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Attitudes towards women's participation in local politics in South Asia

Despite men's traditional dominance in politics, survey data from selected geographical areas in India, Nepal and Bhutan show that attitudes towards women's participation in local politics are overwhelmingly positive. Attitudes cluster along three major dimensions: perceptions of women's capacities to join politics, the consequences of political engagement for the family's reputation, and consequences of women's political participation for their domestic responsibilities.

Households with high economic status and political leaders are more positive whilst education, organisational membership, and living in urban areas do not show a consistent effect across the three dimensions, so we do not find a 'modernity effect'. Despite variations in where and how women participate and in socio-economic and cultural contexts, attitudes are consistently positive, indicating that explanations for attitudinal changes are varied and complex. Nepal's high score may be due to the political, social and military mobilisation in the last generation, while it is likely that reservation in India and women's relative equality in Bhutan have contributed towards positive attitudes. Data are drawn from a survey of 6647 local level politicians, civil society leaders and ordinary citizens, and from interviews.

Key words: attitudes, political participation, local politics, women's participation, patriarchy, gender, Nepal, Bhutan, India

Introduction

Low levels of political participation by women in South Asia have been explained by the prevalence of attitudes that confine women to the home and reserve the public sphere for men.

According to this perspective, social norms have defined politics as a public and male activity while family affairs have been considered private and female. Public decision-making power has been considered the men's responsibility, while women have been responsible for carrying out domestic duties and maintaining family harmony. Thus, women's life has formed around the private sphere while men's life has revolved around the public sphere (Bryld 2001). Norms and attitudes have reflected the idea of the family's 'honour' and what it means to behave as a 'good woman' (Vissandjée, Abdool et al. 2006). Gupte puts this succinctly 'Customarily, women have to choose between honour and power; they lose one because of the other. Men, however, possess both; in fact the presence of one strengthens the other' (Gupte 2013). The fear of bringing shame to the family through 'inappropriate actions', such as participation in 'dirty' politics, have prevented women from pursuing activities beyond the confines of the household (Vissandjée, Abdool et al. 2006). Because men loses honour through the inappropriate behaviour of women from their families or kinships, controlling women's behaviour becomes imperative (Gupte 2013).

Studies highlight that men and women have shared similar perspectives on gender-based social relations confining women's role to the private sphere (Vissandjee, Abdool et al. 2006). Some have argued that the strongest opposition has come from women themselves, and the mother-in-law has been singled out as particularly staunch opponents of women's political engagement (Bryld 2001, Vissandjee, Abdool et al. 2006). Also in Bhutan, which is considered a matri-local society, a study by the National Election Commission of Bhutan on voter behaviour and gender, argued that although voters in principle supported the idea that more women should participate in politics, both men and women still held the perception that politics was mainly a man's responsibility (NCWC 2008, Tinley 2014).

Women's customarily confinement to the home and discriminatory practices in the household and society have been underpinned by individual characteristics such as limited political awareness and experience, less access to education compared with boys, and economic dependence on male family members. In the extensive Indian literature on female representatives in the Panchayat Raj Institutions, women's lack of political skills is reflected in the concept of the 'proxy' representative, women acting on the instructions of her husband, other male family members, caste leaders, local elites or party functionaries (Vijayalakshmi and Chandrashekar 2000).

Recently, authors have argued that social norms are changing and that women's mobility and participation in public spaces are increasingly becoming accepted activities (Vissandjee, Abdool et al. 2006, Rai 2011). Perhaps reflecting a change in attitudes towards women in politics, in the latest local election in India, women gained more than 50 per cent of seats. Reservation and measures such as training programmes have encouraged women's participation in local politics in India (IRCW 2013). In Karnataka, the state selected for this survey, strategies to increase women's representation was discussed in parallel with rights of marginalised groups and reservation was proposed as early as in 1954. India adopted the Panchayat Raj Act in 1993 (the 74th Amendment to the Constitution), which reserved one third of the seats in local elected bodies for women, in parallel with the introduction of similar quotas for other underrepresented groups in society. Taking the lead on the issue, Karnataka had already in 1983 reserved 25 per cent of seats for women in the local level political bodies, the Panchayat Raj Institutions, increasing it to 50 per cent of seats in 2015 resulting in more women than men becoming elected in 2015.

In Nepal, women have played an important role in the political and social mobilisation since the adoption of a new, democratic constitution in 1990 (Hachhethu, Kumar et al. 2008) and women joined the armed struggle of the Maoist movement on a large scale and participated as guerrilla soldiers in the 1996-2006 war (Lama 1997, Pettigrew and Schneiderman 2004, Tamang 2009).

Nepal experienced a tremendous social and political transition process, from the party less monarchy to the new, federal, republican Constitution of September 2015, and women's rights have been at the heart of these parallel processes of social, political and military mobilisation as one element of a broader social inclusion agenda (Haug and Aasland 2015). The Constitution states that women shall have the right to access and participate in state structures and bodies on the basis of proportional inclusion. Women won 50 per cent of seats at the local elections in 2017, and almost all deputy mayors are women (with mayors being men). In the period from 2002 to 2017 when local elections were not held, women participated in local planning processes through the representation of women's organisations in institutions such as the former Ward Citizens Forum and the Integrated Planning Committees at the village level, but their representation tended to be low at around 15 per cent (Dhungel, Sapkota et al. 2011).

Bhutan is a young democracy and there have only been three local government elections, in 2007, 2011 and 2016. Women's representation is still very low, but increased somewhat in 2011, and stayed the same in 2016. The main problem identified in Bhutan is that there are few women candidates. Women have not been willing to give up other income generating activities in order to stand for elections as Bhutanese law requires office holders to resign from other positions. This reflects women's relative stronger position in society and in the economy and reflect more gender equal norms where women's political role is compatible with community values and where her domestic role is based on relative gender equality. The challenge of recruiting women has caused a discussion of a quota system but the idea has not gained much support beyond some women activists.

