The Power and Dilemma of Informal Political Institution: A Case Study of 'Chiya Bhatti Baithak' and Women's Struggle for Political Participation in Kathmandu Metropolitan City

(2008-2022)

A Thesis

Submitted to the Master's Study Program of Political Science at the Faculty of Social Sciences in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Author

Saemah Shamim

02222120010

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02222120010

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how *Chiya Bhatti Baithak*, an informal political institution in Kathmandu Metropolitan City, discourages women from participating in politics. The study's findings provide light on the challenges experienced by women in accessing resources, networks, and decision-making processes, leading them to leave the political arena by examining the impact of the unwritten rules, social and cultural norms, and networks that are the causes of the exclusive nature of *Chiya Bhatti Baithak*. The research design combined qualitative information from interviews with pertinent stakeholders and preexisting literature on informal institutions and women's political participation. It used both primary and secondary data. A thorough comprehension of the subject topic was attained by using a qualitative approach. This study adds to the corpus of knowledge by providing compelling proof of the specific ways through which *Chiya Bhatti Baithak* limits women's political participation. It draws attention to the necessity of inclusive political settings that respect and welcome all participants. To create successful solutions that tackle the underlying issues behind informal institutions, advance gender equality, and ultimately increase women's political involvement in Kathmandu Metropolitan City, further research and exploration in this area is required.

Keywords: Chiya Bhatti, Informal institution, Women, Political participation, Kathmandu

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AUTHENTICATION

I confirm that this thesis, titled "Informal Political Institution: The Case of *Chiya Bhatti Baithak* and Women's Struggle for Political Participation in Kathmandu Metropolitan City (2008-2022)", is my original work. I want to assure you that the content of this thesis is reliable, trustworthy, and based on my research and analysis. In preparing this thesis, I have diligently cited and referenced all the sources I have consulted, including primary and secondary data. I have adhered to the highest academic standards and ethical guidelines in conducting my research. I want to emphasize that no part of this thesis has been taken from any other source without proper acknowledgment, nor has it been previously submitted for any other academic qualification. This thesis reflects my sincere dedication, hard work, and intellectual contributions to the field of social science.

Saemah Shamim
5/26/2023

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Nepal was declared a Federal Democratic Republic by the newly Constituted Assembly on May 28, 2008, abolishing a 240-year-old monarchy. The struggle for democracy resulted in women winning the right to exercise their franchise. As a gesture of appreciation for their contributions, the established parties made significant efforts to promote women's involvement in politics, including as members of Parliament, deputy ministers, district commissioners, and other several strong positions. In addition, the second president of Nepal was a woman. Quota systems were also introduced to sustain women's participation in the political arena. Women significantly contributed to Nepal's shift from a single-party state to a multiparty democratic system during the 1990 People's Movement. This was the first instance of the women of Nepal actively participating in politics. The 2006 Second People's Movement, which resulted in the abolition of the monarchy and the formation of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, included a significant number of women.

In 2008, the Interim Constitution of Nepal allocated seats to women politicians in the Constituent Assembly, thereby further cementing their role in the field. First-past-the-post (FPTP) and proportional representation (PR) were both used in the electoral system. Out of the 575, 195 seats were specifically reserved for women among the elected members. By using the FPTP method, each political party was required to guarantee that 30% of their members were women, and 26 had to be nominated from different societal sectors (Baruah & Reyesa, 2022). These provisions enhanced the number of women who participated in the Constituent Assembly and parliamentary processes.

The proportion of women in the legislature significantly increased to 32.8% during the 2008 elections for the Constituent Assembly. One hundred and ninety-one women were elected to the 575 seats available, and the Cabinet selected another six women to fill the remaining seats. Women's participation in the following 2012 elections further grew to about 36% (Paswan,

2017). However this achievement did not continue and their participation dropped to 25% and 21% in the elections of 2017 and 2022, respectively (Baruah & Reyesa, 2022). This decline was also reflected in local governments.

This research explores and investigates the factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in the Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) administration, including the gender culture in local governments, with a focus on informal institutions such as after-hour caucuses and informal political networks. This study investigates the dynamics of gender, power, and change with the question of how such informal institutions cause the fall of women's political participation within the context of running for offices rather than on their right to vote. This study will examine the obstacles, difficulties, and opportunities of women who aspire to become political candidates. By narrowing the scope to candidacy, the study intends to shed light on the informal institutions that influence women once they win their elections.

In political science, informal institutions refer to the unwritten rules, practices, and traditions that govern social interactions and behavior (March & Olsen, 1989). These unwritten social norms are developed, conveyed, and upheld outside of channels that are formally recognized. Individuals and groups develop and preserve these institutions in their everyday activities and practices, rather than through formal government or legal processes. Douglass North contrasts formal institutions, which are regulations that are established in writing, with informal institutions, which are standards of conduct, conventions, and practices (North, 1990). Informal institutions have a more complicated history and are a product of a culture, where knowledge about institutions is passed down from one generation to the next. Impersonation, oral traditions, and the teaching of traditions are just a few examples of this transfer in different ways (Pejovich, 1998)

It is also crucial to make a clear distinction between informal institutions and informal organizations. The unwritten laws, customs, and practices that regulate conduct within a society or a particular setting are referred to as informal institutions. They are the expectations of society and culture that shape how people behave and interact. Customs, traditions, informal social networks, and behavioral norms are examples of informal institutions. On the other side, informal organizations are groupings or associations that arise devoid of a formal legal

framework or official recognition. They often operate outside the confines of established institutions and are characterized by voluntary membership. Clans, mafias, grassroots movements, and community-based organizations are examples of informal organizations (Helmke & Levitsky, 2012). While some authors may include organizations in their definition of institutions, I prefer to adopt the viewpoint of Douglass North, an influential economist and political scientist (North, 1990). According to him, it is beneficial to separate the "players" or political actors from the rules they follow. We can better comprehend the dynamics at work in social and political systems by isolating the actors from the rules. This distinction enables a more sophisticated examination of the relationships and influences between informal institutions and informal organizations. And so, my study dwells in informal institutions. Informal institutions have been proven in studies to have a major impact on social and political results (Dahlerup, 2005; Stockemer, 2011; Union, 2014).

In Nepal, *Chiya Bhatti Baithak* is considered an informal political institution, which is confirmed by respondents of this study in an upcoming chapter. *Chiya Bhatti* refers to a tea shop or tea stall, a popular gathering place for people to engage in informal discussions, debates, and exchanges of ideas. These tea-shop gatherings often involve political discussions and debates among individuals, including politicians, activists, and community members. While not an official or formal political institution, the *Chiya Bhatti Baithak* plays a significant role in Nepali politics as a space for sharing political views, mobilizing support, and networking. It serves as a platform for informal political discussions and has been recognized as an important element of Nepal's political culture. The *Chiya Bhatti* represents a specific informal institution that organizes and facilitates social gatherings, "post-office-hour gatherings" and "Friday night gatherings". Post-office-hour gatherings typically occur after the regular workday. Friday night gatherings, as the name suggests, take place on Friday evenings and are also seen as an occasion to celebrate the end of the workweek. The political background of Nepal has been significantly molded by a variety of informal institutions and practices over its long and complex political history (Gautam, 2021). In Kathmandu, this institution is known as *Chiya Bhatti Baithak*; however, in general terms, it is also called *Chautari* (Gautam, 2021). This system has a long-standing history. Initially, during the country’s kingship, elite individuals gathered at *Chautari* as an important space for political discussions, social interactions, and community decision-making (Kharel & KC, 2022). This then evolved and

adapted over time; however, *Chautari* remained exclusively for men (Gautam, 2021). Nevertheless, it is regarded as a fundamentally engrained component of local governance and the social fabric, reflecting the prevalent consensus- and participatory-based decision-making procedures in these areas.

The tactics used by political parties to assist female candidates, however, are influenced by other variables, including institutional structures such as government regulations, political parties, as well as any quota systems or proportional representation in the election system (P. Paxton, 1997; Wilma Rule, 1994). There is also the notion that political culture and women's representation are strongly correlated. If they reside in states that support gender equality, for instance, women may have a greater chance of effectively representing their community in politics (Thames & Williams, 2013). Some of the obstacles women encounter while seeking to enter politics are political customs like money or fundraising, party organization, and sustenance, the benefit of tenure, and the operation of the polling system. Additional obstacles include gender stereotypes, gender discrimination, family obligations, and job preparation and choices (McGlen et al, 2011).

The goal of achieving greater gender equity has taken on a significant worldwide significance. For instance, according to research by Celis, Krook, and Meier (2011), reforms aiming at increasing the representation of women in politics have been put in place in more than 50 nations with democratic, semi-democratic, and non-democratic political systems. This implies that women's involvement in politics is considered advantageous independent of the precise social context and as having the capacity to improve the political system regardless of the shape that system takes (Celis et al., 2011). It is common to anticipate that as more women run for office and hold elected office, women's issues will become more prevalent and prominent on campaign platforms (Childs & Witney, 2004).

The political representation of women tends to be less common, despite the acknowledged benefits of having more women in politics (Karp & Banducci, 2008). The majority of the research has been conducted in the United States, but similar outcomes have been found in other global regions. (Christy & Mandel, 1987; Iwanaga, 2008). Because of this, it has occasionally been argued that many nations still uphold a patriarchal social worldview that

influences how women are perceived (Lerner 1986), which may imply that politics is not a suitable arena for their involvement. This dogma embraces the societal and political order and has an impact on cultural and structural elements (P. Paxton & Kunovich, 2003). It is commonly accepted that this social orientation explains the frequently noticed occurrence of fewer women participating in politics than men. By examining the difficulties surrounding women's participation within political institutions in Kathmandu Metropolitan City, this study will supplement earlier studies.

The political engagement of women in Nepal is unsatisfactory when compared to other countries. In Nepal, women's representation and engagement in politics face significant obstacles despite years of political conflict, civil society advocacy, and the adoption of innovative legislation and policies in their favor, as well as the fact that women make up more than half of the population. Women have been fighting for equality and political rights for more than a century. Nepali women are widely known to participate in social, economic, and political freedoms (Dhungana, 2014). Even though women make significant contributions within the home and beyond, they are frequently overlooked, and their labor is rarely recognized as a form of economic activity. They also experience communal, cultural, and political biases. Women's roles have historically been limited to domestic and agricultural work, which often takes up 14 to 16 hours a day compared to seven to nine hours for men (Bari, 2005; Wendy Mee, 2001)

This study covers women's participation in municipal assemblies, municipal executives, and village councils. In industrialized countries, women are somewhat well-regarded. In underdeveloped countries, however, things are very different. Although women's socioeconomic and political standing is improving in emerging countries, it nevertheless remains unsatisfactory in terms of decision-making (Prakash Paudel, 2011). Concerns over women's underrepresentation in politics and policymaking continue to grow.

