

NECESSARY YET INSUFFICIENT

Women's Quota for Wider Political
Representation in Sri Lanka

PRADEEP PEIRIS AND HASINI LECAMWASAM



WMC WOMEN AND
MEDIA COLLECTIVE



Norwegian Embassy
Colombo

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Preface

It is now well understood that we need equitable representation for women and other marginalized groups to enhance democratic governance. However across the board women have had to fight for such representation and political parties, which act as gatekeepers, do not inevitably or universally mediate women's entry into representative politics. In many countries women have had to wage protracted struggles to win the right to representation as they did a century ago to win the right to vote. Formal or informal affirmative measures had to be sought, and entrenched patriarchal attitudes incrementally changed. By the time of the 4th world conference on women in Beijing in 1995, women had achieved recognition for affirmative action to redress their under representation in politics. The Beijing Platform for Action noting that women made up "only 10% of the members of legislative bodies" (Art 182) globally, called for positive measures to address "structural and attitudinal barriers" (Art 186). This paved the way for temporary special measures in various forms to take hold, bringing about a shift in perception that women were not suited to enter politics (Dahlerup, 2020)¹.

Affirmative methods that were introduced varied. Scandinavian countries succeeded in introducing

informal quotas in the 1970s with most political parties gradually embracing voluntary quotas. The law on political parity in France was only won in 1999/2000 by a process of constitutional and legal reform. The Inter Parliamentary Union's 2019 report notes that more than 130 countries have adopted some form of quota policy to increase women's representation in Parliament. Various affirmative measures have been adopted worldwide to increase women's representation at local level as well.

Affirmative measures differ considerably in their form and effectivity and are often best realized "when political circumstances are favorable"². Sri Lanka witnessed such a moment of favourable political circumstances in 2016 when the passage of the Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Act No.1 of 2016³ was made possible through the initiative of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and the operationalizing of Minister for Local Government and Provincial Councils, Faizer Mustapha. However, this moment was a victory for the unceasing work and advocacy, of many women and women's organisations, to bring about legally binding affirmative measures to increase women's representation in politics.

¹ *Drude Dahlerup, Professor of Political Science and International Advisor*
Temporary Special Measures, Including Gender Quotas - types, usage, and effects

² *Lépinard and Rubio-Marín, 2018:450, quoted in Dahlerup, 2020*

³ https://elections.gov.lk/web/wp-content/uploads/publication/acts/01-2016_E.pdf

The Women and Media Collective (WMC) has been an active part of this history. The first formal acknowledgement of the underrepresentation of women in politics in Sri Lanka was included in the Women's Charter of 1993 which noted that:

“The State shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the Public and Private Sectors, in the political and public life of the country, and ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right;

a) to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies,

b) to equitable representation in the nomination process at the National, Provincial and Local government elections.”

At that point affirmative action was limited to 'equitable representation in the nominations process'. This was not wholly uncommon, most advocates for affirmative action were as yet not completely aware of how quotas should be constituted and governments were even less concerned about them.

Over the years since the 1990s, WMC approached the issue of increasing women's representation mainly by advocating with political party leaderships for increased nominations. Such a quota existed for youth under the age of 35 for Local Authorities but this was seen mainly as the preserve of young men. In general, mainstream political parties only gave women between 4% to 6% nominations and therefore women had no real opportunity to contest in any serious numbers and their representation hovered around 2% at

local government, 4% at Provincial government and less than 6% in Parliament. As nominations continued to elude women, we resorted to fielding women only lists but Sri Lanka's electoral culture that gave precedence to electing representatives through political parties, made victory through independent lists virtually impossible for women. We also began a process of working with women at the local level, enhancing their leadership skills and knowledge of local and Provincial government, in the hope that political parties would consider them for nominations. We engaged with electoral and Constitutional reform processes and worked to promote women candidates, profiling them through formal and informal media campaigns to no avail. In the face of such intransigence, we moved to promote affirmative action in the form of quotas.

However, Sri Lankan Parliamentarians were unaware and unconvinced of the need for quotas or how they should be composed and fought shy of legislating for a legally binding quota to increase women's representation in real terms. Political parties were uniformly resistant even to the idea of a voluntary quota. Women were not deemed to be deserving of political representation, certainly not to deprive sitting male members of nominations if they wished to run for re-election. As a result, while male family members too were given first preference when a sitting member died or withdrew from active politics, women appeared to receive nominations most easily at the death of a male family member in politics, especially if there was no son or brother to take preference.