Local politics is different from national politics. This is reflected in the regulation in India and Bhutan that local elected leaders should not be affiliated with party politics but should be elected as independent candidates to serve their communities. Nevertheless, the Constitution of Nepal of

2015 allows for party political representation at the local level in view of Nepal's problematic historical experience with the party less Panchayat system, perceived as anti-democratic. At the core of local level politics is the delivery of infrastructure and technical services, such as road construction, drainage facilities, street lighting, water supplies and so forth. All these activities contribute to the development of communities for the benefit of residents and reflect a notion of politics as community development and social service (Ciotti 2012). The step from being involved in self-help groups to becoming involved in local politics in order to contribute to community development is conceivable to many women themselves and to their families. Self-help groups may even serve as a nascent political constituency that women count on for support when making the decision to run for office.

In view of the increase in women's participation in local level politics, with Karnataka leading the way since 1983, we hypothesize the following;

We expect attitudes in Bhutan to be least positive, and in India most positive due to a strong positive relationship between high numerical participation and positive attitudes,

Women in South Asia have made significant progress on development indicators such as educational attainment, labour market participation, financial resources and equal inheritance rights (Gleason 2001, Hust 2004, Vissandjee, Abdool et al. 2006), while they increasingly also take part in numerous community-based organisations, such as savings and credit groups, forest user groups, water user groups, school management committees, and mothers groups. Education often is cited as the most significant factor to explain levels of political participation (Vissandjee, Abdool et al. 2006, Haug and Aasland 2015). Is an individual's education equally critical to explain attitudes towards political participation? Does this also mean that individuals who show higher scores on socio-economic variables, and/or who live in urban locations, are more likely to

accept women's participation in politics? There are several reasons why this may be the case. Firstly, as more households include female members who either go to school or to work outside the home, these households become accustomed to women's participation in public spaces, they benefit from her increased income, and from her new social networks. Secondly, as people observe women crossing the public-private divide by entering public spaces, such as factories, schools and universities, they may more easily accept that women cross the private-public divide into politics. Thirdly, individuals with higher socio-economic status living in urban areas are more likely to have been exposed to ideas of women's right to participation, and to ideas about gender equality through media and urban meeting places. This may apply in particular to those women who are active in civil society organisations. Fourthly, women with higher socio-economic status, may feel more empowered, self-confident and independent, and thus able to argue the case within the household for their own involvement in politics. We hypothesize the following:

We expect individuals who have higher scores on socio-economic variables, and/or who live in urban locations, to be more likely to accept women's participation in politics.

The data analysis reports on variations in attitudes between local politicians, civil society leaders and ordinary people, and between men and women. Subsequently, we identify three dimensions of attitudes towards women's participation, relating to i) women's *capacity* to engage in politics ii) implications of women's participation for family *reputation* iii) implications for her *domestic responsibilities*. For each dimension, we analyse which types of respondents have more or less positive attitudes towards women's participation. Finally, we explore explanations for the key survey finding that attitudes towards women in politics in the region are positive despite substantial variations in social, cultural, economic and political contexts.

Data and methods

A survey covering three different populations: ordinary citizens, political leaders and civil society leaders was conducted in four districts of the Indian state of Karnataka (Gulbarga, Dharwad, Mysore and Chitradurga), the Nawalparasi district in Nepal and six districts of Western Bhutan (Chhukha, Haa, Paro, Punakha, Samtse and Thimpu). Thus, the survey is not representative for the three nations but rather of specific areas within them. The civil society leaders represented non-governmental organisations (NGO), community based organisations (CBOs) and other civil society organisations (CSOs), but a majority of the civil society leaders were members of self-help groups and agricultural cooperatives. A detailed sampling procedure was undertaken in order to ensure representative samples within each territory.. A total of 6,647 respondents were interviewed in person by a team of interviewers trained for the specific survey.

Household members were selected as follows: The districts were divided into smaller units and a certain number of them were drawn randomly. Furthermore, the units were stratified according to urban and rural settlement, in order to secure proportional representation of different settlement types. Respondents were then drawn randomly from each selected household according to a lottery system.

Political and civil society leaders were drawn randomly from compiled lists of available and applicable leaders in the selected districts, with quotas for men and women. Quotas were established for men and women of all respondent categories to ensure sufficient representation especially of women political and civil society leaders.

The distribution of respondents on districts and by gender and respondent category can be found in Table 1 in the Appendix. Due to the low number of women political and civil society leaders in Bhutan, the interviewer teams were not able to fully cover the planned quotas of political and

civil society leaders in all geographical units there. The survey was undertaken during the months of August 2014 to January 2015. Refusal rates (including absentees) were very low.

Attitudes are more difficult to measure than facts and behaviour because attitudes are more fluid. Strategic responses, context dependency and problems involved in analysing the link between attitudes and meaning are key challenges associated with the measurement of attitudes (Wittenbrink and Schwarz 2007, Jowell, Roberts et al.

2007). Strategic responses refer to the tendency among respondents to respond in a manner that gives a desirable self-presentation in line with socially acceptable norms. This may be particularly pronounced in communally oriented cultures such as in South Asia. Answers offered by respondents are also context dependent. This means that the psychological processes involved in formulating an answer, do not reflect a core of unchanging attitudes held by the respondent. The attitudes expressed could rather be a product of judgement made up on the spot or deliberate considerations of contextual information. Attitudes may also reflect certain messages related to how the message on women's political participation was presented in the media and in campaigns from the electoral commissions, interest groups and the state. Hence, attitudes are fluid and produced through a process of interaction with the specific context in which the answer is given

Although interviews with the individual respondents should be carried out without the presence of the spouse, other family members or colleagues, in practice this was not always feasible due to space constraints or other practical hindrances (e.g. the respondents' insistence that an external person should be present). The enumerators were instructed to report such instances and they occurred in about 3 per cent of the interviews. Thus they should only have a very minor effect on results. Another aspect of the context refers to the interviewer and how the interviewer poses the questions to the respondent. Words and nuances in use in one language may not exist at all in other, or may only exist with an additional meaning. In particular in Bhutan, where respondents

speak many different languages, some of which do not even exist in written form, the challenge of translation and checking consistency and comparability was formidable. Thus, a large amount of time and resources was put into the survey design phase in order to ensure validity of the measurement. Through this work we sought to ensure the relevance of each survey item, that they match the local social environment and at the same time remain comparable across the three countries.