Many modifications have been made to Nepal's Constitution to boost women's political participation. The Local Self-Governance Act of 1998 set aside 20% of the seats in ward-level committees for women. Per Article 6(2), two of the five ward committee seats are set aside for

women, with one of these reserved for a Dalit woman (Marginalized group) in the Rural Municipal Assembly and three out of five seats in the Urban municipal assembly. Similarly, Article 17(4) of the same statute explicitly states that each political party must ensure that 50 significant municipal roles go to women, including that of chairperson and vice-chairperson of the municipality, rural municipality, and District Coordination Committee. This was seen as a way to guarantee that women can serve as vice chair or chair at any level. Despite all these provided seats and quotas, women's participation and representation were not seen to be satisfactory (Kanel, 2014; Dahal, 2021).

The patriarchal stereotype is certainly an issue, but the fight against such a mindset is a longstanding, ongoing battle. Women have made significant strides in this struggle, gaining their right to education, the right to make their own decision, the right to work, and the right to hold seats in Parliament. However, there remains a shortage of female participation in local politics and society. Many studies highlight the socio-economic obstacles; however, these arguments can't be fully dependent upon in the contemporary era, where women are successfully claiming their rights. Similarly, very little research has been done on Nepali women's political participation at the local level. This study aims to address the issue of Nepali women's local political engagement in this environment, despite all the available opportunities.

1.2. Problem Statement

Nepal has witnessed a consistent decrease in women's participation in politics and an increase in their resignations. Women still have limited access to decision-making positions, despite considerable advancements made in their political participation, such as increased representation in legislative bodies through reserved quotas. The purpose of this study is to investigate how *Chiya Bhatti Baithak* — as an informal institution in terms of social norms, cultural practices, and power relationships — shapes and maintains barriers that stop women from actively participating in politics.

Historical settings emphasize women's early participation in political activities and their contributions to Nepal's democratic reforms. However, the recent reduction in women's political engagement, both nationally and locally, raises questions about the efficacy of formal measures and the long-lasting impact of informal institutions.

Fifty-three municipalities in Nepal held their first-ever local elections in February 2008, but there was a low turnout because major political parties abstained. The most recent elections, which took place in 2012, were for a five-year term. However, the political environment remained difficult because of the ongoing civil war in Nepal (B. Ghimire, 2022). A new Constitution that established a three-tiered system of government with national, provincial, and municipal levels of government was promulgated in 2015. In 2017, the new local levels were implemented, replacing the old city and village development councils. In the 2017 municipal election in Kathmandu's 32 wards, a mayor, deputy mayor, 32 ward chairs, and 128 ward members were elected. However, the results showed a lack of women's participation. A Dalit woman candidate came forward and resigned soon after the election, leaving the seat vacant. Only three women won a candidacy in the municipal executive, while the mayor and deputy mayor positions were filled by male candidates. Among these three women, two of them resigned just after three months (B. Ghimire, 2022). The overall participation ratio was just 30%. In the most recent election in 2022, a female candidate was elected as the new deputy mayor, but no woman was able to secure the position of mayor and the ratio of total participation fell to 23% (Dangol, 2022).

Women, nevertheless, face several obstacles despite constitutional protections and protected quotas, such as restricted access to important decision-making roles, insufficient representation, and exclusion from significant political processes. Examining the instance of Kathmandu Metropolitan City clarifies the issue. Awareness about the obstacles women face in their efforts to participate in politics requires greater awareness of the existence of *Chiya Bhatti Baithak*. This study looks to further examine *Chiya Bhatti Baithak* and its rooted pillars — if they are based on societal expectations, cultural norms, and power relationships that uphold gender inequality and stop women from contributing fully to politics — and investigate whether the resistance of senior leadership to give women decision-making positions and the

continuous debates over women's representation are the impact of *Chiya Bhatti*, thereby limiting women's involvement and influence over governance and policy.

1.3. Research Question

This study aims to address the following question:
To what extent do informal institutions such as *Chiya Bhatti Baithak* work in discouraging women's political participation in Kathmandu Metropolitan City?

1.4.Research Objectives

The above questions are framed to achieve the following objectives:

-To discuss and investigate the extent of informal institutions in discouraging women's political participation in Kathmandu.

1.5. Significance of the study

Since the People's Revolution II in Nepal, the topic of women's involvement in politics has taken center stage in the Nepalese political sphere. The involvement of women has been deemed the most crucial element at all levels and in all industries. The same goal has been the subject of several plans, programs, and projects. Only a small number of scholars have looked at women's political engagement at the local level, even though many have researched women's health, knowledge, and prejudice.

Considering this, investigating the function of informal institutions is important because it offers a chance to deal with the underlying issues that contribute to women's underrepresentation and low political involvement. The mechanisms through which informal institutions inhibit women from participating in politics can be uncovered by this research, which will help build focused interventions and tactics to remove these obstacles. Promoting

gender equality, inclusive governance, and meaningful representation requires an understanding of how social norms, cultural practices, and power dynamics function to marginalize women in politics.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Exploring Women's Representation in Politics

The principles of supply and demand have frequently been utilized by researchers who are interested in politics and women's and gender issues to examine the representation of women in politics. In this context, supply is the availability and readiness of people, and in this example, women who wish to run for office and get involved in politics. The desire and openness of political parties, electoral processes, and voters to support and elect women candidates is referred to as demand. There may be significant relationships between supply and demand as a result of all of these factors, which could lead to favoritism and discernment on the part of selectors (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995). The demand for female candidates is influenced by informal institutions. Gendered prejudices and norms have an impact on political parties, election processes, and voter preferences. The need for women to participate in politics can be impacted by informal institutions that put up hurdles for them in party structures and candidate selection procedures. On the other hand, informal institutions that combat gender biases may enhance the demand for female candidates (Htun & Jones, 2002; True & Mintrom, 2001). Supply and demand are influenced by institutional and cultural variables, as well as individual preferences and choices. Women's supply and demand in politics are significantly influenced by informal institutions such as norms, expectations, and social practices. Women's access to political office may be facilitated or hampered by these informal structures (Krook, 2014).

The supply and demand model has some drawbacks, including the inability to explain why women are typically underrepresented in political office in virtually every country on the planet. According to Krook, this may be because the application of these principles might also be impacted by the structural differences among other civilizations, which disguise diversity (Krook, 2010a). The supply and demand ideal, however, can be expanded to take organizational, environmental, and communal factors into account (Krook, 2006, 2014). Krook

points out that different studies on women's political representation and engagement view supply and demand problems. Although these concepts appear to be economic, she continues, they do not place the same emphasis on productivity and symmetry that traditional economics does. The "political market" typically takes gender stereotypes and the workings of political parties into account when determining the supply and demand (Franceschet, 2005; Lawless & Fox, 2008). Otherwise put, this model represents a single conceivable approach to applying an economic metaphor to analyze gender disparities in politics.

Women's representation and political participation have been impacted by structural, cultural, and societal factors still within the framework of the supply and demand model. Women's underrepresentation is examined by Paxton and Kunovich (2004) from the perspectives of social, political, and ideological causes. They contend that supply is related to the social structures now in place; for instance, female inclusion in scholastic and proficient prospects, which may lead to a greater ability to engage in political activity (Paxton & Kunovich, 2003). It is commonly known that educational achievement and resource access are related. Higher education tends to increase one's prospects for success in the social and economic sectors, and women today may find this to be particularly significant. For women in the particular environment of politics, this might also include their capacity for self-empowerment (Inglehart & Pippa Norris, 2003). However, some data suggests that women's participation in politics is not directly connected to education, as structural issues may have influenced their electability (Bylesjoe & Seda, 2006; Dahlerup, 2005; Inglehart & Pippa Norris, 2003). According to Paxton and Kunovich (2004), women attempting to enter politics may face structural impediments due to political and electoral processes. The options accessible to women in the political arena are usually impacted by different election structures — like proportional representation (PR) and quota systems — either facilitating or occasionally inhibiting their entry into politics (in the case of quota systems). By implicitly upholding the status quo, these structural environmental factors may have a major effect on political engagement. PR systems, as opposed to direct election systems, have been found to allow for a higher number of female candidates (Caul, 2001). Nevertheless, in these instances, electoral rules and procedures frequently contribute to this outcome as parties look for female applicants to steadiness their slants (Krook, 2010a).

Another viewpoint is that political elites have some degree of control over women's political involvement. According to Lovenduski and Simms, party gender politics have evolved as a result of the infiltration of feminist ideas, which may be seen in the political behavior of party leaders. (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Simms, 1993). Most countries have a patriarchal society, as defined by Lerner in 1986. This is predicated on the notion that men's objectives typically prevail over women's interests (Lerner, 1986). Furthermore, according to Paxton and Hughes, the term "patriarchy" refers to a societal structure in which men predominate over women, which may be seen in organizations such as those in the social, political, and economic spheres (P. M. Paxton & Hughes, 2007). It has been stated that this division between the public (male) and home (female) spheres remains to be the foundation of democracies around the world in the setting of the political environment (Phillips, 1998; Rai, 2000).

According to Norris and Inglehart (2003, p. 8), who highlight the frequently observed "strict gender roles" in many civilizations, these social and cultural norms affect both the political climate and the advancement of politics in a particular community. (P. M. Paxton & Hughes, 2007). Women working in entry-level positions are one illustration of this. Research conducted by Niven in four US states found there was a bias against female legislators, particularly at the local level (Niven, 1998). He concludes by saying that may be difficult to change engrained patterns and constructions in political parties due to the male majority, which could make it difficult for female politicians to advance in the political system. The Inter-American Commission on Women, for instance, has claimed that the low number of women in political office globally is an issue that must be addressed and is a result of the actions of political parties and the government that are based on cultural and social conventions (Inter-American Commission on Women 1999).

Women's engagement in the political domain is frequently seen as being constrained by these sociocultural norms. In a similar vein, (Lawless & Fox, 2008; Lovenduski, 2002; P. Paxton & Kunovich, 2003; P. M. Paxton & Hughes, 2007) all contend that the role of women in politics encompasses a complexity that extends beyond a simple correlation between political system accessibility and successful electoral campaigns. Apart from the enduring social and cultural

influences discussed earlier, women who decide to pursue a career in politics may encounter various difficulties and hurdles. When women choose to enter politics, there may be additional permanent societal and cultural factors that make this challenging and other influences that impact their decisions to do so. Older cultural norms, gender-neutral social beliefs, and social systems that favor political engagement by one sex over the other must all be taken into account. Inglehart and Norris analyze the "rising tide" phenomenon, which shows that in the latter half of the 20th century, a large portion of the world started to recognize the significance of gender equality (Inglehart & Pippa Norris, 2003). This is seen as a case of the spread of policy, notably from Western countries to other parts of the globe. Towns examines this pattern regarding political quotas for women as an example of how social conceptions of what is beneficial spread. (Towns, 2012). She points out that quotas are an example of how this viewpoint has propagated globally since it first emerged in Latin America. Several international organizations, like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, backed the creation of such quotas (Bush, 2011; Krook, 2010a).