The Local Authorities Quota for women

Finally, on the 6th of February 2016 the Local Authorities (Elections) Amendment Bill⁴ was passed amid chaos instigated by the Joint Opposition demanding they be recognized as a composite group and paying no attention to the momentous historic passage of the long-awaited women's quota into law. As Chulani Kodikara, wrote:

“The theatrics in parliament that day can be seen as a parody of the inattention given to the issue of women's representation in political institutions by politicians over the years.”

The shenanigans in Parliament failed not only to mark the occasion but also to debate its significance and further the discussion on the quota. This appalling lack of attention, was reflected by the media. It remarked on the quota in a desultory manner, paying far more attention to the antics of the opposition in Parliament on the day, failing to grasp its historic significance and made no attempt to further the debate on democratic governance, patriarchal dominance of political space and the non/engagement of women. Neither did it discuss the amendments with any level of care and attention to its merits or limitations.

The 2016 amendment was to undergo a more substantive revision in 2017⁵ which left the

25% quota intact but provided for women to be nominated to contest a minimum 10% of wards and compelled parties to include 50% women in the additional persons list within the new mixed system of elections which brought back the first past the post wards to complement proportional representation lists at Local Government. The Elections Commission was to ensure when declaring the results that all wards comprised of a complement of 25% women. However, the lack of understanding and informed discussion on the quota manifested in the wake of the Local Government elections in February 2018 when political party leaders, party organisers and defeated male candidates joined the chorus of decrying the women's quota as unfair and unnecessary.

The quota increased the number of women in Local Government from approximately 92 to 1991 bringing a significant shift in both electoral politics as well as in governance at the local level. Women are now firmly in place across all Councils and many of them are asserting their place in politics and marking their presence in local governance. Yet the political will and acceptance of women, their capacity and indeed their right to representative politics is not a given and is constantly challenged.

⁴ See *Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) ACT, No 1 of 2016*

⁵ See *(Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Act No. 16 of 2017)*

The need to strengthen and safeguard the Quota

The understanding of temporary special measures and affirmative action has a significant bearing on how women's representation can be enhanced. Temporary special measures are often misconstrued to mean temporary in terms of time and special in terms of form. However temporary special measures both in terms of time and in terms of form need to address historic gender discrimination and ensure that this discrimination is redressed. Therefore, these measures need to stay in place till it fulfills the goal it seeks to achieve irrespective of the time this may take.

Women's quotas are also often framed with the understanding that women are deserving of at least a minimum representation, often held to be a 'critical mass' threshold of 1/3rd. Yet such quotas immediately privilege men by allocating to them an undisputed and much larger, unequal and unacknowledged advantage. If women are allowed the concession of a 1/3 'critical mass' men are at the same time allowed the advantage of the balance 2/3rds without dispute. This allows for a continuing of the status quo within which the 'over-representation' of men is protected. The debate on the form of quotas is now shifting away from minimum representation to the idea of parity or 50:50 representation bringing about equality or balance. A further contemporary formulation addressing both gender inequality and discrimination is posited as "no less than 40% of each gender" or "minimum 30% and maximum 70% of each gender" (Dahlulap, 2020). Explaining

this nuance Dahlulap says "The fact is that genderneutral quota regulations set a maximum for both genders, while quotas for women specify a minimum for women and a maximum only for men. Consequently, gender-neutral formulations indicate that gender balance is the goal, where women now demand a means towards full power sharing. This formulation however needs to be further nuanced to include the intersectionalities of other marginalisations including class, race, ethnicity, etc. so that the balance does not continue to privilege certain groups of women at the expense of others.

Winning a quota might be half the battle won but there are ways to go to bring about attitudinal change, political will and compliance. We experienced this in the backlash to the women's quota following the February 2018 Local Government election. We need therefore to protect the quota whilst building an understanding that women must be ensured the right to equitable representations at all levels of political governance so that democracy is strengthened and reinforced. Yet broader social change needs to go hand in hand with possible political change. The underlying structural causes of gender inequality, including both the perception and the reality of the sexual division of labour in the public and the private sphere, must be addressed (including ethnic, religious, class and caste discrimination and patriarchal structures) in order to meaningfully change gender inequality.

This Study

As this research study amply illustrates while moving towards a quantitative increase in women's representation so that women may participate equitably with men in the business of doing politics it is crucial that the gains of the women's quota are consolidated and the work with women politicians at the local level continued so that we move towards increased substantive representation and a more democratic and inclusive political culture.

Wide ranging scholarly research on women in politics in Sri Lanka has long identified a welter of challenges faced by women both to enter politics and to sustain their presence in representative politics. This study undertaken in the immediate aftermath of the 2018 Local Government elections and the entry of 1991 women into local politics examines the broader experience of women politicians who have navigated the challenges of gaining nominations, contesting elections, winning ward seats, getting appointed on the additional persons list and working as sitting members of Local Authorities.