To ensure consistency across interviews, thorough training of the interviewers has been critical to receiving high quality answers. Nevertheless, it is hard to ensure comparability across geographically and culturally very different contexts. The meaning of answers depends on the country context in which the answer is given and reflects differences in thought processes, institutional frameworks and underlying values. Measuring cross-national differences in meaning is made particularly difficult by variations in social structures, language, politics, economics and culture. Occupational categories may differ and leadership duties vary from one context to another. All these variations are difficult to control for in the analysis, but as much as possible we have relied on the national teams to interpret answers. Some extra caution should still be taken in the interpretation of the survey results as some of the differences, or similarities, could be caused by slight differences in the wording of the questions or nuances in the understanding caused by language and cultural differences. Also given the social transformation and contradictory and contested gender norms attitudes may well be contradictory in themselves (Nielsen and Waldrop 2014).

Positive attitudes towards women's participation in politics

A battery of statements that covers the most common contested issues surrounding women's participation in politics was presented to the respondents. The battery was made up of ten

statements. The respondents were asked to say to which extent they agreed with each of the statements read to them, where 1 indicates strongly agree and 4 indicates strongly disagree. Figures 1 to 3 in the appendix show the mean score on this scale for each item for each of the respondent categories where the variables are coded so that 1 indicates most support and 4 least support of women's participation. Separate figures are displayed for each category of respondents.

The findings suggest that respondents are overwhelmingly supportive of women's role in politics. The vast majority of respondents disagreed with the statements that expressed negative views towards women's participation in politics. Thus the majority of respondents thought that women's opinions are equally important in private and public spaces and that women should take part in politics on an equal basis with men and that women have the ability to become effective leaders. The respondents were also supportive of women's work outside the household while at the same time many believed that women should look after the family and stay at home with the children.

The differences in responses from men and women are quite small, as shown in Figure 4 in the appendix. For ease of interpretation, we have here displayed the unweighted general results for all categories of respondents for women and men respectively. The figure shows that women tend to be only slightly more supportive than men of various aspects of women's political and overall societal participation. When it comes to support for the view that women's role is to look after the family, women in our survey are even slightly more inclined to have this view than are male respondents.

It is noteworthy that differences between countries¹ and between categories of respondents (political leaders, civil society leaders and ordinary household members) turn out to be larger than differences between men and women. Overall, however, differences in viewpoints between the different categories of leaders tend to be only minor, though with a slightly more supportive view among political leaders. Results for the last category of respondents, ordinary household members, are displayed in Figure 3 in the appendix. They overall tend to be slightly less supportive of women's participation in politics and society than are political and civil society leaders.

The results then, give evidence that the majority of respondents perceive women as fully capable of participation in politics on an equal footing with men. This is striking in the view of the literature that has documented how citizens question women's capacity as politicians, and how traditional negative attitudes towards women constitute barriers to her political participation. The next section explores in more detail the underlying dimensions of respondents' attitudes towards women's participation in politics.

Dimensions of attitudes towards women's participation

We want to analyse to what extent attitudes towards women's representation can be seen as interrelated aspects of one underlying dimension, or whether such attitudes rather consist of several dimensions that may be more or less interrelated. This can be checked by conducting a reliability analysis of the listed items which gives a Chronbach's Alpha of 0.65 (on a scale from 0 to 1), indicating some, though not particularly strong, internal correlation among them. Thus, the battery of questions does not seem to represent a purely unidimensional scale.

¹ For ease of reading, in the following text we refer to countries even though the surveys covered only specific survey areas as explained in the methodology section above...

To check which dimensions the battery of questions on attitudes consists of a factor (Principal Component) analysis with all the listed items was performed.² The analysis resulted in three components or dimensions, explaining in total 66 per cent of the variance among the items. The results (the Pattern Matrix) are presented in Table 2 in the appendix.³

The first dimension, for which five of the items have a high factor score, and which accounts for 30 per cent of the variance, we interpret as representing women's *capacities* for external participation. The second dimension accounts for 23 per cent of the variance and refers to implications for the family's *reputation* of women's external participation. The third dimension, accounting for 13 per cent of the variance, is seen as a reflection of women's *domestic responsibilities*⁴.

The internal correlation between the three dimensions varies, with a Pearson's R of 0.08 between factors 1 and 2, a considerable correlation of 0.25 between 2 and 3 and a notable negative correlation of -0.15 between dimensions 1 and 3. The latter means that those believing in women's external abilities are more inclined than the average to also consider women having greater responsibilities in the domestic sphere. This indicates that these respondents do not see a contradiction between believing in women's abilities and holding the opinion that women should take care of their domestic responsibilities. Women can do both; caring for their families and having responsibilities at home and being able politicians. Both men and women seems to give

² We applied an Oblimin rotation to allow for correlation between the resulting dimensions. Components with an eigenvalue of 1.0 and above were identified as separate factors.

³ For ease of reading only factor loadings of 0.4 and higher are reported.

⁴ It should be noted that one of the items "Women act according to peers/friends" does not load higher than 0.4 on any of the three components. Thus, this item is not strongly associated with the scores on any of the three dimensions that were identified.

high value to women's household and care work, and may not necessarily see this as detrimental to women's political participation.

We have identified three dimensions - women's capacities, implications for her family's reputation, and domestic responsibilities - that cover different aspects that are likely to affect women's possibilities to enter and play a constructive role in public life. Since these dimensions are only moderately correlated with each other, and two of them even are negatively correlated, one would expect variations in the scores on each of the dimensions for people with different characteristics. In this section, we will examine these patterns in order to find out which groups of the population are more and less likely to be associated with high and low scores on each of the dimensions. When we examine the findings dimension by dimension in this manner, several of the findings are unexpected.