While certain countries have shown a growing trend of increased representation of women in municipal and national legislatures, studies in Latin America, Europe, and Sub-Saharan Africa have indicated that women participate in politics less than men do. Scholars have attributed this difference to various variables, some of which may be unique to each attraction. Krook and Jalalzai looked at several recent research and found a variety of reasons why women are less likely to participate in politics than men (Krook, 2010a). For instance, Lawless and Fox's study in the US indicated that women frequently lack the motivation men have to pursue politics (Lawless & Fox, 2008). This might be because women's traditional social roles still have an impact on the careers they choose, making it more appealing for women to work in traditionally female fields like teaching, nursing, or secretarial work. Women are inclined to be less knowledgeable about politics and less involved in it, according to research on this subject (Karp & Banducci, 2008). The proportion of women serving in national and local parliaments varies across Europe. Women make up between 20% and 30% of Parliaments in Finland, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, on average. Since the 1970s, this has been consistent, and it is more developed than in other countries. These northern European countries have a long history of social equality concerns, and their populations are amenable to initiatives like

quota systems. Despite being at the very top of the scale for women holding political office, it took these nations almost 60 years to gradually increase their levels of involvement to where they are now (Dahlerup, 2005; Inglehart & Pippa Norris, 2003).

Studies on Asian women's political participation have brought to light a varied set of challenges in various countries that are related to social structures, context, cultural concerns, norms, and religion, in addition to political institutions and practices. Howell, for instance, discovered that women in China faced two substantial obstacles to political involvement in local legislatures (Howell, 2006). First, women struggled with self-confidence and were hesitant to run for office. Second, the social norms at the time did not encourage women to work in typically male fields.

Jacobsen also asserted that in Cambodia, the number of women in politics has been underrepresented. (Jacobsen, 2008). Despite being involved and having a significant impact on the rebuilding and reconciliation process that followed the end of the Khmer Rouge regime, female activists have not been able to translate this involvement into official political participation. Although the government intends to expand the representation of women in politics and thereby enhance gender parity throughout society, Jacobsen contends that these goals have not been carried out. She concludes that an example of a strategy for gender equality for women that cannot be implemented, at least not in the short to medium term, is the situation in Cambodia. (Jacobsen, 2008). The informal institutions sometimes undermine the formal rules as claimed by March and Olsen (March & Olsen, 1989), which made it challenging for women to actively engage in politics and challenge the political dominance previously exercised by men.

In the Philippines, there are now more women participating in politics. Several of these women have also attained leadership roles and held influential positions. But according to research by Rallonza, female parliamentarians in this country are not efficient change agents due to strict party discipline. Rallonza asserts that due to the structure of party affiliation, legislators are restricted by the platform and past attitude of their party on gender issues, such as the relative roles of men and women in the family, and are unable to bring fresh concerns to the political

table. (Veneracion-Rallonza, 2005). I see how clientelism and patronage networks play a crucial role in shaping political behavior and outcome, which also lies under informal institutions. This study is in line with what Lipa asserts in his study: "…Both democratic and non-democratic political regimes develop these informal institutions, which frequently coexist with official institutions. These unofficial organizations support the growth of crony capitalism and clientelism and have the power to either undermine or support legitimate institutions" (Lipa, 2018). However, this study by Rallonza overlooks other forms of informal institutions, such as social norms and cultural practices, while the study by Lipa is based on a nondemocratic regime.

According to Madsen (2021), the persistence of informal institutions, such as gender culture within Parliament and the verbal abuse faced by female candidates, is a crucial factor contributing to the underrepresentation of women in Ghanaian politics. These informal institutions can either support or hinder progress. Madsen further examines their impact within the Ghanaian context and contends that formal institutions, embodied by party structures, serve as both obstacles and opportunities for promoting increased female participation in politics. Conversely, the informal structures encompassing gender norms and rules within Parliament, as well as the stereotypical portrayal of women in politics, work against the advancement of women in political spheres. The analysis of these informal institutions provides insight into the complexities of the situation. According to case study findings, Ghana has not experienced positive development in women's representation despite introducing a quota in 1959 reserving 10 seats for women in Parliament, with only 11% of women represented after the 2012 election and 13% after the election in 2016. The findings indicate that informal institutions, specifically party structures, can serve as both obstacles and opportunities for enhancing women's participation in politics. On the other hand, informal institutions in the form of gender culture in Parliament and verbal abuse work against the advancement of women in politics.

Nevertheless, the article suggests that even though informal institutions play a significant role in shaping and maintaining gendered practices, patriarchal structures, gender cultures, and gendered stereotypes, they received less attention in the study. Therefore, the article implies that the study has limitations in terms of fully addressing informal institutions.

Much research shows that these institutional structural obstacles result in gender stereotypes that prohibit women from taking on leadership roles. For instance, in his study “Gendered Institutions and Women’s Political Representation in Africa”, Diana attempted to understand the low level of women’s political participation and the influence of institutional framework in Nigeria (Hojlund & Madsen, 2021). According to the study's findings, the Nigerian state does not treat everyone equally, and when it does, it tends to treat women as numerically abnormal and subjectively identical. As a result, the study proves that institutions matter in determining women's representation in politics in Nigeria during the periods under consideration and significantly contribute to the present-day low level of female representation in politics. Similarly, Georgina Holmes in her study “Feminist Institutionalism”, says that although leaders ensure that they have enough women in their parties and the required quota is full, their focus is not on women’s participation in leadership and equal opportunities for women in Ghana (Holmes, 2020). She adds that women participate and are encouraged to because of the law, but their participation is diminished by biased attitudes within the organization. Lisa in her study “The Pros and Cons of Gender Quota Laws: What Happens When You Kick Men Out and Let Women in?", declares that women are still required to follow traditional norms whenever they are elected to or given positions of authority, which restricts the amount of change they can make. The ideology, structure, and openness to include women in the framework of politics have an impact on the role that women play inside any institution. Females are key change agents inside these organizations, according to feminist institutionalists. The presence of more women in these organizations serves as a resource, enabling other women to feel more at ease and perform better in these roles.

According to a review of the literature, research on women's political engagement and representation cannot be limited to political systems and the particular situations of female politicians. Like many social phenomena, political participation is likely influenced by a multitude of interrelated variables that differ from place to place and from case to case. Nevertheless, there seems to be a growing global consensus that more women should hold positions of governmental authority. This may be an acknowledgment of the significance of all people's opinions, regardless of gender or the specific societal and political environment.

While different countries have varied norms, religious traditions, and social, economic, and institutional systems that affect women's political engagement, developing democracies all have patriarchal traditions that have the potential to harm political involvement.

2.2. Women's Representation in the Nepali Political System

In the democratic nation of Nepal, women are seen to have a lower political status than men. In research, Bari identified and described a number of significant barriers to Women's participation in politics (Bari, 2005). Considering this, ideological, political, sociocultural, and economic issues are all crucial. In addition to these issues, women's political engagement is also hindered by a lack of funding and organization. A survey was undertaken in 2018 by Ghale to determine the status of women in Nepal's Parliament. Women attained 40.4% of the vote the Nepal Election Commission had set for them, particularly in the higher-ranking positions of mayor and deputy mayor, for which parties had to field at least one female candidate (Upreti, 2012). Men, however, dominated women candidates in both running for office and as elected officials. Despite the favorable legal and policy frameworks, women's representation, particularly in the executive, judiciary, and bureaucracy, remains low (Bimita, 2020; Upreti, 2012).

Although Nepal's patriarchal system has deteriorated throughout the course of its history, it prevails to this day (Upreti, 2012). This is evident in the persistent racial stereotypes that are ubiquitous in society and even in households (Upreti, 2020). Male dominance is a form of prejudice that impacts not only gender dynamics but also extends to political, economic, social, and cultural structures. In Nepal, a state that maintains a patriarchal society, gender and sexuality intertwine with factors such as caste, indigenous and ethnic identity, and religion. These intertwined systems reinforce patriarchal norms and power structures. Consequently, addressing these global patriarchal systems, including those present in Nepal, will require a long-term, multigenerational effort. Again, this process requires questioning and challenging deeply ingrained beliefs, norms, and practices that perpetuate male dominance in society.

Societies are, without a doubt, immensely embedded with patriarchal beliefs; yet with growing awareness and educational programs against these biases, the grip of patriarchy is not as tight as it was before. However, while patriarchy plays a role, it is important to understand that the lack of female political participation cannot be attributed solely to it. The local elections of 2017 in Nepal represented a significant milestone in the political landscape, as it witnessed a historic level of women's engagement. Notably, 40% of women exercised their franchise rights and participated in the local governance system. This achievement holds great promise for enhancing women's presence in politics. But it is important to highlight that further efforts are needed to ensure the sustained and active participation of women in politics (Bimita, 2020). In this vein, policy interventions such as quotas and reservations are being implemented to enhance women's representation in the legislature.

Nepal has a provision mandating that women make up at least 33% of participants in local consumer committees. Notably, women make up 54% of the total membership in primary cooperative organizations, which encompasses approximately 7.3 million members. However, despite this significant presence, women's representation in committees, assemblies, and direct leadership positions within civil bodies remains relatively low. For instance, out of the 29,886 cooperatives in Nepal, only around 4,000 are led by women in management roles. Although these changes and new policies are formed to curtail patriarchal views, the disparity highlights the existing gender gap and the need for further efforts to ensure equitable representation for women in cooperative organizations and other civil bodies (Neupane, 2022). The positive impact of increased political participation and representation for Nepali women cannot be denied, regardless of how one examines and analyzes the issue — whether it is perceived as tokenism or not. Recent local elections presented an opportunity for female representatives and those from marginalized groups to gain access to formal political spaces and exercise their rights. Following the 2008 Constituent Assembly elections, sub-alliances such as the Women's Caucus, Dalit Caucus, and Indigenous Caucus were founded in the Constituent Assembly. These partnerships were critical in campaigning for women's, Dalit's, and indigenous people's rights. These efforts show the potential for change and empowerment that can be realized via collaborative action and the formation of inclusive caucuses (Baruah & Reyesa, 2022). Despite the implementation of various measures and strategies aimed at enhancing women's political

participation, the question remains: Why haven't the outcomes met the anticipated expectations?

Seira Tamang's study argues that the underrepresentation of women as candidates is mostly due to the issue of qualification. However, this has not been examined in isolation, but rather in comparison to the qualifications of male applicants (Tamang, 2022). This phenomenon reflects the normalization of men's empowerment, wherein men are afforded privileges that are obscured by neutral terms. The connection between these qualifications and the existing networks of political and social power is often concealed. Consequently, men are often perceived as naturally more competent on paper, but in reality, they are just entrenched in positions of authority.

