

Understanding Voter Preferences and Qualities Sought in Elected Candidates

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Abstract:

Introduction: The need for academic credentials for politicians is a topic of much discussion worldwide. As a result, Nepal being divided into federal, provincial, and municipal levels, political leaders from diverse parties have emerged, raising questions about their academic credentials for the roles they have at various levels of the state. This study tries to demonstrate how Nepalese voters view the importance of academic credentials for politicians.

Methods:A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 200 voters in Nuwakot district, Bagmati Province, using a semi-structured questionnaire. The data analysis was performed in SPSS version 20 including univariate and bivariate analyses with 93.5% of Cronbach's alpha test.

Results: The findings shows voting behavior and preferences, including frequency of voting, party loyalty, perceived importance of votes, and research conducted on candidates. The study highlights the perception of voters towards qualities of elected candidates, emphasizing the value placed on education, systematic development, and ethical conduct. The study presents the ranking of candidate qualities, with well-educated candidates and those who consider consequences being highly regarded.

Conclusion: In addition to advocating for gender equality, raising women's political knowledge, improving educational possibilities, supporting thorough candidate screening, and boosting openness and responsibility in politics are suggested.

Keyword: *Voter's perception, educational level, politician's qualification, Nepal*

Introduction

An individual's personal and professional lives are greatly impacted by their education. After completing formal schooling, one may be academically qualified. In order to combat the political instability across all countries, especially in low- and middle-income countries, education has become a crucial necessity income (1). A certificate, diploma, or degree is a sort of academic qualification that attests to the achievement of program or stage success in

education (2). Politicians are key players in governing the nation's political system. They have the authority to enact laws and represent the interests of the people, which emphasizes the need for effective leadership (3).

There are many debates around the world regarding the requirement of academic qualifications for politicians. There are also previous studies that depict the significant relationship between a higher level of education and disposition to engage in politics (4). The interdependence of politics and education is evident, as academic qualifications play a crucial role in shaping effective political leadership and decision-making processes (5). The relationship between politics and education is complex, particularly in low and middle-income countries like Nepal, where the academic qualification of politicians is lacking, resulted in an educational gap, contributing to political instability and hindered development in the country. The categorization of Nepal into federal, provincial, and local levels has led to the emergence of political leaders from various parties, raising concerns about their academic qualifications for the positions they hold at different levels of the state. Nepal's slow-paced development and persistent poverty and hunger contrast with the progress of its neighboring countries(6).

Political instability, corruption, nepotism, and a lack of accountability and transparency, stemming from a deficiency in academic qualifications among politicians, impede the nation's progress and hinder effective leadership qualities(7). Undoubtedly, a lack of academically qualified politicians can disrupt the smooth functioning of the activities to run the country peacefully leading to frequent strikes and increasing corruption (8). Hence, this study aims to highlight the voters' perception on the need for academic qualification among the politicians of Nepal.

Methods

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 200 voters from the Nuwakot district of Bagmati Province, Nepal. The participants having voter card were collected data by using the semi-structured questionnaire and a face-to-face interview, after getting permission from the individual. The collected data was entered into SPSS version 20 for analysis where univariate and bivariate analyses was done and Cronbach alpha test was run to test the internal reliability of the Likert-scale questions, which was 93.5%.

Results

1. Socio-demographic Information

Table 1: Socio-demographic Information

Socio-demographic Characters	Frequency (n=200)	Percent (%)
Age of the respondents (years)	15-24	27
	25-54	66
	55-64	4
	Above 65	3
Gender	Male	62
	Female	38
Marital Status	Married	75.5
	Unmarried	24
	Separated	0.5
Caste	Brahmin	8.5
	Chettri	12.5
	Janajati	71
	Dalits	8
Religion	Hindu	38.5
	Buddhism	61
	Christian	0.5
Educational status	Illiterate	8
	Primary level	10
	Secondary level	23.5
	Higher secondary level	29.5
	Bachelor	21
	Masters and above	8
Occupational status	Professionals	16.5
	Business	30.5
	Farmers	14
	Daily wager	3
	Home maker	6.5
	Students	18.5
	Social worker	7
	Others	4
Monthly Family Income (NPR)	Up to 15000	32.5
	15000-25000	20.5
	25000-40000	26.5
	40000 above	20.5

Table 1 shows that the majority of the respondents i.e., 66% are of 25-54 years of age group, 62% male, 75.5% of the respondents are married, 71% are Janajati and 61% follow Buddhism. Also most of the respondents i.e., 29.5% of the respondents have higher secondary level of education, 30.5% are engaged in business, and 32.5% have up to 15000 NPR monthly family income.