The factor scores from the Principal Component Analysis represent three continuous variables, ranging from low (most supportive of women's public participation) to high (least supportive). We then carried out linear regression analyses with the factor scores for each dimension as dependent variables. In addition to survey location, respondent category and sex, we also included other variables that we believed could be relevant for explaining high or low scores on the dependent variables. The independent variables are based on other questions in the questionnaire.⁵ ;

The following independent variables were included:

- Respondent category (political leader (control group), civil society leader, household member)

⁵ The indices have been tested for internal consistency (by reliability analysis), and we have controlled for potential inter-correlinarity between variables.

- Survey location (country/state; Karnataka control group)
- Sex (men vs. women control group)
- Urban/semi-urban/rural settlement (urban control group)
- Age group (treated as continuous variable)
- Educational level (treated as a continuous variable, 6 levels)
- Household size
- Position in household (head, spouse, vs. all others)
- Occupation (agricultural worker (control group) vs. home maker; salary based service; wage labour; trade/small business; other occupation)
- Household facilities (number of amenities in household, index)
- Active (active in organisation, programme or movement vs. all others)
- Training (participated in any training programme vs. all others)
- Men first (men/sons are served meals first vs. all others)

Women's capacities in public life

We then performed multiple linear regressions with the above-mentioned dependent and independent variables.⁶ The first regression, with degree of support to the notion of women as capable subjects in public life as the dependent variable, revealed some important and unexpected results. The model itself is only moderately strong; the score on the independent variables explains 10 per cent of the variability in the scores along this dimension (R squared = 0.10). There are, however, some notable effects of several of the independent variables, as shown in Table 3 in the appendix. The big picture is that all categories of respondents are positive towards women's participation in politics. Nevertheless, within this picture of overwhelming support in all

⁶ Missing values were excluded pairwise, i.e. only affect scores on the specific variable.

categories, respondents in Nepal and even more so in Bhutan, are much more likely than respondents in India to support the notion of women's capacities in public life, after controlling for all other variables in the model. There are also differences between respondent categories; leaders – whether from politics or civil society – are more inclined to consider women to be capable of public activity than are ordinary citizens. There is a small gender difference as well, men being somewhat less inclined to value women's contributions.

The findings suggest that positive attitudes to women's capacities is not linked with a more urban and modern way of living. It is people living in rural and semi-urban areas that stand out as clearly more supportive of women's public role compared with people in urban areas. Perhaps surprisingly, a respondent's educational level and income do not have a visible effect on respondent attitudes towards women's capacities. Neither does the respondent's age matter.

Family reputation

The second model, with attitudes on whether women's public participation influences her *family's reputation*, is slightly stronger than the first in that 12 per cent of variability is explained ($R^2 = 0.12$). Again the results reveal considerable differences between the surveyed areas. Once more India stands out as least supportive of women's external participation for this dimension, this time with Bhutan in a middle position and respondents in Nepal much less likely to associate women's participation with a negative impact on family reputation. There are also differences between respondent categories, with political leaders being the least inclined to believe that family reputation gets tarnished by women's participation, while civil society and household members are both more likely to associate these two aspects negatively. Men are more concerned with the impact on the family reputation of women's participation than women are, but differences are rather small.

This dimension of threats to family reputation appears to be linked with social class, as individuals with high income and education tend to think that women's participation does not tarnish family reputation. Economic resources (measured in terms of household facilities) turned out to have a considerable effect on these attitudes, the higher economic status, the less likelihood of expressing a negative link between women's participation and family reputation. Education has a certain positive effect on the dependent variable – the more educated being less concerned with family reputation. The negative effect of organisational activity, however, is surprising. We would have expected women who are active in organisations to be more aware of women's rights and to be more accustomed to women playing a role in public life. This is similar to the finding above on capacity.

Women's responsibilities for children and domestic duties

The third model, concerning attitudes towards women's responsibilities for children and domestic duties, is the strongest of the three regression models. As much as 25 per cent of the variability of the dependent variable, can be attributed to the respondents' scores on the independent variables (R squared = 0.25). Much of this variation is attributed to survey location. Respondents in Nepal stand out as clearly least likely to underline women's domestic duties; again we find India respondents at the other side of the scale associated with attitudes that put the most constraints on women's external participation. Women's domestic duties are stressed in rural and, in particular, semi-urban environments. For this variable we find only very moderate differences between different categories of respondents when all other variables in the model have been controlled for, though with political leaders being the least likely to emphasise women's domestic duties.

Women are somewhat less likely than men to consider women to be the responsible for domestic duties. Higher economic status (measured by household amenities) is associated with lower inclination to see women as the sole responsible for home duties. The effects of having undergone training and being active in organisations make respondents more likely to view household duties

as a shared responsibility. Thus, for this dimension, being active in organisations has the expected effect of resulting in more gender equal attitudes.

Exploring explanations for positive attitudes towards women's participation

A majority of respondents across the three countries report positive attitudes towards women's role in politics, thus accepting that women take up public roles. This applies to three diverse localities that according to the literature have been characterised by negative attitudes towards women. These findings indicate that negative attitudes towards women's political participation have loosened their grip on household and communities as respondents are less concerned about negative implications for women's domestic role and the family's reputation, and they take a more positive view of women's capacities. Women hold slightly more positive attitudes compared with men on all the three dimensions. The difference is so small, however, that the main message is that women and men share similar views.

Do the data give any indication of why respondents display positive attitudes? Firstly, which household level variables are connected with positive attitudes, and do respondents with a modern life style tend to display more positive attitudes, as proposed by our first hypothesis. Among the variables we tested, only being a political leader is connected with positive scores on all three dimensions. Political leaders are more inclined than other respondents to support the notion that women and men have equal capacities suggesting political leaders experience that women and men are equally capable. The findings from this study, supports previous research findings that women and men are equally capable to perform well in a local political setting in which politics is about the common, local interest of community development. For example, there are only small differences between women and men in service delivery outcomes (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004, Anitha, Bharadwaj et al. 2008). Political leaders are also less concerned about implications

for family reputation and women's domestic responsibilities. Political leaders are perhaps more independent minded, and motivated by doing service to the community, in a way that makes them feel less constrained by social norms compared with ordinary citizens.