While the concept of patriarchy remains relevant for analysis, it risks becoming an oversimplified explanation for complex social realities that are difficult to change. In the context of candidate selection in Nepal, it becomes evident that specific men, at specific points in recent history, have shaped the definitions, procedures, and decisions within the candidate selection process to favor their interests. This process is not natural or inevitable, nor does it represent a timeless manifestation of patriarchy. Moving forward, it is essential to shift away from repetitive discussions about "building the capacity of women" and embrace more nuanced approaches to address these challenges (Dahal, 2018).

Further, because female candidates lack funding, connections, and general support compared to their male counterparts, female political leaders also encounter financial challenges during election campaigns. Additionally, because their financial situation is less stable than that of men, they are less confident in their ability to financially support an election campaign (Dahal, 2021). Because of this, a woman's political chances depend on her employment for the self-assurance, contacts, and resources required to run for governor. According to this argument, there will be more highly competent female candidates willing to vote and run for office the more women there are in the profession (Norris, 1987). As indicated by Dr. Magnus' study on the underrepresentation of women in politics, the possible growth in female representation may be ascribed to a variety of factors. His survey points out the importance of the financial

challenges faced by female candidates. When asked about potential solutions to increase women's meaningful engagement in politics, the majority of interviewees emphasized the importance of “improving political finance monitoring mechanisms for all candidates, followed by strategies aimed specifically at alleviating the financial burden faced by female candidates.” (Cantrell & Ohman, 2020).

The Nepal Constitution ensures the protection of women's property rights, and the government has established tax exemptions for properties registered under women's names (Times, 2017). If this amendment is utilized properly, women can overcome political and financial issues. However, the observed rise in women's ownership of property in Nepal does not necessarily represent the number of women's decision-making authority regarding property utilization, generated revenue, or substantial expenditures. The factor that seems to be lacking is the proper training and encouragement that women do not get due to a still-rooted patriarchal system. As a result, women experience less control over the revenues generated through property ownership, leading to a consequent impact on their access to financial resources for engaging in political activities. Investment in a political party, on the other hand, is not limited to monetary contributions. Individuals who have committed their lives to a party, actively engaging in democratic movements, going through imprisonment in the cause of democracy, and facing physical assault by law enforcement authorities, are included. Political parties, according to political scientist Krishna Hachhethu, have their beginnings in democratic movements and thereby place a high priority on political effort and sacrifice when selecting leaders. These parties consider a "leader" to be someone with exceptional capabilities or heroic characteristics. Despite the passing of two decades, these factors remain relevant in the recruitment of political leaders, but they are increasingly dominated by corporate and economic reasons (Hachhethu, 2020).

However, authors are pointing to the declining disparity between men and women in terms of obtaining an education (Knodel, 1996). Also noted in (Kanel, 2014), women have extraordinary chances in terms of access to schools, jobs, and earning potential. However, despite these developments, the gender gap in politics has not been eliminated, pointing to additional challenges.

Girdhari Dahal in his study, “Women Participation in Local Development: A Study of Kaski District”, asserts that “there are no significant female contributions to Nepal's politics, economy, or social spheres. However, the involvement of women is theoretically granted constitutional and legal rights.” Also, Janka Prajuli in her research “Women’s Participation in Politics: A Case Study of Pokhara Leknath Metropolitan City”, concedes that intra-party discrimination of women, family barriers, and lack of willpower are factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in politics (Prajuli, 2018). The two variables, i.e., the meaningless participation of women and lack of willpower, open a new door to study the behavioral and institutional approach to better clarify the causes of these problems. There is no specific study on Kathmandu Metropolitan City so far; however, previous studies of other metropolitans will aid me in this study.

In recent years, women in Nepal have achieved notable success in attaining prominent positions such as the presidency, the former chief justice of the Supreme Court, and the speaker of the parliament. These achievements, which were unimaginable just two decades ago, signify progress in women's advancement within the political landscape. The achievement and minimization of the gender gap in politics depend on continued, concerted action from all parties, therefore resolving the root problem is crucial.

A large portion of earlier publications focused on socioeconomic, political, and cultural elements that influence Nepali women's political participation and representation. However, it is anticipated that as women's educational and employment prospects rise, so will their political and democratic representation and that this relationship is bolstered by Nepal's commitment to democratic institutions, ideology, and gender equality. Meanwhile, other international studies have highlighted the role of informal institutions in other developing democratic countries. Despite the wealth of research on Nepali women's political engagement, little is known about the impact of informal institutions on women's political engagement. There is a dearth of in-depth research on the impact of informal institutions on women's political engagement in a newly established democratic country, even though earlier studies have looked at a variety of

factors, including ideological, political, sociocultural, and economic barriers, as well as the impact of formal policies and legal frameworks.

This study will demonstrate how informal institutions restrict women's engagement in politics, such as patriarchal systems, and social hierarchies. Investigating how informal institutions shape the processes of women's participation and decision-making might shed light on the underlying causes of the chronically low participation of women in politics.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

This study primarily will utilize Meryl Kenny's feminist institutionalism theory. The institutional theory or institutionalism refers to institutions' role in influencing and restraining human behavior. There is no single definition of an institution that applies to all institutional methods; instead, according to Knill and Tosun, each approach has its definition of an institution (Knill, 2012). It might be thought of as a set of laws that state actors can use to impose them; they are the "rules of the political game." Hall and Taylor view rational choice institutionalism (RCI) as a situation where individuals maximize their utility in ways that result in less-than-ideal outcomes because, in RCI's view, institutions give actors expectations about how others would behave (Hall, P. y Taylor, 1996). One thing we need to understand is that institutions are shaped in part by the actors who participate in them because actors' behavior often mirrors what institutions do. The study of institutions focuses on how formal and informal regulations affect people's conduct in a constricting or enabling way.

Feminist institutionalism focuses on how gender dynamics influence institutions, including both explicit and implicit norms and regulations, and their impact on molding political processes and structures (Kenny, 2014). Feminist institutionalism is heavily influenced by gender. Gender influences decisions and is constantly present in the subconscious, influencing ultimate judgments regarding institutions. This theory will offer a perspective to understand how *Chiya Bhatti* as an informal political institution shapes political participation from a gendered lens, highlighting the access to the network, decision-making, and power dynamics.

Feminist institutionalization is frequently criticized for having flaws and not always being advantageous. Most feminist institutional work has neglected to look at other options in favor of focusing on institutions and policies that are specific to gender. Even with measures like quotas and legislation being implemented, institutional arenas continue to be controlled by men, despite the growth of feminist institutionalism (Waylen, 2014), allowing for criticism that these policies may not be successful. While acknowledging the significance of informal institutions, institutional feminism theory frequently lays more emphasis on official institutions, such as political parties, election processes, and legislative bodies. The significance of grassroots movements, community organizing, and alternative forms of political participation that take place outside of formal institutions may be overlooked by this focused approach. (Krook, 2010a). The lack of effect feminist institutionalism has within institutions is criticized (Chappell, 2006).

However, feminist institutionalism theory provides a useful perspective through which to examine informal political institutions and their effects on women's political engagement. The research on informal institutions offers a fuller understanding of the power dynamics and gendered norms that determine women's engagement in politics, even if formal institutions like political parties and legislative bodies have traditionally garnered a lot of attention. Despite its greater emphasis on formal institutions, the theory offers insights into the context of this research and its study area. Essentially, it provides a premise for advancing women's participation in the decision-making process. The implication is that women are empowered to be active political participants in any setting — formal or informal. In the informal setting, women's political participation is shaped by the dynamics of the informal institution. In Nepal's context, *Chiya Bhatti Baithak* is both a social network and a political platform that influence politics at the local level. In line with feminist institutionalism, women's informal political gatherings are internally and externally determined. Important internal parameters such as mutual trust, determination, committed networking, and the established culture could explain the effectiveness of *Chiya Bhatti Baithak*, as well as women's involvement in local politics. From an external angle, *Chiya Bhatti Baithak* is not immune from the dynamics of formal institutions. For example, government regulations may be favorable or unfavorable to the progress of *Chiya Bhatti Baithak*. Though an informal institution, the incumbents'

politicians may view *Chiya Bhatti Baithak* as a political threat and invoke rules to restrict its activities. Alternatively, if pro-feminist leaders dominate the national political environment, *Chiya Bhatti Baithak* will be a stronger and more autonomous informal institution; hence, greater women's participation in local politics and governance.

Therefore, institutional feminism emphasizes that institutional processes contribute to gender power dynamics. Institutions have their own sets of rules, procedures, and power hierarchies that affect the distribution of resources, decision-making processes, and access to opportunities. These processes are often influenced by underlying gender biases and reinforce existing gender inequalities. Institutional feminism seeks to analyze and challenge these gendered power dynamics by advocating for structural and institutional changes that promote gender equality. It calls for addressing and transforming the norms, rules, and practices within institutions to create more inclusive and equitable systems.

As support, the study also uses social capital theory. This theory examines people's connections and relationships, which can aid or hinder their access to resources and opportunities. It can be beneficial in understanding how the functioning of political institutions, which may be dominated by certain groups or individuals, influences women's access to social capital and networks that are essential for political participation (Putnam, 1995). Gender norms and stereotypes refer to the culturally constructed beliefs and expectations about the roles, behaviors, and capabilities of men and women. These norms and stereotypes often shape social interactions and influence women's access to social networking, which is an important aspect of social capital. For example, in professional settings, gender norms and stereotypes contribute to the exclusion of women from informal networks or informal social gatherings such as *Chiya Bhatti Baithak,* which serve as platforms for professional networking and career advancement. Women face barriers in accessing these networks due to assumptions about their capabilities or concerns about their career's compatibility with family responsibilities. Elaborating on the relationship between social capital theory, gender norms, and women's access to social networking, it becomes evident that gender norms and stereotypes can influence the extent and nature of women's social capital.

The social capital theory is relevant in understanding the social networking among the stakeholders of *Chiya Bhatti Baithak*. The theory shows that informal institutions are guided by informal social rules. In the context of *Chiya Bhatti Baithak*, social norms require lobbying and bargaining among participants. This fosters mutual trust, promotes social cohesion, and ensures decentralized decision-making. Consequently, more optimal outcomes are likely to be achieved as all stakeholders have input in improving local governance.

CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This chapter offers an elucidation of the research methodology employed in this study. The primary objective is to investigate the influence of institutional traits and norms on women's political participation within local legislatures, as previously mentioned. I deem the case study approach more appropriate in the study; thus, it is employed to explore the factors contributing to the decline in women's political participation in Kathmandu Metropolitan City. Concurrently, the chapter describes the research methodology, the analytical framework, and other important parts of data collecting for this study.

