. Rather, various Nepali – and to a lesser extent international – stakeholders must make changes so that the role of money in Nepali politics can advance, rather than hinder, women's equality.

The below recommendations are based on the findings from this report, and are organized based on the concerned stakeholder.

## Recommendations for Parliament

### **1. Consider additional regulations to increase transparency and reduce the advantages of candidates with easy access to money.**

There are various political finance provisions in Nepali legislation, many of which could, if effectively enforced, reduce the role of money in Nepali elections. This includes provisions for increased transparency, which (if implemented, see Recommendations 3 and 4) could reduce the advantages of candidates, who are mainly men, with access to wealthy networks. Campaign finance reporting requirements should be amended to require detailed reporting of income. Limits on donations and strengthening requirements for transparency must also be implemented to reduce the amount of money being loaned or donated to candidates with the expectation of favors in return.

Additional provisions could also include providing discounted campaign materials for female candidates or free or low-cost access to media through legislation, helping women to overcome campaign challenges and incentivizing political parties to nominate more women. Additional provisions to prevent abuse of state resources in elections could also help to reduce the advantage of incumbents in FPTP races, who are mainly men.<sup>32</sup>

### **2. If public funding to political parties is introduced, consider introducing a funding scale, whereby political parties adhering to women's representation requirements receive larger amounts than parties that do not.**

There was no consensus among those interviewed for this study about the introduction of public funding of political parties in Nepal. If public funding is introduced in Nepal, the amounts provided to each eligible political party should be connected to the level of women's representation among the candidates chosen by the party. A growing number of countries worldwide tie the level of public funding to political parties that meet an established level for women's representation. In other countries, a certain share of public funding is set aside for parties that achieve a certain level of women's representation.<sup>33</sup> Should public funding of political parties be introduced in Nepal, similar provisions should be considered, though admittedly, the impact on women's equality may be limited unless the public funds make up a significant portion of the party's income. However, earmarking part of public funding for activities that support women's equality within political parties could prove effective in gradually reducing party leadership's reluctance to advance women's equality due to the emphasis on raising money as reported by many of those interviewed for this report.

### **3. Consider legal reforms to increase compliance and strengthen oversight to increase Nepal's enforcement of political finance regulations.**

Most political finance provisions in Nepal are disregarded or only partially implemented, be it reporting requirements, spending limits or bans against abuse of state resources. Part of addressing this is the introduction of legal reforms to support more successful enforcement. This can include enhancing the financial reporting requirements for political parties and candidates and

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<sup>32</sup> IFES developed a research and assessment framework specifically relating to abuse of state resources ahead of elections. See International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2018) *Abuse of State Resources Research and Assessment Framework, Guidelines for the Democracy and Governance Community of Practice*.

<sup>33</sup> International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2014) *Political Finance and Gender Equality* and International IDEA (2018) *Gender-Targeted Public Funding, a Comparative Analysis*.

strengthening the ECN's mandate and powers to oversee compliance with political finance provisions, investigate potential violations and impose sanctions when violations have occurred.

## **Recommendations for the Election Commission of Nepal**

### **4. Actively enforce political finance regulations and make recommendations for legal reform that would promote effective enforcement, transparency and consistent reporting of both campaign income and expenses.**

The ECN can play a key role in strengthening the legal framework to enforce political finance regulations by making recommendations to Parliament for legal reform to facilitate stronger oversight. The ECN should also plan to implement its existing mandate to monitor political finance, build awareness on campaign finance restrictions with observers, voters, parties and candidates, identify what is needed for effective oversight and engage with political party leaders and candidates, who must be held accountable to political finance provisions.

### **5. Support the active participation of women in Nepali elections.**

To be fully inclusive, elections in Nepal must include the active participation of women and men on equal terms, and as the election management body in Nepal, the ECN should act within its legal mandate to support women's equality in elections. For example, a complete waiver of candidacy fees for female candidates would increase women's engagement in elections. Several respondents also argued that the ECN should provide resources to female candidates and explore ways that such support could be provided within the existing legal framework, or if necessary, make recommendations for legal reform.

### **6. Strengthen the application of quotas for women as candidates for FPTP races and PR closed party lists and quotas for women's representation in central party committees.**

As the election management body, the ECN is responsible for implementing the election quotas laid out in the Nepali Constitution. The ECN's enforcement of gender quotas for PR closed lists and for FPTP candidates – if legislation mandating FPTP quotas is passed – is essential to strengthening women's political representation in Nepal. One option the ECN may consider is a mandate that every other PR list is headed by a woman. The ECN could also work closer with political parties to meet the quotas for women's representation in political party central committees.