In addition, however this study provides compelling insights to the background of the women politicians

who contested in the context of the broader contemporary political discourse on the nature of political representation; the function of political parties; the electoral engineering performed by political parties; the nature of elections and electioneering.

Within this broader structure of analysis, the study inquires how various conditions such as family background, status within the party, economic capacity and political knowledge impact women politicians' ability to progress in their political career. It also investigates the degree to which women politicians conform to or challenge existing structures and arrangements when attempting to reach their goal. This is an important exigent for entrenching the democratic norm that representation must be equitable for all, and must be inclusive. This is an imperative in women's journey towards storming one of the last and immutable bastions of patriarchal control: which is the control of political power and governance in Sri Lanka.

Kumudini Samuel

January 2021

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Introduction

The struggle for increasing women's representation in the legislature has been a long and difficult one. The increase of women's representation in politics has been a commonplace election promise of the two main parties – the UNP and the SLFP – for years. However, all political parties generally go on the back foot on this issue once elections are over. Patriarchal structures in our society, and especially the dominance of men in political party structures pose a significant challenge to increasing women's participation in politics in general, and women's representation in legislative bodies in particular. Therefore, in order to overcome the structural disadvantage that women face when entering political life, women's organizations have been advocating affirmative measures, such as a quota for women in all legislative bodies.

This study examines whether the new quota will lead to an increase of women's representation in politics, what challenges these newly elected women members face inside and outside of the councils, and whether it is sustainable in the long term.

The Yahapalana government which came in to power in January 2015, under the banner of Good Governance introduced, for the first time in Sri Lankan electoral history, a mixed-electoral system for the local government election. These electoral reforms included a quota system for women candidates for the first time in Sri Lanka. As a result, women were allowed the opportunity to contest for 10% of all wards and 50% of the preferential list was also allocated to women with the proviso that all local authorities must return a minimum of 25% women under the multi member proportional system of elections introduced for local authorities. This has once again intensified the debate on the function of quotas, women's representation in legislatures, and politics in general. Among the issues in contention were: will this quota system truly improve women's representation? Will those women members who entered Local Councils through the quota represent voices and concerns of women, and bring a gender perspective into representative politics or will they be mouth-pieces of their party leadership? What are the challenges – within their own party as well as from male politicians generally - that those new women members face when acting as local counselors? It is in this context that this study was conducted to examine whether the new quota while leading to an increase in women's representation in politics will actually enable women to participate effectively in politics, what challenges these newly elected women members face inside and outside of the councils, and whether it is sustainable in the long term.

Context

At the first ever election that was held 17 years prior to the independence, two women were elected to the State Council – one directly and one following a by-election. Thereby women managed to secure 5% of the seats in the legislative as early as 1931. The problem, however, is that this percentage has remained more or less the same over seven decades, when all other South Asian countries have by far surpassed this figure with their women's quotas (Wickramasinghe and Kodikara 2012).

Despite making up slightly more than half of Sri Lanka's population, and being the chief contributors to the country's top three economic sectors that generate foreign remittances, women have largely been missing from the policy landscape where

decisions about their lives and livelihoods are made. The political landscape fails to reflect their other social and professional achievements as well, such as high literacy rates, significant increase in higher education enrollment, increasingly high occupancy of white-collar professions, etc. As such, the policy debate around increasing the substantive representation of women in politics has been intensifying in recent times. Women's representation remained low at the local level as well, up until the recent introduction of the women's quota. The following table illustrates the abysmal levels of women's representation in local government institutes during the 1966-2011 period.

DESPITE ITS CONTRIBUTION TO STRENGTHENING MARGINALIZED GROUPS, ELECTORAL STATISTICS SUGGEST THAT THE PR SYSTEM HAS DONE ALMOST NOTHING TO INCREASE WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING BODIES.

Table A: Women's Representation in Local Government from 1966 as a % of Total Membership in Municipal Councils, Urban Councils, and Pradeshiya Sabhas

	MCs	UCs	PSs	Total
1966	1.1	*1.9	**	
1970	2.9	*1.4	**	
1979	2.8	2.3	**	
1982	1.3	1.7	**	
1991	2.9	2.5	1.6	1.7
1997	3.4	2.6	1.7	1.9
2006	3.0	3.4	1.6	1.8
2008-2011	2.63	2.47	1.93	2.06

Source: Kodikara 2012, p. 10-11

**Statistics under Urban Councils in 1966 and 1970 include Urban and Town Councils which existed at that time*

***Elections not held*

Since independence, political participation in the country has increased significantly. With the expansion of the political party system and widening of democratic institutions, the way was paved for citizens living in the furthest corners of the country to take part in elections. Since the introduction of the Proportional Representation (PR) system, the efficacy of the vote further improved. As a result, individuals from hierarchically lower caste groups and minority communities also managed to get elected to the country's legislative bodies more than before. The preferential vote (each voter can cast three votes within one party/coalition) has favored candidates from culturally marginalized groups at Parliamentary elections, under the PR system (Peiris 2018). However, despite its contribution to strengthening marginalized groups, electoral statistics suggest that the PR system has done almost nothing to increase women's participation in legislative bodies.