3.1. Research Design

The approach used in this study is qualitative, which is defined as the collection of information from verbal and written sources, as well as observed behaviors, followed by their description and interpretation (Patton, 2011; G. R. Taylor, 2005; S. J. Taylor et al., 1984). Common methods for gathering data in qualitative research include interviews, conversations, observations, photos, audio, videos, and field notes (Bloomberg, Linda Dale Volpe, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The results of these actions may be integrated with data from other sources, which may include a variety of secondary sources and documents.

This study adopts a qualitative study as it offers a complete and in-depth understanding. It will allow us to dive into the experiences, perspectives, and narratives of people participating in the political arena using qualitative research techniques like interviews, focus groups, and observations. The intricate interplay of informal institutions and their effect on women's political engagement can be captured by interacting with women politicians, ward members, and other pertinent stakeholders. Qualitative research enables participants to share their opinions, attitudes, and experiences through open-ended questions and in-depth talks, revealing light on the distinct informal norms, practices, and hurdles that prevent women from participating in politics.

According to Creswell (2017), there are five main methods for qualitative research: case study, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and narrative research (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This study was conducted using a case study methodology. This was done to create a platform for the presentation and examination of the experiences of female politicians, as well as the legislature's institutional design of Kathmandu Metropolitan City. This case study offers an illustration of the institutional design of local legislation and its behavior toward women politicians.

3.2. Case Selection

In a case study, actual occurrences are objectively observed in circumstances where the boundaries between the phenomena and its surroundings are ambiguous. (Remenyi, 2012). According to Schramm (quoted by Yin 2003, p. 12), a case study is a type of research that focuses on particular problems and asks why, how, and what in an effort to shed light on a particular social phenomenon (Yin, 2003). Women in politics in KMC is the topic of the current study.

This study aims to investigate these three factors as they narrate the different facets of KMC's female political engagement. First, KMC is selected as the study location because it is a significant political, economic, and social hub of Nepal. Also, it's home to several women's rights organizations and civil society groups. Women are seen not to be bound by societal stereotypes like in other regions of Nepal, which are yet to be developed. The study makes it interesting to study why those women do not participate in the political area but excel in other economic or educational fields. Next, it is required to demonstrate how the principles and makeup of the political informal institutions influence female politicians in KMC. Lastly, this study responds to the query, "To what extent?" This study investigates the possibility of a relationship between women's political representation and the impact of informal political institutions.

Explanatory case studies, descriptive case studies, and exploratory case studies are the three different forms of case study research (Yin, 2003). This study is an experimental and descriptive case study that aims to shed light on how the real world and the reality of the legislature functioning coordination affect and define women's political engagement, despite the national Constitution granting seats and rights for women's political participation.

According to Yin (2003), one advantage of the case study approach is that information can be discovered using a variety of data sources and approaches to examine and explore the problem. Swanborn suggests that a case study may incorporate a variety of data sourcing, counting leaflets, informant answers, and note-taking during observations or interviews (Swanborn, 2010). Documentary evidence is used in the study's example to describe the nature of women's political participation in KMC. This type of information made up a relatively small portion of the data for this study because the influence of the institutional system and behavior is mostly a matter of perception. The majority of the information will be gathered via conducting extensive interviews. This approach's goal is to look into the variables that influence the phenomenon of interest in a specific contextual environment (Bush, 2011; Childs et al., 2010; Cockcroft et al., 2014), as it is in the current study.

3.3. Data Collection

Data for this study was gathered from numerous sources and classified into primary and secondary types. The main information was acquired through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with female politicians. Secondary data came from web sources and government papers and reports. To investigate the history and previous data, the study gathered them through journals, publications, websites, documentation, and other published secondary sources. As the centralized character for the study is women, different women delegates who are involved in different political organizations will be taken into account. I tend to have two categories of women for the interviews. One, those who are no longer working in those institutions but have experience working in them; the other, comprises those who are working in such institutions at the current time. These categories will help me to ascertain the different perspectives of the former, and what current interested candidates think about them. Interviews

were carried out online with a help of a mediator. The questionnaires are in Nepali and English for easy and smooth communication. The collected data was translated into English and compiled in this study. Asymmetric interviews and open-ended questions were used. To better understand the findings of this research, a detailed examination of the legislative and institutional design of the local level, as well as Constitution laws and acts, will be conducted.

3.4. Data Analysis

Five processes are described by Yin (2003) for the examination of data gathered through interviews. The steps are as follows: Gathering verbal data, reading the data, then categorizing the data. The next phase organizes and expresses the data from a disciplinary perspective, after which the proposition and field notes are connected. And finally, the data is synthesized and summarized. The classification and categorization of raw data help the formulation of conclusions based on analyses.

The five processes Yin (2003) suggested will be used to analyze the data for this investigation. The interviews will be recorded, and the transcriptions will be split into three groups based on the information provided by the six females as mentioned earlier. In order to code the data, each transcription will be reviewed and reread, and significant passages connected to study objectives will be noted.

Using the viewpoints and interpretations of the respondents, relevant material will then be sorted and arranged into themes. The following primary topics emerged: informal institution issues that are crucial to women's political participation, the drawbacks of KMC's political system for women, influenced behavior toward women candidates and politicians, and connections between contemporary politics and patriarchal society.

These topics will be utilized to categorize the ways the institutional behavioral system has influenced women in politics in KMC and to characterize the experiences of female politicians and their opinions.

3.5. Translation

The majority of the information used in this study came from interviews that will be transcribed in the languages in which they were conducted. In this survey, some respondents will be utilizing both Nepali and English at different times, with some people using one or the other more frequently than others. Each interview clip is accompanied by the original and a description of the language used, and all interview excerpts used in this thesis will be translated.

CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Assessing the Women's Political Participation in Kathmandu's Changing Landscape

Over the years, Nepal has made considerable strides toward empowering women and advancing gender equality, which has resulted in increased political participation for women. The 2008 Nepali Constitution ensures women's involvement and representation in political entities to foster a more open and just political environment (Bhattrai, 2011; Tamang, 2017). Generally speaking, Nepal has seen advancements in women's political representation. A quota system has been put into place in the country, reserving seats for women in Parliament and other political entities. Because of this, more women have a place in elected office, which has helped create a political environment that is more inclusive and diverse. Even so, distinct problems and difficulties remain in terms of women's political participation in Kathmandu, the nation's capital. The continued existence of unofficial institutions that prevent women from participating in politics is one of the main obstacles (Wendy Mee, 2001). In Kathmandu, informal institutions like social conventions, cultural values, and patriarchal structures continue to have a big impact on how women participate in politics. These unwritten rules frequently reinforce traditional gender roles, fostering prejudices and preconceptions that prevent women from participating fully in political life and decision-making processes (Terzi-barbarosie, 2013). Social norms and gender-based restrictions prevent women from actively participating in politics. This is why, up to recently, women are seen as having no interest in running for office

Discriminatory attitudes and behaviors toward female politicians can be sustained through unofficial norms and practices. Both inside and outside of political institutions, female politicians experience harassment, intimidation, and violence based on their gender (Childs & Witney, 2004; Cislaghi & Heise, 2019; Gasparikova, 2021). These difficulties can discourage women from entering politics, erode their self-esteem, and restrict their ability to actively engage in the political process.

To pursue this research, five female politicians were questioned. Two incumbents had just won reelection, one had held office but lost it in the most recent election and the remaining two had been dragged into a conspiracy and had to quit. These five women represent different political parties.

No.	Respondents	Education and understanding	Period served	Experience and pathways into politics	Party affiliation
1.	DOB 6/8/1966 Married - Three children	- Bachelor of Management,1970 - Comes from an elite family - Full support from the family	2014-2023 Ward member since 2015	- Gained experience from assisting her uncle. - Served as minister of law, justice, and Parliamentary affairs	Nepal Communist Party (NCP), Maoist. It is Nepal's third-largest political group.
2.	DOB 10/12/1968 - Married - Two children - Children employed by private companies	- Bachelor in law, 1992. - Was always interested in politics and hence graduated with a political science major	2010-2015 2017-1022 as a deputy speaker	- Good administrative experience - Elected as deputy speaker of KMC - Made controversial statements, after which she resigned	Rashtriya Janta Party, Nepal’s fourth-largest political party. It was established on the principle of a democratic society.
3.	DOB 10/10/1977 - Unmarried	- Bachelor’s degree in humanities.	2013-2018 2018-2023	- Some experience in youth and student affairs	Nepal Communist Party (NCP),

	- Teacher at a university in Kathmandu	- Post graduate degree in social science, 2012 - Doctoral degree in political science.	Ward member	- Family and friends inspired her to step into politics	Maoist Nepal
4.	DOB 10/3/1969 - Married - One child (Adopted) - Entrepreneur	- Bachelor of Arts 1993 - Graduated in IR, political science - Keen interest in political affairs	2015-2019 2019-2021 Ward chairperson	- Involved in politics yet no proper involvement due to issues of biases and controversial news	Loktantrik Party
5.	DOB 6/12/1974 - Unmarried - High school teacher	-Bachelor's degree in political science, 1998 - Passed the *Lok Sewa* civil servant exam on first attempt -Father is a businessman and a well-known public figure	2019-2022 Deputy mayor	- Involved in politics for one period and lost in another	Loktantrik Party

Table: Participant details

These women were inspired to pursue politics by a combination of their own drive, educational credentials, and supportive family members. Some of them have influential positions within their respective parties or local governments, demonstrating their commitment and tenacity in their political activities.

The female politicians who were questioned all agreed that their husbands, children, siblings, parents, and parents-in-law (the married ones) gave them positive support. They acknowledged their appreciation for the support and inspiration of those around them. One responder described how her father gave her financial support and persistently urged her to persevere in the pursuit of her goals. Another respondent emphasized the help she had along the way by noting the positive reactions from her family and friends. These women's families were instrumental in helping them pursue further education and the careers of their choice. They disregarded conventional gender stereotypes by giving their daughters the freedom to pursue their education and jobs. The women stressed that females are no longer denied access to an education or meaningful employment in any area of economics or politics by their families. This is in line with Adhikari, who contends that family support has a beneficial impact on women's desire to run for office (Adhikari, 2018). Family encouragement and financial support can provide women with the means and confidence they need to pursue their political objectives.

Although family support can be a significant influence on a woman's political engagement and professional advancement, recognizing the larger structural and societal problems that women still face is essential; for instance, the respondents' conflicting feelings about the community's overall support. When they first ran for office, three of the respondents said they encountered opposition and a lack of support from their extended families and the community. Some members of the women's extended families voiced outrage over their involvement in politics and questioned the role of women in such a profession. They were disheartened and tried to be persuaded by members of the community who claimed that politics had no future and urged them to concentrate on more honorable careers.