When we take a closer look at the variables that have a positive effect on some of the dimensions, we find that economic status, education, being a member of an organisation, and urban/rural residency matter but these variables are not consistently linked with positive attitudes on all three dimension. As expected, respondents who had a relatively high *economic status* were less worried about the family's reputation and more likely to think that the political and domestic roles were compatible, but economic status was not connected with positive attitudes towards women's capacities. High *education* also had a positive impact on the reputation dimension, however, education level did not have an impact on views on women's domestic role and her capacities as we had expected. We had expected *urban* respondents to hold more positive views, in line with an argument that urban residents are more likely to hold jobs outside the home, to have had school-going experience, and to have more opportunities for using public transport to move outside the home. Rather, we found the opposite. Respondents from rural areas are more positive than urban respondents with regard to women's capacities, while urban versus rural settlement does not have an impact on the other two dimensions.

We found that *being active in organisations* is linked to more liberal views on women's domestic role, whereas these respondents are not more positive in their views on women's capacities or the effects of women's participation on the reputation of the family. This suggests that being active in organisations has a more limited impact on views on political participation than expected based on the literature where civil society participation is often seen as a means to awareness creation and empowerment (Shrestha and Hachhethu 2002, Subramaniam 2012). This may have to do with the kind of organisations the respondents are engaged in. Respondents were active mainly in

credit- and savings groups, other self-help groups, and agricultural cooperatives. While participation in such groups may improve participants' livelihoods and strengthen their social networks, participation may not change traditional norms, nor build awareness on women's rights. Participation in community organisations may rather serve as instruments to strengthen the role of women as home makers and mothers because women through their participation contribute to the family livelihood or the family's social status in the community. The finding that participation in organisations is perceived to be compatible with women's domestic role, supports the notion that this activity does not challenge women's traditional role as home maker.

Having participated in various *training programmes* is linked with positive views on women's domestic role, but such participation is linked with negative views on women's capacities. It could be that women who have participated in training programmes observe that being a participant in such programmes does not conflict with performing a domestic role, and by implication, taking part in other public activities is also compatible with a domestic role. It is puzzling why people who have undergone training are not more positive in their views on women's capacities. A possible explanation could be that training programmes have the effect of uncovering weaknesses in women's capacities, and participants may also have realised that building capacities is a long term endeavour. They may also become more aware of the complex tasks involved in being local elected representative, and how difficult it may be in combining with household and care work⁷. Finally, there could be a selection effect, in that persons who have undergone training had less capacities than other respondents, and tended to think that the capacities of women in politics were limited, too.

⁷ Women being trained in Bhutan (September 2015) referred to this when interviewed about their training sessions.

Overall, the findings do *not* support the idea that attitudes are more positive in urbanised or modern settings in which women have gone to school and participate in social networks, such as community-based organisations. This indicates that as women more often cross the public-private divide in the social and economic arena, this shift does not translate into higher acceptance for women's political participation. Perhaps politics is fundamentally different from other public spaces. Whereas the entire family benefits from women's participation in the paid workforce or from her better education, politics may still have characteristics that make it a male domain and that dissuade women, or make politics incompatible with the definition of being a 'good woman'.

The second hypothesis concerns numerical representation, and the difference it makes to attitudes. First a note of caution. The household level data set we draw on, does not offer guidance for a country-level, comparative discussion, consequently the ideas presented below are tentative and intended to link our findings with the broader debate on how to facilitate women's political participation through active measures designed to support women's leadership. Despite policies of reservation in India that have led to a sharp increase in women's participation, respondents in India show the least supportive attitudes. This contrasts sharply with the situation in Nepal where respondents show the most positive attitudes towards women's participation in politics. Social structures and values are similar in Nepal and India. Both societies are majority Hindu and caste based, while patriarchy has governed gender relations. The more gender equal views held in Nepal are likely to be a result of the tremendous social, military and political mobilisation in the last generation with gender equality being situated at the core of the social inclusion agenda. Women's participation in all public arenas has increased and it is likely that attitudes towards women's participation in local politics reflect these changes in the practice of women's participation (Hachhethu, Kumar et al. 2008, Lama 1997, Pettigrew and Schneiderman 2004, Tamang 2009). Thus, the process of political struggle and social change in Nepal since 1990 appears to have had a more profound impact on attitudes towards women's political

participation than has reservation. This does not mean, however, that numerical representation has not been an important driver for attitudinal changes in India, keeping in mind that the main finding of this study is that attitudes are positive.

Respondents in Bhutan are particularly supportive in their views on women's capacities but are also less worried about women's reputation and tend to believe in sharing of domestic responsibilities. Political leaders in Bhutan are the least likely to believe that women's civil society and political participation tarnish family reputation. This finding may reflect more gender equal and liberal family relations in Bhutan. In Bhutan, divorce is common, and marriages are easy to enter into and to leave for both men and women. Social structures in Bhutan differ as Western Bhutan from where respondent were drawn, traditionally has been matrilineal and matrilocal, with the eldest daughter inheriting the agricultural land, and women being responsible for farming. Gender equality is also established in Bhutanese law. Although Bhutan has traditionally been more gender equal compared to other South Asian countries, politics was solely in the male domain until democracy was introduced in 1999. Positive attitudes may also have been influenced by the strong nation-wide, UN backed campaign on promoting women's political participation and targeted training activities for women candidates ahead of the elections. The positive views may reflect the population's responsiveness to the message on women's equal capacities, which were part of the electoral campaigns to encourage women to stand as candidates for elections. The UN supported campaigns thus linked the new, democratic institutions with women's rights to participation perhaps succeeding in building a general awareness on women's rights to participation. There is no available data, however, to document the effect of the campaign on attitudes.