Voter's voting experience in elections

Table 2: Voter's voting experience in elections

Statement		Frequency (n=200)	Percent (%)
Times I voted in elections	Once	65	32.5
	Two or more	135	67.5
If the party i voted for do not have a chance of winning, I would still vote for them	Yes	156	78
	No	35	17.5
	Don't Know	9	4.5
The vote you will use is very important for my society and country	I strongly agree.	105	52.5
	I agree.	86	43
	I have no idea	8	4
	I disagree.	1	0.5
I conduct enough research about the candidates before elections	Yes	147	73.5
	No	21	10.5
	Partially	32	16
The most important factor that influenced my political preference in local elections	My political views and compliance with my ideology	14	7
	Candidates' previous activities and actions	53	26.5
	Image of the candidate	56	28
	The fact that candidate knew problems of the town/ward.	65	32.5
	Party cadres and projects	12	6
The candidate I support comply with the party line and ideology of the party s/he represents	Yes	148	74
	No	22	11
	Some	30	15
The most effective source of information regarding last elections	Radio	9	4.5
	Television	9	4.5
	Newspaper or other print media	6	3
	Social media	117	58.5
	Friends and families	35	17.5
	Candidate campaigns	14	7
Election session/ meetings	10	5	

Table 2 shows that the majority of the respondents i.e., 67.5% have given their votes two time or more in elections,78% of the respondents responded that they would still vote for the party whether the party have a chance of winning or not,52.5% of the respondents strongly agreed onto think the vote they will use is very important for them and 73.5% conduct enough research about the candidates before the elections. Likewise, majority of them i.e., 32.5% responded the fact that candidate knew problems of the town/ward when asked about the most important factor that influenced your political preference in local elections and 58.5% responded social mediawhen asked about the most effective source of information regarding last elections.

Voter's perception towards qualities of elected candidates

Table 3: Perception towards qualities of elected candidates

Statement	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly agree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Elected candidates should be honest.	10	5	5	2.5	17	8.5	89	44.5	79	39.5
They should have strong ethics and values.	10	5	4	2	19	9.5	128	64	39	19.5
They should have ability to persuade other people.	6	3	5	2.5	24	12	123	61.5	42	21
They should be able to listen to others and respect their views.	4	2	4	2	16	8	120	60	56	28
They should have equal treatment to everyone.	4	2	5	2.5	14	7	105	52.5	72	36
They should be able to deal even difficult situations patiently.	7	3.5	5	2.5	15	7.5	96	48	77	38.5
They should analyze the consequences before taking any decisions.	4	2	4	2	15	7.5	88	44	89	44.5
They should have good connection and network.	4	2	3	1.5	21	10.5	88	44	84	42
They should bring about positive impact on others.	3	1.5	12	6	18	9	87	43.5	80	40
They should possess good communication skills.	7	3.5	6	3	7	3.5	115	57.5	65	32.5
They should be well-educated.	5	2.5	3	1.5	17	8.5	59	29.5	116	58
Educated politicians can develop country systematically.	5	2.5	3	1.5	21	10.5	75	37.5	96	48
Educated politicians can better understand situations and problems of people.	2	1	4	2	31	15.5	76	38	87	43.5
Educated politicians can ensure fair treatment and equality.	5	2.5	5	2.5	20	10	97	48.5	73	36.5
Education should be mandatory for participating in politics.	2	1	13	6.5	21	10.5	72	36	92	46
Educated politicians understand culture and norms of community.	6	3	2	1	24	12	103	51.5	65	32.5