Overall, women still have a difficult time entering politics because of community opposition and discouragement (Karen Vecchio, 2019; Neupane, 2022). However, people who already have power or access to organizations are more likely to get past these obstacles and win elections (Carothers & Feldman, 2023), such as Respondent 2, whose parents were sociologists and had networks with different NGOs and INGOs. This prompted more people in the community to support their daughter. She says, *"Since my parent were social activists and were a member of many other humanitarian organizations, I was supported by them. They encouraged me and were supportive of my decision."*

The results and level of success of these women in politics are still uncertain. Families and close friends always showed their support, but when the conversation turns toward the community, we see the parks of disagreement and disappointment for women's involvement in politics. Community perceptions often prioritize male leadership (Celis et al., 2011; Chappell & Georgina, 2013; Childs et al., 2010). Respondent 3 says: "…*The elder people in society were not happy with my decision. They kept telling me to focus on the business sector or be a teacher etc., these respectful jobs, and that politics may ruin my career and I will be left with nothing…"*

These instances of deep-rooted thoughts of politics not being a respectful job for women is what give space for people to believe and implement them in real life. This is where the dots can be connected to how such informal behavior is transferred from the community, making it challenging for women to pursue political careers inside the political sphere. Women experience opposition or skepticism when they are involved in the political field if the community harbors preconceptions that connect women with domestic roles or consider politics as a male-domain (Chappell & Georgina, 2013). This influenced the informal institution to rise against women's political participation. It's not easy for women to take part in politics.

The gaps can be filled in by realizing that unofficial behavior, which has its roots in the community, affects women's political careers by fomenting doubt and opposition, as well as by fostering an uncomfortable and unsafe climate within political organizations through

informal institutions. The interviewee's account demonstrates the difficulties women encounter due to societal expectations, disparaging remarks, and a lack of safety precautions in political settings. The idea that women in politics frequently experience disrespectful treatment and a lack of support from their male counterparts is supported by research. Women's political careers are affected by gendered power relations, such as patriarchal norms and male domination inside and outside political institutions, (Celis & Childs, 2011). Similarly, Moser and Clark contend that the persistence of gender-based violence and harassment creates an unsafe environment limiting women's political engagement (Moser & Clark, 2002). This is supported by Respondent 5 who proclaims: "*...I even faced attempted intimidation. I received texts from someone's wife trying to torment me. Someone else tried to coerce me into aiding him, and when I refused, he made fun of me."*

This is in line with what Respondent 3 said: *"…. We know what is happening with women. They are being blamed without any proof and are compelled to resign… I need to be careful and maintain my distance and time to avoid being embroiled in such situations. No steps are taken against it. Although we have our formal rules within the political institution, no one bothers to follow them…"*

For women, either married or not, safety is very essential. The unsafe environment of politics is highlighted by the interviewee who asserts that despite the existence of rules, regulations, and laws, the safety of women remains a matter that is unsolved. This indicates that the prevailing formal rules and laws are not effective. The women in politics feel unsafe and nothing can keep their male counterparts from verbally attacking them unnecessarily. These safety concerns have a negative impact on women's political careers and deter female involvement in politics.

According to Celis and Childs (2011), opposing patriarchal norms and addressing male dominance within political groups are necessary for changing political institutions. This is in line with the idea that informal institutions need to be changed in order to create a more just and encouraging climate for women in politics. The impact of gender-based violence and harassment on women's political activity is highlighted in the work of Moser and Clark (2002).

Feminist institutions must address these safety issues if they are to build environments where women can engage without fear of intimidation or prejudice.

4.2 *Chiya Bhatti Baithak*: Leading to resignations

The significant difficulties that female politicians face in the political sphere are highlighted by the experiences they revealed in this study. The three respondents who have left politics, Respondents 2, 4, and 5 (interviews with Respondent 2 on 9/3/2023 and with Respondents 4 and 5 on 13/3/2023), expressed their unhappiness and disgust with the informal institution and its exclusive gatherings, which work against women's participation to the extent they are forced to resign. Respondent 5 says: *"…Chiya Bhatti gives men the space to strengthen their plans against us, leading to more difficult situations closing every way out possible…"*
Similarly, Respondent 2 asserts: *"...After every Chiya Bhatti gathering, their behavior toward me changed. If one individual was unhappy with me the previous day, the other day half of the working members would also stand against me, and I get accused of things I don't know anything about…"*

They spoke about being treated unfairly and facing false accusations, which forced them to resign or led to them losing their jobs without any justification. Respondent 5 says: *"…Not knowing what happens during the Chiya Bhatti gatherings embroiled me in problems. My opposition members got a chance to influence others while I was unaware. The situation got out of control and there was nothing I could do but resign."*

Informal institutions, referred to as the "secret garden of politics" by Gatto in his research study, highlight the fact that such exclusive gatherings help promote and influence gendered implications (Gatto & Wylie, 2021). The challenges experienced by women are exacerbated by the patriarchal nature of political informal institutions, which further leads to a lack of support from peers and the predominance of male coworkers (Chant & Pedwell, 2008). Prevailing laws and sanctions don't do enough to defend the rights and dignity of women in politics.

An informal institution known to be exclusively open to men, *Chiya Bhatti Bithak,* as mentioned by all the interviewees, served as fuel to the flame that stirred up difficulties for women in politics. Respondent 2 affirms: *"It is crucial to note that these specific gatherings, the Chiya Bhatti, are exclusively meant for men. This exclusivity suggests that women do not have the same level of access or participation in these events. These gatherings serve as male-dominated spaces where men freely interact, form connections, and engage in informal discussions*."

In line with this, Respondent 4 claims*: "This gender-exclusive gathering provides space for men to talk and engage in unnecessary tirades against women out of jealousy and patriarchal sentiments. These gatherings act as a flame that burns women's participation in politics."*

These informal organizations frequently start at the local level and have strong ties to the social structures, cultural norms, and traditions of the areas. These claims correspond to what Sven and his peers say in their study of women and the role of informal institutions in their workplace: such informal networks tend to exclude women, limiting their participation and career progression (Horak & Suseno, 2022). This gender-exclusive nature of the gatherings raises important considerations regarding gender dynamics and the potential exclusion of women from the social and professional networks that develop during these informal interactions. The limited access women have to these activities results in missed opportunities for networking, information sharing, and the development of social capital, which can have implications for including and promoting women in politics on a larger scale. In the same vein, as mentioned by Chant, exclusive informal institutions lead to women going unnoticed and becoming invisible, even within the frame of formal institutions. (Chant & Pedwell, 2008).

It is crucial to note that because informal norms frequently aim to protect the status quo and current power structures, they frequently conflict with formal rules and prevent more women from entering politics or making significant reforms that are more gender-inclusive (Hojlund & Madsen, 2021). The experiences that Respondents 2 and 4 provided shed light on how women in politics are treated unfairly, which leads to disappointment and resignations. The second respondent, a former member of the House of Representatives, talks of being oppressed and not being able to deal with issues brought on by her male colleagues. She concedes how

some disagreements would start with one individual, and the next day, she would find herself in heated discussions with other male colleagues. She confirms: "… He got the opportunity to sway others to his [side] at *Chiya Bhatti*…"

She was forced to quit because of the flawed structure of formal institutions, which was caused by informal political institutions, as she was afraid of what would happen if further conflicts arose. This shows how informal institutions destroy the limits of formal institutions as well. More often than not, informal institutions distort or undermine formal rules (Waylen, 2014), creating new "rules of the game" that effectively exclude women from holding political office with no apparent consequences for non-compliance. Respondent 4 also laments the absence of genuine support for women in politics, noting that parties frequently comply with inclusion criteria without actual conviction. They underscore how common fraud, bribery, and unethical behavior are in politics, further discouraging women from getting involved. The law of inclusion and introduction of gender quotas is "a law on paper only", as elaborated on by Gatto as he explains the failure of the Brazilian quota system and parties employing informal practices that affect women's political representation (Gatto & Wylie, 2021). The claim is no different than what has been asserted by the interviewees in this study.

These accounts are consistent with more extensive studies conducted on the difficulties faced by women in politics. According to studies (Inglehart & Pippa Norris, 2003; Krook, 2014), women frequently experience gender-based exclusionary practices in political organizations. Women's advancement is hampered and their possibilities for significant leadership roles are constrained by the patriarchal structure of politics and the pervasiveness of traditional gender roles and stereotypes. These hurdles are made even more entrenched by the lack of encouragement, regard, and appreciation for the talents and abilities of women (Acharya, 2021; Kambo, 2019; Piscopo, 2017). Furthermore, the narratives of Respondents 2 and 4 illustrate the patriarchal norms and gendered power dynamics within informal political institutions that support inequality and impede the advancement of women. The unequal power distribution and lack of assistance from male peers serve as examples of the gender prejudices ingrained in these institutions (Celis et al., 2011). On the other hand, the story of Respondent 5 emphasizes the negative effects of unfounded allegations and gender-based discrimination. Respondent 5 highlights the entrenchment of informal behavior within parliaments and judiciaries, as well as

the existence of double standards when it comes to charges against women. This prompts them to resign, notwithstanding promises of development and education.

While Respondents 1 and 3 show resiliency and a commitment to continuing their political careers in the face of ridicule and abuse, they emphasize how crucial it is for women to take action and advance in order to provide the community with their finest contributions. The difficulties that women face in political institutions, where they deal with male colleagues' power and harassment, are reflected in their experiences.

These women's collective experiences highlight the obstacles formed by political informal institutions as a *Chiya Bhatti Baithak*. If the system lacks appropriate legislation, discipline, and respect for women, it is insufficient to provide constitutional provisions and quotas for female representation. A comprehensive strategy is needed that challenges informal institutions, promotes gender equality, and creates a welcoming and inclusive political atmosphere in order to enhance women's involvement and safeguard their rights.

The socially and traditionally rooted policies of political informal institutions are seen as a major hindrance that contributes to gender inequality and discrimination against women. The difficulties faced by female politicians are further exacerbated by the lack of support from their peers and male coworkers. The responses of those who have quit politics show the cruel and unfair treatment they endured, which resulted in their resignation and job loss. This is a reflection of the systemic biases and prejudices at play in politics. The inadequacy of current constitutional safeguards and quotas for female representation is underlined, implying that more regulations and discipline are required to secure women's effective participation. The prevalence of fraud, bribery, and unethical behavior also deters women from entering politics (Bimita, 2020).

Without addressing the underlying informal rules coming from informal institutions, advancing gender equality, and establishing a friendly and inclusive political atmosphere, simply providing constitutional requirements and quotas is insufficient. The information, taken as a whole, critically examines the structural and cultural barriers that prevent women from

participating in politics and emphasizes the urgent need for significant reforms within the informal institutional framework to increase women's involvement, defend their rights, and confront gender inequality in politics.