## **Recommendations for Political Parties**

### **7. Support women's equality in Nepali politics.**

All political party representatives interviewed said that their parties, while supportive of women's equality, do not have any policies to advance women's equality among party officials or candidates. A root cause underlying the challenges for women's political participation is the patriarchal mindset among political party leadership. Political parties should seek to attract women who would be interested in pursuing politics as a career and carefully analyze what policies and approaches can be introduced to empower women politicians. A practical example could be to exclude elected women representatives from requirements to donate a portion of their salary to the political party. Political parties should further be held to the standards set forth in the Political Party Act, 2017, to have one-third women's representation on all party committees and commit to inclusion of women in party



decision-making processes. In addition, political parties can provide trainings for female candidates on public speaking, leadership, fundraising, bookkeeping and cost-effective campaigning.

**8. Seek low-cost campaigning approaches and reduce the pressures on candidates to independently raise large amounts of money.**

The financial limitations of many Nepali political parties are undeniable, and efforts to increase women's equality must consider this reality and not demand that parties and candidates spend money that they simply do not have. This does not mean that political parties do not have an important role to play, however, in addressing the causes of women's inequality in elections. Parties should seek ways to reduce the resources needed for election campaigns by identifying low-cost campaigning approaches and start fundraising early. Low-cost campaigning tools that have proven effective in Nepal include door-to-door campaigns, using social media instead of traditional media and using a smaller number of campaigning committees. Reduced pressure to raise large amounts of funds from private sources will diminish the emphasis on personal wealth or having connections to wealthy networks for aspiring candidates, which disadvantage women.

**9. Place special emphasis on empowering women through the candidate nomination process, making use of talented female candidates who may not have access to independent wealth or resources.**

Many respondents who had run for office in Nepal emphasized that being perceived as able to run a well-financed campaign and having close ties to party leadership significantly increased the probability of being nominated. Political parties should seek alternative approaches to identifying strong female candidates and engage future political leaders, whether or not these individuals have access to large-scale independent funding or connections with party leaders. This is essential for the sustainability of the political party and promoting increased women's representation in Nepali politics. Political parties should identify viable female candidates for FPTP elections, not only women to place on PR election lists to meet the quotas. For example, parties could identify rising leaders from local councils and PAs and build their capacity to run for higher office.

## **Recommendations for the Media**

**10. Offer free or discounted rates to female candidates for print, radio and television campaign advertisements.**

Most respondents interviewed stated they had used some form of traditional media to advertise their campaigns. Parliament may consider campaign finance legislation to mandate media organizations provide discounts to female candidates. Absent a legal mandate, media organizations could initiate this measure independently. Female candidates have less access to funds for campaign activities and providing free or discounted media coverage to women can mitigate the impact of the fundraising barriers they face.

## **Recommendations for Nepali Civil Society**

**11. Provide support and mentoring to potential women leaders.**

The success of efforts to amend legislation and alter the behavior of the ECN, political parties and civil society groups can only increase women's equality if motivated women step into the electoral arena and actively engage in political processes. Civil society groups can play an important role in



assisting women to take on leadership roles as candidates or in their political parties. Leadership and campaign skills development and longer-term mentoring by experienced politicians can play an important role in supporting women to prepare for elections.

**12. Provide targeted support to potential female candidates to begin fundraising early and seek cost-effective campaign approaches.**

The interviews for this report identified many challenges women face in raising funds needed for successfully running for office in Nepal, and also that the financial and capacity-building assistance that candidates receive from political parties is limited. Civil society can support potential female candidates to start fundraising early and to carefully consider low-cost, high-impact campaign approaches, such as social media-based outreach and campaign strategies. The next parliamentary elections are scheduled for 2022, which means that it is already time for those wanting to run as candidates to start raising funds, building support networks for campaigning and working on possible campaign strategies.

**13. Support female candidates to report incidences of election violence and harassment and invest in media literacy programs to empower voters to recognize instances of disinformation.**

Female candidates are more likely than male candidates to face violence in elections in the form of defamation, harassment, threats of violence and economic violence. Nepali civil society could advocate to the government, the ECN and third-party stakeholders to strengthen reporting and investigation mechanisms for instances of violence against women in elections. Civil society should also consider investing in media literacy projects to encourage voters to critically examine election information received through social media, traditional media or word of mouth to recognize possible instances of disinformation against female candidates.

## **Recommendation for the International Community**

**14. Provide skills-based support for early and efficient fundraising for political parties and candidates, focusing on female candidates.**

A remarkable finding from the interviews was that no one, women or men, reported having received fundraising or financial management trainings. International organizations providing assistance to political parties and candidates should build their capacity on issues such as those discussed under recommendations seven and 11. Such efforts can be designed to particularly support female candidates. To successfully advance women's equality, such activities should seek to assist women before they have been nominated by a political party, build their capacity to advocate for the nomination, start fundraising early and run an effective campaign.

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