Table 3 shows the perception of voters towards qualities of elected candidates, most of the respondents i.e., 44.5%,64% and 52.5% agreed on elected candidates should be honest, on elected candidates have strong ethics and values and on elected candidates have equal

treatment to everyone respectively. Likewise, 44.5%, 58%, 48% and 43.5% strongly agreed on elected candidates analyze the consequences before taking any decisions, on elected candidates be well-educated, educated politicians can develop country systematically and educated politicians can better understand situations and problems of people respectively. Similarly, 48.5% agreed on educated politicians can ensure fair treatment and equality, 46% strongly agreed on education should be mandatory for participating in politics and 51.5% agreed on educated politicians understand culture and norms of community.

Association between voters’ perception and socio-demographic characteristics of the participants

Table 4: Mean score and standard deviation of perception towards qualities of elected candidates

SN	Statements	Mean ± SD
1	Elected candidates should be honest.	4.11±1.011
2	They should have strong ethics and values	3.91±0.903
3	They should have ability to persuade other people.	3.95±0.837
4	They should be able to listen to others and respect their views.	4.10±0.783
5	They should have equal treatment to everyone.	4.18±0.825
6	They should be able to deal even difficult situations patiently.	4.16±0.925
7	They should analyze the consequences before taking any decisions.	4.27±0.843
8	They should have good connection and network	4.15±0.921
9	They should bring about positive impact on others.	4.23±0.847
9	They should possess good communication skills.	4.13±0.885
10	They should be well-educated.	4.39±0.895
11	Educated politicians can develop country systematically.	4.27±0.895
12	Educated politicians can better understand situations and problems of people.	4.21±0.848
13	Educated politicians can ensure fair treatment and equality.	4.14±0.880
14	Education should be mandatory for participating in politics.	4.20±0.939
15	Educated politicians understand culture and norms of community.	4.10±0.866

Table 4 showed that the perception towards qualities of elected candidates revealed that being well-educated (4.39 ±0.895) was considered the most important attribute, followed by the ability to develop the country systematically (4.27±0.895) and analyze consequences before making decisions (4.27±0.843). Other valued qualities included bringing about a positive impact on others(4.23±0.847), understanding the situations and problems of the people(4.21±0.848), and advocating for equal treatment(4.14±0.880). Factors such as good communication skills (4.13±0.885), honesty(4.11±1.011), respect for others' views(4.10±0.783), cultural understanding(4.10±0.866), and persuasion abilities(3.95±0.837) were also deemed significant. However, having strong ethics and values (3.91±0.903) received the lowest mean score.

Correlation between Socio-demographic characters and perception towards elected candidates

Table 5 : Correlation between Socio-demographic characters and perception towards elected candidates

Socio-demographic characters	Perception towards elected candidates	
	Pearson correlation	Sig. (Two-tailed)
Age	0.54	0.0001
Gender	0.068	0.340
Marital status	0.004	0.954
Ethnicity	0.038	0.590
Religion	0.253	0.0001
Education	-0.77	0.276
Occupational status	0.081	0.252
Monthly family income	0.576	0.0001

Table 5 shows that there is a positive correlation between age, religion and monthly family income with the perception towards elected candidates.

Crosstab between socio-demographic characteristics and Times voted in elections

Table 6: Relationship between socio-demographic characteristics and Times voted in elections

Characteristics	Times voted in elections				p-value	Chi-square	
	Once		Two or more				
	f	%	f	%			
Age of the respondents (years)	15-24	46	23	8	4	0.001	94.792
	25-54	19	9.5	113	56.5		
	55-64	0	0	8	4		
	Above 65	0	0	6	3		
Gender	Male	39	19.5	85	42.5	0.686	0.163
	Female	26	13	50	25		
Marital Status	Married	29	14.5	122	61	0.001	52.169
	Unmarried	36	18	12	6		
	Separated	0	0	1	0.5		
Caste	Brahmin	2	1	15	7.5	0.057	7.512
	Chettri	6	3	19	9.5		
	Janajati	54	27	88	44		
	Dalits	3	1.5	13	6.5		
Religion	Hindu	13	6.5	64	32	0.001	14.741
	Buddhism	52	26	70	35		
	Christian	0	0	1	0.5		
Educational status	Illiterate	0	0	16	8	0.001	36.044
	Primary level	1	0.5	19	9.5		
	Secondary level	14	7	33	16.5		
	Higher secondary level	28	14	31	15.5		
	Bachelor	22	11	20	10		
	Masters and above	0	0	16	8		
Occupational	Professionals	1	0.5	32	16	0.001	67.731