Conclusion

Although the discussion above had focused on differences in respondents' background variables, and across countries, the main message from the survey is that attitudes are positive across respondent categories and countries. Disaggregated attitudes cluster along three dimensions; women's capacities, family reputation and domestic responsibilities. The positive attitudes on these dimensions indicate that political participation at the local level no longer is perceived to threaten the family's honour like before. Political leaders are the most likely to display positive attitudes. Whereas high economic status is linked with positive attitudes, surprisingly, we found that education and organisational membership each is linked with only one of the dimensions, and urban location does not have a positive impact. So, women and men who show high scores on social participation, or who live in urban areas, are not more accepting of women's political participation than others. This indicates that women's participation in the public space in general, is not associated with a higher propensity to accept women's participation in political. The three countries have been set on different paths towards women's participation in local politics, Bhutan through democratisation of a matri-local society and comprehensive information campaigns, Nepal through political, social and military mobilisation, and India through reservation. These processes and measures are likely to have impacted on social norms that define women's role in politics, triggering a shift towards more positive attitudes. Finally, we argue that women's engagement at the local level is about delivering local development. Compared with traditional political leadership characterised by power and patronage, this notion of politics is likely to be less at odds with women's traditional role as homemakers.

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Respondents for the Women Political Participation Survey

	Number of respondents	Household members	Political leaders	Civil society leaders	% women among HH respondents	% women of political and civil society leaders
Karnataka total	4759	2309	1226	1224	49.9	49.1
<i>Gulberga</i>	<i>1197</i>	<i>588</i>	<i>305</i>	<i>304</i>	<i>50.5</i>	<i>49.1</i>
<i>Dharwad</i>	<i>1190</i>	<i>578</i>	<i>306</i>	<i>306</i>	<i>50.7</i>	<i>48.5</i>
<i>Mysore</i>	<i>1190</i>	<i>577</i>	<i>306</i>	<i>307</i>	<i>49.0</i>	<i>49.3</i>
<i>Chitradurga</i>	<i>1182</i>	<i>566</i>	<i>309</i>	<i>307</i>	<i>50.2</i>	<i>49.5</i>
Nepal	1182	579	298	305	49.9	49.9
Bhutan	706	511	102	93	51.9	44.1
Total	6647	3399	1626	1622	50.3	49.0

Table 2: Principal Component Analysis. Pattern matrix. Loadings of 0.4 and above are reported. (N = 6647)

	Component		
	1	2	3
Women should stay at home and look after children			.877
Women's role is to look after family			.874
Women act according to peers, friends			
Women in CSO tarnish family reputation		.932	
Women in politics tarnish fam reputation		.937	
Women should take part in politics equally with men	.537		
It is good when women work outside household	.659		
Women have the ability to become effective leaders	.735		
Public space: Women's opinions equally important	.903		
Private space: Women's opinions equally important	.880		

Table 3. Multiple regression analysis. Factor scores of three dimensions from PCA used as continuous dependent variables. N =6647

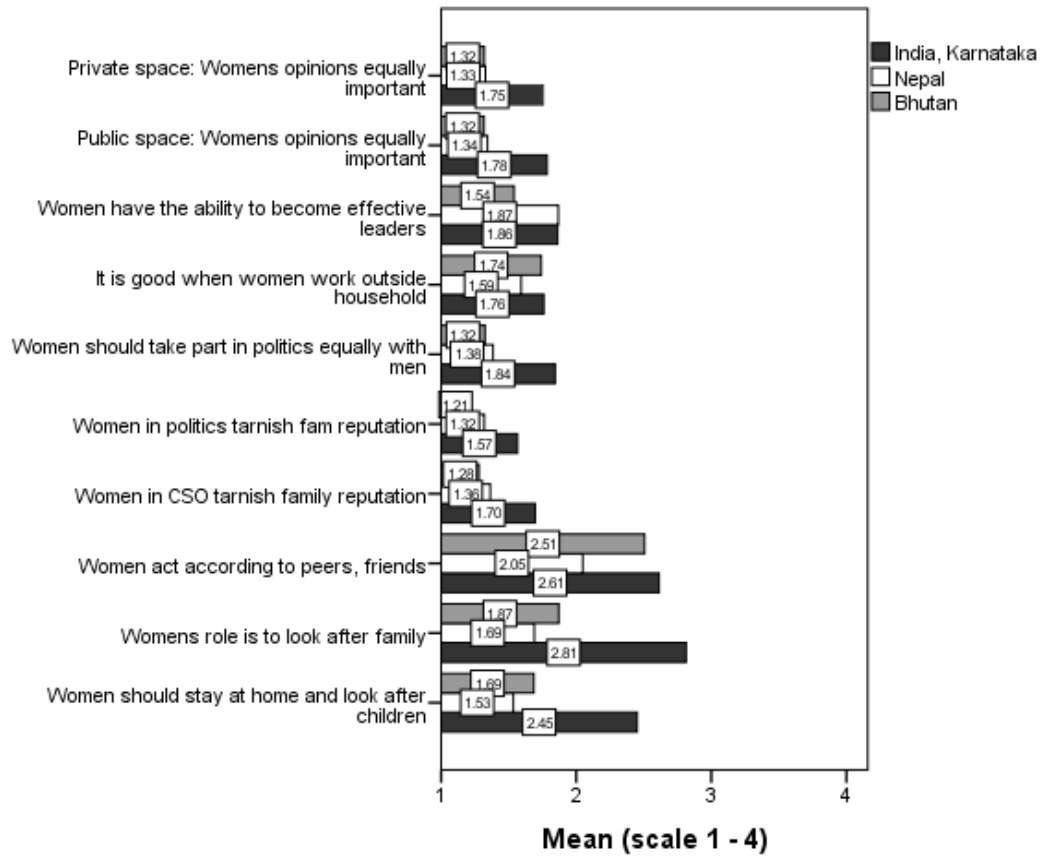
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Abilities		Reputation		Responsibilities	
	Stand. coeff.	Significance	Stand. coeff.	Significance	Stand. coeff.	Significance
Constant		.029*		.565		.565
Civil society leader (vs political leader)	.018	.260	-.056	.000**	-.056	.000**
Ordinary citizen (vs. political leader)	-.097	.000**	-.097	.000**	-.097	.000**
Nepal (vs. Karnataka)	.073	.000**	.169	.000**	.169	.000**
Bhutan (vs. Karnataka)	.165	.000**	.086	.000**	.086	.000**
Rural (vs urban)	.192	.000**	.193	.000**	.193	.000**
Semiurban (vs urban)	.218	.000**	.057	.000**	.057	.000**
Men (vs women)	-.081	.000**	-.064	.000**	-.064	.000**
Age group (continuous)	-.021	.147	.003	.831	.003	.831
Educational level (continuous)	.016	.327	.073	.000**	.073	.000**
Household size (continuous)	-.015	.239	.012	.331	.012	.331
Household head (vs. all others)	.009	.620	-.006	.769	-.006	.769
Spouse of hh head (vs. all others)	-.013	.516	-.081	.000**	-.081	.000**
Home maker (vs agricultural worker)	.007	.645	-.020	.200	-.020	.200