The influence of unwritten rules and customs is firmly rooted in stereotypes and traditions, which continue to mold Nepalese women's political roles. These unofficial institutions support gendered stereotypes and the idea that politics is largely a masculine realm. Despite a rise in the number of women in politics in Nepal, their real participation and impact in decision-making processes are still limited. This supports the earlier analysis, which found that a chief obstacle to women's full engagement in politics is the emergence of informal institutions. An improved understanding of the structural problems that restrict women's political participation is made possible by the focus on unofficial norms and practices. It implies that while formal procedures like constitutional clauses and quotas are necessary milestones, they might not be enough to address the underlying issues that women face. The informal norms and expectations in the political sphere still have a significant impact, restricting women's participation and lowering their influence in decision-making. Informal institutions, like traditional gender norms and discriminatory behaviors, make it difficult for women to participate and establish political legitimacy. Women's political chances are limited, and they are unable to properly use their influence because of the informal networks that are predominately male. Heise contends that gender inequality in political decision-making is a result of informal norms and practices that sustain gendered power dynamics (Cislaghi & Heise, 2019). He highlights that harassment, intimidation, and violence based on gender are commonplace for female politicians in political institutions. His viewpoint calls attention to the harassment and violence leveled against women politicians that are predicated on their gender and are ingrained in the informal institutional structures. Such actions continue because there are no legal or unofficial laws protecting women's rights or establishing a secure and welcoming political climate. The predominance of this type of behavior reflects the informal institutional structures that uphold unequal power dynamics and prevent women from taking an active role in society.

4.3. Bridging the Gap: 'Chiya Bhatti Baithak' and Gendered Power Dynamics

As an informal institution disrupting gender norms and affecting power dynamics, *Chiya Bhatti* can be understood through the lens of feminist institutionalism. A theoretical paradigm called feminist institutionalism looks at how social institutions generate and perpetuate power relations between the sexes and how gender is ingrained in these institutions (Kenny, 2014). In addition to formal laws and regulations, informal institutional theory suggests that informal norms, beliefs, and practices also have an impact on outcomes and behavior (Webb et al., 2019). The experiences of the politicians who were interviewed for this study demonstrate that the unwritten rules of politics stem from social and cultural contexts rooted in informal institutions. As indicated by the lack of support these women received from their community and colleagues, informal institutions play a role in hampering women's participation in the political arena. Their participation is limited by the unwritten rules and conventions of political informal institutions. These norms influence people's behaviors and decisions within the formal political sphere, even with the existence of clear rules and regulations (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2010; Krook, 2014; Prajuli, 2018).

The challenges faced by the women politicians who were questioned for this study, such as traumatic experiences and unfair treatment, are examples of the real impacts of informal institutions. The experience of Respondent 2 — in which she received sexist remarks and was advised to spend her time in the kitchen rather than politics — illustrates the existence of unwritten rules that degrade the reputation and legitimacy of female politicians. Like Respondent 3, Respondent 4 also experienced social pressures to choose a "respectable" career over politics. This is a reflection of the unspoken norms and expectations related to gender roles. Further illustrating the impact of informal norms and power dynamics inside the political system are Respondent 5's description of being ignored and hushed during political conversations, and Respondent 1's account of experiencing contempt and derision (Interview with Respondent 1, 08/03/2023). These incidents show how informal institutions influence expectations, perceptions, and power dynamics, ultimately influencing politicians' experiences and results.

The analysis fits with the framework's emphasis on confronting and altering gendered power dynamics within political institutions, whether formal or informal, in the context of feminist institutionalism. The informal rules and customs mentioned above help perpetuate discrimination and gender disparity in the political realm (Dahlerup, 2005). The lack of a structured and inclusive institutional framework can be seen in the domination and limited support of male politicians. It is obvious that informal institutions significantly influence how people perceive and behave in every political setting.

Political formal and informal institutions are essential in the operation of any political system because they give political actors a framework within which to participate in group decision-making, resolve disputes, and allocate resources fairly and equally (Helmke & Levitsky, 2012). They can also aid in the stabilization of political systems by establishing a clear and uniform set of guidelines and practices for conflict settlement, gender equality, respect among all politicians, and the exercise of authority. The results of this investigation indicate that a fissure exists in the institutional framework from which the systematic way of working is leaking. Even when female politicians want to stand up for their contributions, the various factors within the informal institutional framework prevents them from doing so (Bayer, 2019; Mackie et al., 2015; Witz, 1992; Young, 2000). Despite coming from a political background, some women find it difficult to carve out their own place in the political arena, such as Respondents 3,4, and 5.

We can’t deny the fact that to promote gender equality in politics, Nepal implemented political quotas that aim to increase women's representation in the field. These quotas are also known as gender quotas to ensure that women have a more significant role in decision-making processes (Bimita, 2020). The implementation of political quotas is a way to address gender imbalances in political systems and give women more opportunities to participate in governance. Women’s participation in politics was transformed when the quota system was adopted in 2008 and increased in 2012 — but then the quota declined. The quota system was unable to maintain the increasing participation of women, and it did not remain constant; instead, it declined. The quotas were filled just for the sake of fulfilling them, rather than for the empowerment of women.

Women get involved in politics with different motivations, including to improve the welfare of women. However, in general, they seem to be failing. The above interviews revealed that the women who resigned or who were forced to resign were no longer willing to play political games. Not only that, but they were also afraid to encourage others to run for office. The phenomenon of gendered political institutions must be discussed as they run the risk of causing a decline of women's participation in politics (Lowndes, 2020). While rules shape gendered behavior, the individuals and groups that interact with them also have the power to challenge and transform these gendered practices. It is important to acknowledge that the gendered effects of rules may seem impartial on the surface, as they contribute to a larger systemic pattern of discrimination against marginalized groups. However, by recognizing these gendered implications and actively working toward reform, we can move toward a more equitable and just political system. Here, I am not referring to the gendered effects of rules about gender, but rather the discussion of the stereotypical rules that are transferred from society into political offices, i.e., informal institutions. Though political formal institutions have equal rules for both male and female participants, the individual rules influenced by informal institutions affect the overall atmosphere. For instance, when one male colleague speaks against any female colleague, the other men highlight the matter with their support, having been influenced while networking at these informal gatherings. This behavior persists, creating problems within the formal institutions and challenges for women striving to take part in politics.

It is justifiable to say that the uneven institutional behavior of political institutions appears to be a cause of the decline of women's interests in politics. Regardless of constitutional and family support, women cannot fully participate in the political sphere unless there is a change in the behavior of its stakeholders. Some rules must be demonstrated through conduct instead of merely through writing (Y. Ghimire, 2021; Swanborn, 2010). Humans learn by observing and imitating those around them, especially in social settings where they are expected to conform to certain norms and behaviors (Adhikari, 2018). These norms and behaviors are communicated through social cues, and those who fail to adhere to them may be met with disapproval or social isolation. Obligatory rules play a crucial role in shaping our behavior in a particular setting, as they let us know what is acceptable and what is not (Mackie et al., 2015). They inform us of what behaviors are approved or disapproved of within a specific context,

such as in a workplace or social gathering. These rules are not always explicitly stated but are often conveyed through subtle social cues and expectations. For example, in a workplace, employees may be expected to respect all their colleagues. These behaviors are considered obligatory rules, and failure to adhere to them can result in negative consequences, such as disapproval from colleagues or even disciplinary action — and that is what we see in our political institutions. Informal institutions undermine these obligatory rules, causing the failure of formal institutions as well (Webb et al., 2019). For instance, mandatory rules promote gender equality, whereas *Chiya Bhatti Baithak,* as an informal institution, prioritizes the patriarchy over political decisions. This keeps patriarchal power structures in place and supports them in the context of political decision-making. Through its exclusive gatherings, *Chiya Bhatti* influence and contribute to maintaining the dominance of men in decision-making processes, perpetuating patriarchal power dynamics within the political sphere. In the same vein, as mentioned by Lowndes in his study, political opportunities are shaped not only by rules, but by gender, and the political institutions are gendered (Lowndes, 2020). Although he doesn't mention formal or informal institutions explicitly; however, he notes that "gendered rules" evolved due to the interaction of political institutions outside the realm of formal politics.

However, it is also important to question and challenge these rules when they perpetuate harmful or discriminatory practices. Critically examining those obligatory rules and advocating for more equitable and inclusive norms in informal political institutions can lead to creating a more just and accepting society (Mackie et al., 2015).

Based on conducted analyses, women seem to be losing interest in politics and facing greater challenges because their male colleagues are failing to adhere to important rules. The result is a situation where the men dominate the sphere and create difficulties for their female counterparts. Not even a political background, social connections, or family support can help women establish themselves in politics until political institutions adopt and enforce proper rules that are to be respected by all actors. To guarantee that women can participate and succeed on an equal footing, such rules must be implemented in informal institutions and followed consistently within any political body.

4.4. Invisible Networks, Visible Consequences Through Chiya Bhatti Baithak

Power relations in politics play a significant role in shaping political consequences. Political power is the ability to influence decisions and results in a variety of ways, including the use of force, manipulation, persuasion, and negotiation (Charvet, 2018; Dahlerup, 2005). Power, in its most basic form, is the ability to shape and control the environment in which decisions are made. Power relations within political systems are frequently built by the formal and informal institutions that govern, who has access to power, and how it is exerted. The matter of concern is that political institutions may be structures of cooperation, but they may also be structures of power (M.Moe, 2005). It's a fact that informal institutions compete negatively with formal institutions and undermine them, especially when patronage networks are involved (Azari & Smith, 2012; Lowndes, 2020; M.Moe, 2005). *Chiya Bhatti*, in terms of social networks and alliances, alters power dynamics by affecting choice-making and resource availability.

The findings suggest that due to the exclusive nature of *Chiya Bhatti* limiting women's mobility, visibility, and opportunities for involvement within male-dominated political networks, women face greater challenges in forming social networks and accessing resources. Many scholars have highlighted that limited access to or exclusion from informal contact networks is one of the issues that women and racial minorities most frequently report experiencing in organizational settings (Labovitz, & Fry, 1975; Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990; O'Leary & Ickovics, 1992 ;Ibarra, 1993). This is supported by the testimony of Respondent 2, who, unlike the other respondents, had received community support because her parents were involved with different organizations as social activists. Their networking paved the way for the respondent to run for office and she was successful. However, their influence was unable to help in the long run because the respondent was unable to network in the informal political sphere herself. Meanwhile, Respondent 3 did not receive support from her community, which made it difficult for her to run for office. Despite all the disapproval, she went on to achieve her goal. However, due to the male-dominated and male-exclusive nature of political networks, it became complicated for both respondents to continue their political careers. Women's political engagement and representation are hampered by these conditions. For example, they become less likely to run for office, get campaign support, or have access to political

information and decision-making processes if they have limited access to political networks and resources (Hojlund & Madsen, 2021).