status	Business	22	11	39	19.5		
	Farmers	6	3	22	11		
	Daily wager	1	0.5	5	2.5		
	Home maker	2	1	11	5.5		
	Students	31	15.5	6	3		
	Social worker	2	1	12	6		
	Others	0	0	8	4		
Monthly Family Income (NPR)	Up to 15000	35	17.5	30	15	0.001	29.96
	15000-25000	17	8.5	24	12		
	25000-40000	7	3.5	46	23		
	40000 above	6	3	35	17.5		


Table 6 shows the relation between the age of the respondents ($p=0.001$, chi-square= 94.792), marital status ($p=0.001$, chi-square=52.169), religion ($p=0.001$, chi-square=14.741), educational status ($p=0.001$, chi-square=36.044), occupational status ($p=0.001$, chi-square=67.731)and monthly family income ($p=0.001$, chi-square= 29.96)with times voted in elections.

Discussion

The study findings indicate a diverse educational background among the respondents, with a range of educational levels represented such as higher secondary (29.5%), secondary (23.5%), bachelor's (21%), primary (10%), master's (8%). These results demonstrate the varying educational profiles within the population surveyed. Education is necessary for the economic and social development of the country (9) and for divisive issues as well as across the many committees and periods (10). Study done in England found that a more marketed and vertically stratified higher education system has circumscribed the political engagement of the students (11). Some study showed that more educated leaders lead to more educated citizens (12).

In this study, a higher percentage of male respondents (44.5%) reported conducting more research on candidates before elections compared to women (29%). These results suggest that women exhibit less engagement and awareness in the political sphere compared to men. This finding is supported by another study (4,13) and factors such as dependency on men, lack of interest in politics, and aversion to conflict may contribute to the lower participation of women(14). The study highlighted the importance of being well-educated, developing the country systematically, and analyzing consequences before making decisions as the most valued qualities in elected candidates. Some studies found leadership and integrity were necessary but the people wanted the candidate to be passionate and kind (15), presented to the public (16), equal treatment, patience, consulting others, have good connection and network (17). The policy making is dominated by a highly educated minority in the Netherlands(18).

In general, a majority of the respondents in the study (67.5%) had participated in elections

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multiple times, as voters would actively participate in the upcoming future elections (19). This study showed that 58.5% responded social media as the most effective source of information regarding last elections. Supporting this cause, similar studies have also shown the impact of social media in the society and politics (20), and influenced by TV (21,22). There was negative correlation between education and perception towards elected candidates, but monthly income of the family was moderately correlated in this study. Similar findings were observed in study by (23) which showed weak correlation was found in terms of gender, education and occupation while moderate correlation was found with monthly income.

Additionally, a significant percentage (78%) indicated that they would still vote for a party regardless of its chances of winning, and (73.5%) reported conducting sufficient research on candidates before elections where (13) showed similar findings. Studies shown that occupational background does not seem to matter for American students (24) however New Zealand students are less likely to vote for a candidate with a business background (25), citizens who are members of professional organizations generally believe politicians are less honest (26). Also, voters with higher political sophistication consider various candidate characteristics, including competence, experience, and issue positions. (27).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the diverse educational background of the respondents and the disparities in research conducted on candidates before elections, particularly among women. It emphasizes the importance of being well-educated, developing the country systematically, and considering consequences in decision-making for elected candidates. Factors like positive impact, understanding people's situations, advocating for equal treatment, and strong communication skills are also valued by the voters. The study indicates active civic participation with multiple voting experiences and party allegiance. The study recommends promoting gender equality, increasing political awareness among women, enhancing education opportunities, encouraging comprehensive candidate research, and fostering transparency and accountability in politics.

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