Salary based service (vs. agr wk)	.054	.000**	-.034	.019*	-.034	.019
Wage labour (vs. agr wk)	.030	.037*	-.058	.000**	-.058	.000**
Trade, commerce, business (vs. agr wk)	.030	.037*	-.022	.126	-.022	.126
Other occupation (vs. agr wk)	.051	.000**	.022	.091	.022	.091
Number of household facilities	.035	.030*	-.121	.000**	-.121	.000**
Active in organisation or movement	-.067	.000**	-.087	.000**	-.087	.000**
Participated in training	-.038	.009**	.027	.056	.027	.056
Men eat first in household	.115	.000**	.019	.143	.019	.143
Adjusted R square	0.10		0.12		0.25	

**Significant at 0.01 level

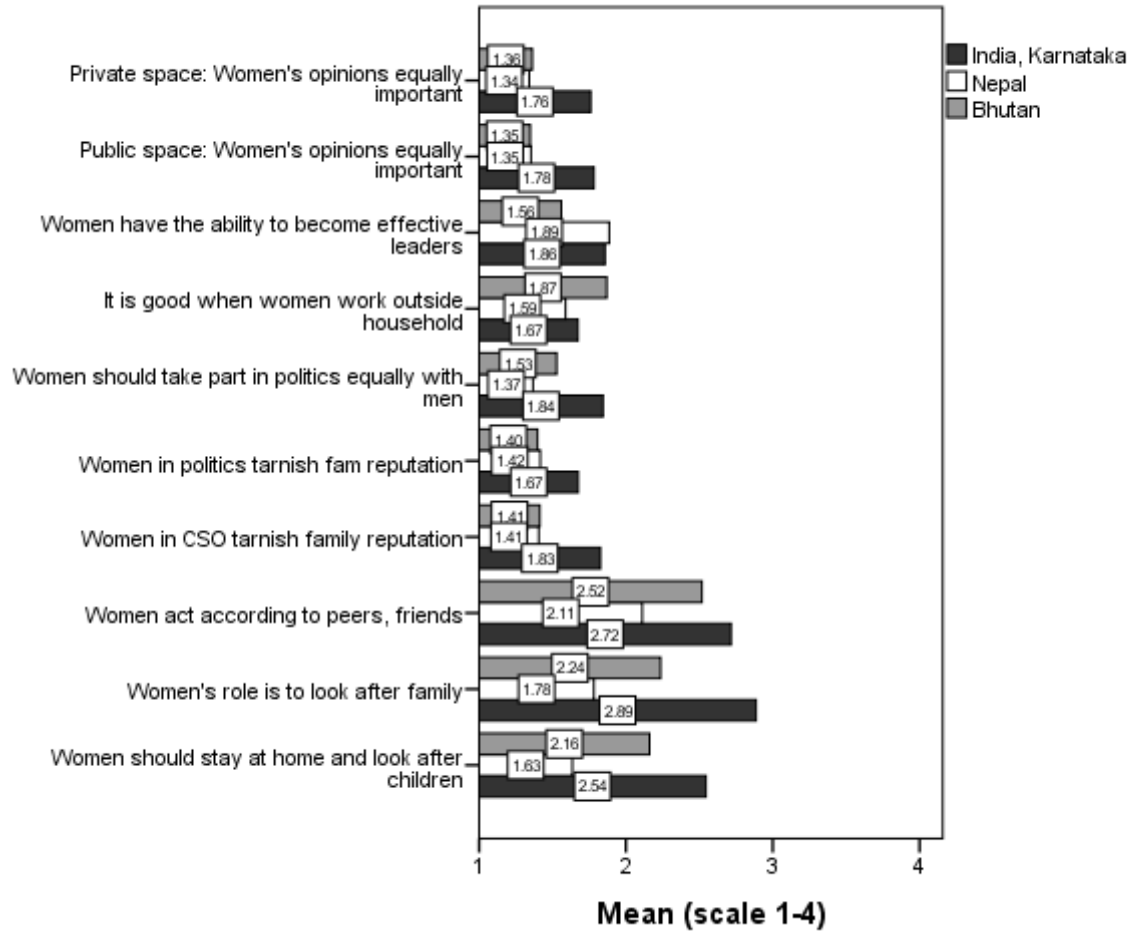
* Significant at 0.05

Figure 1: Attitudes towards aspects of women’s participation in politics. Mean for political leaders on a scale from 1 (fully supportive of women’s participation) to 4 (fully unsupportive) (N = 1621)