Consequently, I highlight the statement that women's political engagement is hampered in a number of different ways by the social capital that results from *Chiya Bhatti Baithak*. By different political institutions I particularly mean informal political institutions. Alongside formal political structures, a variety of social networks, ties, and customs make up informal political institutions. As mentioned before, these consist of informal networks inside political parties, social groups, community organizations, and other areas where political decisions are made, and actions are taken outside of the purview of the established political system. The power dynamics and societal structures that historically benefited men and constrained women's participation and influence in political processes are often reflected in these organizations (Celis et al., 2011; Childs & Witney, 2004).

Access to male-dominated networks becomes restricted for women, depriving them of critical chances to network, find mentors, and get the support they need for political careers. As we also see from the findings, patriarchal attitudes and expectations frequently underlie informal political structures, which limit women's visibility and mobility in public and political areas and maintain traditional gender roles (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2010). Consequently, women face difficulties establishing their credibility and acceptability within these networks, which prevents them from building up their social capital. The decision-making process is significantly influenced by *Chiya Bhatti*, both within political parties and in larger political arenas. Women are denied the opportunity to express their perspectives, influence policy objectives, and have their voices heard when they are excluded from these informal decision-making settings. As a result, women experience obstacles when trying to obtain and utilize social capital, which limits their political participation and representation (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2010).

The lack of women’s participation in these institutions' decision-making processes further entrenches male dominance, as described by Edward and his peers about “homosocial capital”, the bonds of friendship, mutual trust, and understanding that develop between people of the

same gender, i.e., males (Aspinall et al., 2021) acting against women's political participation. As a result, women's viewpoints and interests are frequently disregarded, which prevents them from being adequately represented and participating in significant activities. Another factor in the normalization and naturalization of male privilege is the power dynamics inside informal political institutions. Within these systems, the qualifications and definitions for leadership jobs are frequently shaped by persons who created the selection procedures for their own personal gain. This upholds the stereotype that men are inherently more capable and better fit for leadership roles while undermining the abilities and contributions of women.

In brief, the significant barriers to women's political participation in Kathmandu Metropolitan City's local government are rooted in the social capital and power dynamics that result from informal political institutions. These institutions support preexisting gender biases, perpetuate the dominance of men in politics, and limit the opportunities and resources available to women. The intricate interactions between social capital, informal networks, and power dynamics within political institutions are consistent with the tenets of feminist institutional theory (Horak & Suseno, 2022; Lowndes, 2020; Yadav, 2023), which note that in addition to overtly discriminatory laws and regulations, informal norms, practices, and attitudes also contribute to gender inequality. It becomes clear that tackling these challenges through a feminist institutional lens is essential for increasing women's meaningful involvement and changing preexisting power dynamics once the significance of informal institutions in preserving gender inequality is acknowledged (Dangol, 2022; Kambo, 2019; Krook, 2010b).

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION AND SUGGEGSTIONS

5.1. Conclusion

The study shows that political informal institutions play a crucial role in determining women's political participation. The failure to adhere to rules, coupled with the dominant presence of male actors, creates numerous hurdles and difficulties for female actors. This, in turn, results in a decline in women's participation in politics or their resignation as they struggle to overcome these obstacles and establish themselves in the political arena. According to the informal institutional theory's paradigm, the interviews provide insight into how *Chiya Bhatti Baithak* as an informal institution in Kathmandu Metropolitan City operates to prevent women from participating in politics, creating hurdles and situations that drive them to resign. The experiences that the respondents described point to the existence of informal norms, assumptions, and customs that erect obstacles and uphold gender disparity in the political sphere arising from off-the-clock assemblies and caucuses.

The interviews highlight how *Chiya Bhatti Baithak* shapes and influences people's opinions and beliefs, regardless of gender or socioeconomic status. These unwritten rules benefit male politicians and foster a climate that deters women from actively engaging in politics (Davis, 1997; Kim, 2022; Webb et al., 2019). Furthermore, the difficulties female politicians encounter, particularly the traumatic and frightening incidents they reported, reflect how informal institutions contribute to the persistence of gender biases and power disparities. Unfair treatment, false allegations, and discrimination against women in the political system indicate the existence of unwritten rules that restrict women's political participation and opportunities.

The design of political institutions has a significant impact on the level of women's participation in politics (Chappell, 2006; Hojlund & Madsen, 2021; Lowndes, 2020; MacRae & Weiner, 2021). Legislative bodies, election processes, and political parties are examples of political institutions that provide the framework and opportunities for individuals to participate in politics. When these institutions cannot implement the necessary rules and discipline within,

including informal institutional practices, improvements cannot be achieved (Adhikari, 2018; Dhungana, 2014; MacRae & Weiner, 2021; Webb et al., 2019). The findings confirm that no matter what turn the Constitution takes or what decisions policymakers make, unless the informal institutions bring about positive reforms in terms of gender equality and it is biased in nature, women will continue to be excluded. The lack of adherence to rules and the dominant presence of male actors in political institutions can further make it challenging for women to prosper in politics. This creates an environment that is not conducive to the participation of women in politics. Women face sexism, discrimination, and other obstacles that prevent them from achieving success in the political arena (Iwanaga, 2008; Karp & Banducci, 2008). This leads to a sense of frustration and disillusionment among women, causing them to withdraw from politics altogether.

Therefore, it's critical for political informal institutions to be designed in a way that is respectful to all actors, regardless of gender (Hojlund & Madsen, 2021; Lowndes, 2020). This includes adopting and enforcing proper rules that promote equal opportunities and addressing systemic issues that have historically disadvantaged women (Gender Balance Network, 2020; Horak & Suseno, 2022; Waylen, 2014; World Economic Forum, 2018). By doing so, it would be possible to create a political environment that is more inclusive and welcoming for women. This, in turn, can lead to increased interest and participation in politics, allowing women to contribute their perspectives and ideas to the political discourse (Latif et al., 2015; Madsen, 2019). Ultimately, a more diverse and inclusive political environment can lead to better decision-making, as it takes into account the perspectives and experiences of all individuals. Strengthening women's networks is also a very important strategy to be implemented. Recognizing the impact of informal institutions on political outcomes and implementing policies to address the root causes of these institutions is crucial.

Hence, this research study provides critical insights into the intricate workings of informal institutions and their role in curbing women's political participation at the local level, causing them to resign from the posts they hold. Feminist institutionalism recognizes that gender inequality results from informal norms, practices, and attitudes that influence institutional behavior and decision-making processes, as much as from explicit discriminatory laws and

regulations (Kenny, 2014; Waylen, 2014 ;Madsen, 2019). The study unequivocally shows how informal institutions, like social and cultural norms, hinder women's political participation in Kathmandu. Women's access to resources, networks, and decision-making processes is constrained by these norms, which also reinforce gender biases and perpetuate male dominance in politics.

Social capital theory also sheds light on how social networks, connections, and resources affect political engagement (Putnam, 1995). The research findings highlight the importance of informal networks in shaping political trajectories and opportunities for individuals. The support of families, pressure from friends and relatives, and the lack of access to political networks all contribute to the challenges faced by women in their pursuit of political participation. The dynamics of these networks and their effects on women's political engagement are better understood thanks to social capital theory.

Feminist institutionalism and social capital theory are in line with the reality of women's struggle for political participation in Nepal, both generally and specifically in Kathmandu. Nepal, like many other countries, has a history of gender inequality and patriarchal norms that have limited women's access to political power and decision-making processes. In their efforts to participate in politics, women have encountered a variety of difficulties and barriers, including social, cultural, and structural barriers. These theories provide conceptual frameworks for comprehending the intricate interactions between formal and informal institutions, power relationships, and social networks that influence women's political participation. They help to educate initiatives for advancing gender equality and increasing women's political involvement by offering insightful information about the structural problems and obstacles that women encounter.

Now the new question that begs to be answered is whether the impact of informal institutions in other local governments around the country works for or against women’s participation. It is critical to conduct a scientific analysis of this dynamic because the effects of informal institutions on women's participation in local government contexts can differ between different states of the government. Beyond the formal frameworks of local governments, informal

institutions, which include social networks, traditions, and affiliations, have a big impact on how political decisions and acts are shaped. Replicating this study and delving deeper into the paradigmatic shifts of informal institutions can provide valuable insights into understanding the dynamic behind their emergence within formal institutions to either work for or against female participation.

5.2. Limitations and Suggestions

The study's exclusive focus on women's local political participation in Kathmandu Metropolitan City and its connection to informal institutions is one of its limitations. The generalizability of the results to other geographical locations or degrees of political participation may be constrained by the study's limited scope. The particular social, cultural, and political characteristics of Kathmandu Metropolitan City may make it difficult to completely understand the wide range of variables influencing the reduction in women's political participation in other areas.

This study offers insightful information on the decline in women's local political engagement in Kathmandu Metropolitan City as a result of informal institutions; however, more investigation is required to better comprehend this problem. Studies that compare newly democratic countries can reveal patterns and distinctions in the impact of informal institutions on women's involvement in politics. Such comparative studies would advance our knowledge of informal institutions' complexity, diversity, and influence of political involvement disparities between genders. Comparative studies between different regions or countries will also highlight trends and differences in the impact of informal institutions on women's political engagement.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

Title: Examining the Impact of Informal Institutions on Women's Political Participation

Introduction:

Thank you for participating in this research study. The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather data on the role of informal institutions in shaping women's political participation. Your responses will contribute to a critical analysis of the barriers faced by women in engaging with political processes. Please answer the following questions thoughtfully and critically based on your knowledge and experiences.

Section 1: Demographic information

1. What is your age?
2. What is your educational background?
3. What party do you are associated with?
4. Which ward do you work in?
5. How long have you been in the political field

Section 2: Awareness and Perceptions:

1. How do your family and community perceive your career in politics?
2. How do your colleagues react to you?
3. In your opinion, what is the root cause of problems in your work?
4. What do you think about informal political institutions?
5. How would you define informal institutions in the realm of political processes? Please elaborate on their characteristics and functions.

Section 3: Understanding the Impeding Effects of Informal Institutions

1. To what extent do you believe that informal institutions hinder women's political involvement?
2. Can you illustrate specific instances in which informal institutions have hindered women's ability to participate effectively in political decision-making? Please elaborate on the mechanisms and manifestations of these hindrances.

Section 4: Identifying Barriers within Informal Institutions

1. What are the key barriers women encounter when attempting to engage with informal institutions in the context of political processes?
2. In your opinion, to what extent do traditional gender roles and stereotypes shape women's engagement with informal institutions? Please critically assess their influence and implications.

Section 5: Strategies for Addressing the Impact of Informal Institutions on Women's Participation

1. Have you observed or participated in any initiatives aimed at addressing the barriers imposed by informal institutions on women's political engagement? If yes, please provide a critical assessment of these initiatives, including their strengths, limitations, and potential for long-term impact.

Conclusion:

Thank you for your participation in this questionnaire. Your critical insights are invaluable in comprehending the influence of informal institutions on women's political participation. Your responses will be treated with confidentiality and utilized solely for research purposes.