***Responses do not know and not stated are have been excluded.

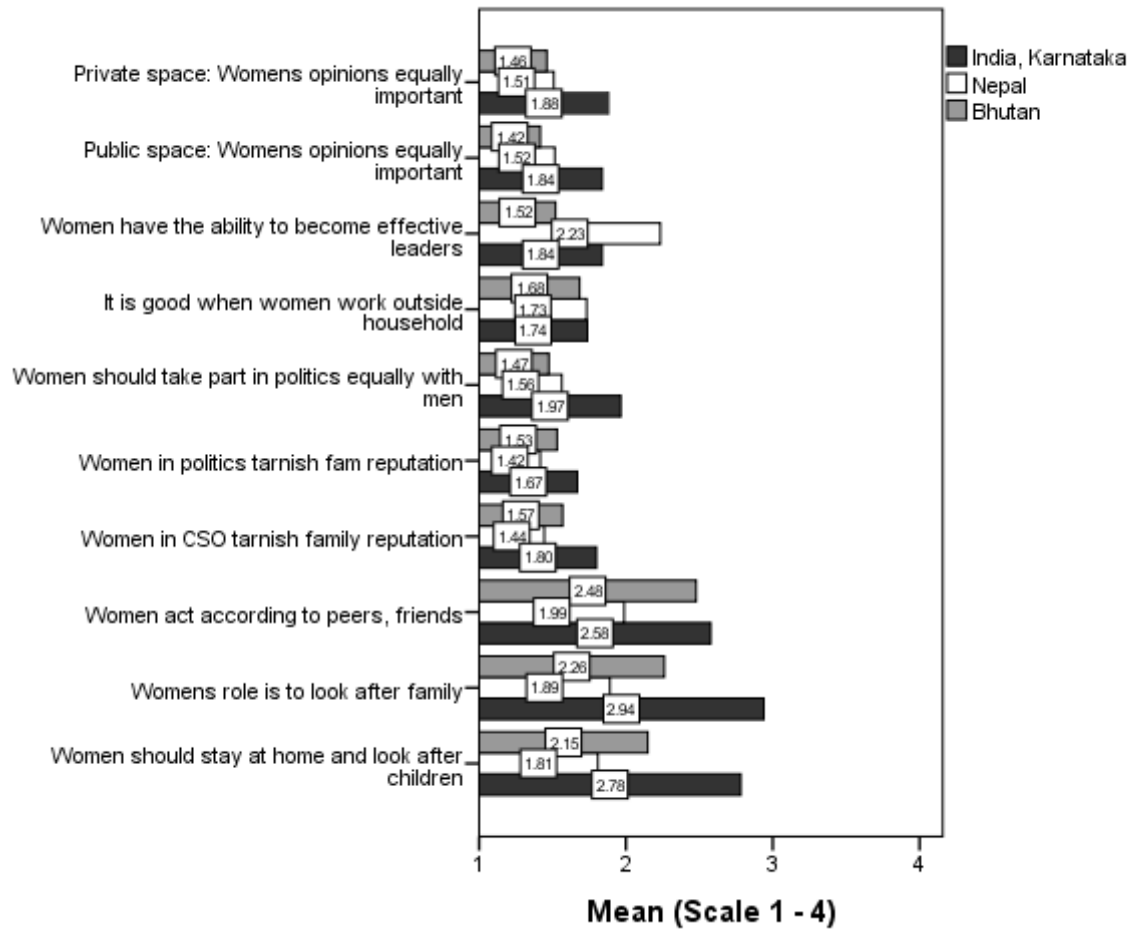
Figure 2: Attitudes towards aspects of women's participation in politics. Mean for civil society leaders on a scale from 1 (fully supportive of women's participation) to 4 (fully unsupportive) (N = 1620)



***Responses do not know and not stated are have been excluded.

Figure 3: Attitudes towards aspects of women’s participation in politics. Mean for household members on a scale from 1 (fully supportive of women’s participation) to 4 (fully unsupportive)

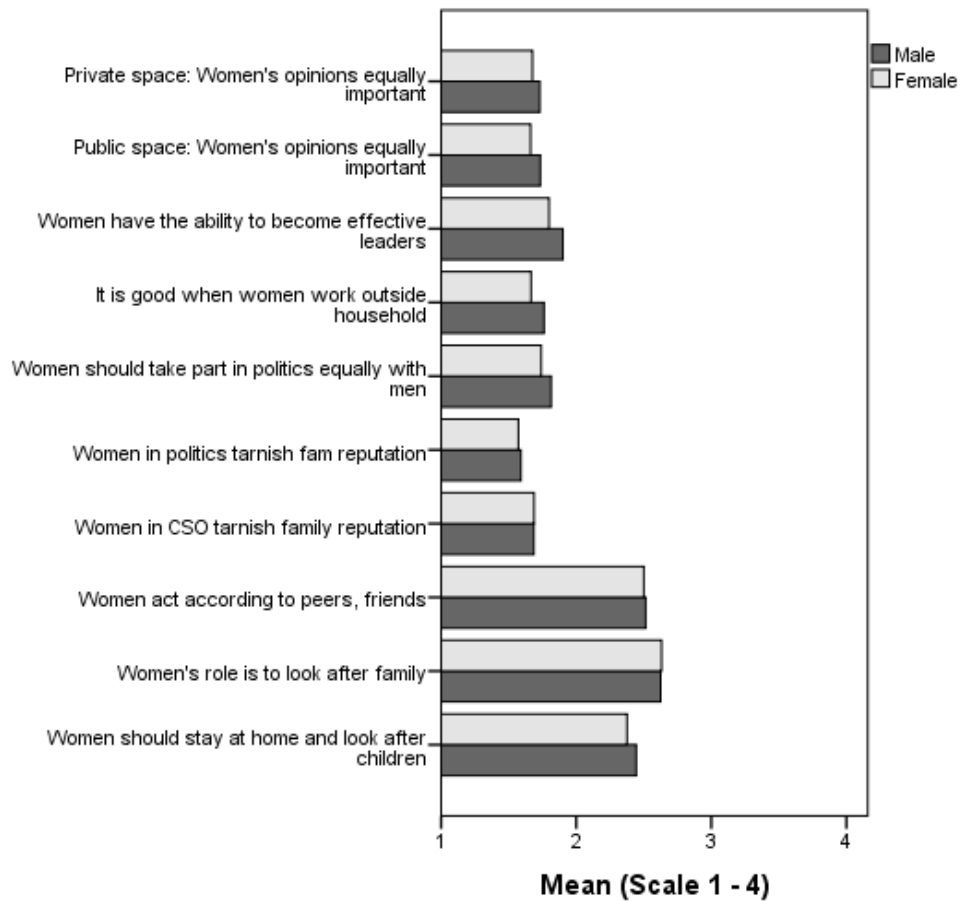
(N = xx)



***Responses do not know and not stated are have been excluded.

Figure 4: Attitudes towards aspects of women’s participation in politics. Mean for women and men on a scale from 1 (fully supportive of women’s participation) to 4 (fully unsupportive).

Unweighted results for all respondent categories (N = 6647)



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