As a consequence, current legislative bodies are mainly dominated by men, resulting in policies that are largely blind to issues specific to women, or those that tend to affect women more than men. Even once they are elected, women representatives usually have to struggle against the system in addition to delivering the duties of their office, which makes satisfactory performance very challenging for a woman politician (Brody 2009). These factors have contributed to a situation where women's representation is strikingly low across all tiers of government in Sri Lanka.

As a form of redress, a 25% quota for women in all local authorities was introduced in 2017, as the result of an enduring struggle that can be traced

back to the late 1990s. It is a measure to establish the equality of result, since formal equality – or equality of opportunity – is insufficient to ensure fairness in representation for women given the structural inequalities that prevent them from equally accessing the political terrain (Kodikara 2009). Especially in a context where parties were typically unwilling to give women nominations due to their perceived lesser capacity to command votes (as mentioned above), a mandatory quota

HISTORICALLY SRI LANKA, AS MUCH OF SOUTH ASIA, HAS SEEN A TREND OF WOMEN FROM ELITE FAMILIES WITH EXPOSURE TO FOREIGN EDUCATION AND SOCIALIZATION IN HIGH POLITICS SINCE A VERY EARLY AGE COMING INTO POSITIONS OF POWER.

ensures an increase in women's representation in local authorities beyond the historical average of 2% (Kodikara 2012). Rwanda and some Latin American countries provide examples of a women's quota being used as a stepping stone towards increasing substantive representation of women primarily by way of encouraging more women to enter into politics through competing at elections (Shvedova IDEAS 2005; Palmieri and Jabre 2005). Sri Lanka's newly introduced quota system too should be steered in a similar direction, without letting the quota be seen as an upper limit, or be used as a way of furthering the power of the party through increased seats in the legislature (Al-Jraibi 2000).

However, a further complexity to the issue is introduced by concerns of who gets the opportunity to come into local authorities through the quota. Historically Sri Lanka, as much of South Asia, has seen a trend of women from elite families with exposure to foreign education and socialization in high politics since a very early age coming into positions of power. Their credibility as political leaders had much to do with this family background, rather than their individual merit, though this is not peculiar to women given the feudal remnants still operative in South Asia (Fleschenberg 2008). The flip side of the argument is that those without family connections in politics find it extremely difficult to find an entry point into the field (Basu 2003). There is an ethnic dimension to this as well. As Kodikara (2012) shows, Sinhalese women far outnumber their minority counterparts in local authorities in Sri

entry into the local political arena has relatively little to do with prior capital of any sort, and more with involvement with the community through community activities and networks of cooperation (Basu 2003). Further, as the local is closer to women actually and emotionally than the national (Evertzen 2001), they are likely to be more receptive to the idea of engaging with local level decision-making.

In light of these realities, the move towards introducing a quota system for women at the local government level should be applauded as a step in the right direction. Much work, however, is yet to be done. As this report attempts to illustrate, continuously working with women politicians who came in through the quota is crucial in consolidating the gains of the quota, and gradually moving towards increased substantive representation.

CONTINUOUS ENGAGEMENT WITH WOMEN POLITICIANS WHO COME IN THROUGH THE QUOTA IS CRUCIAL IN CONSOLIDATING THE GAINS OF THE QUOTA, AND GRADUALLY MOVING TOWARDS INCREASED SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION.

Lanka, though the proportions changed somewhat following elections in Tamil and Muslim dominated areas during the 2008-2011 period.

Focusing on local government may provide us a way to work around this problem of dual marginalization of certain groups of women. As the Indian experience shows, what enables women's

Methodology

This study employed a mixed research method, and was carried out in six provinces – Northern, Eastern, North Western, Central, Uva, and Southern. In the samples drawn under both methods and across field locations, care was taken to include candidates who were successful in securing nominations, who were successful in securing a seat, and who were not successful in securing nominations as well. 10-15 qualitative interviews (both individual and group) per province were conducted, choosing a single district within each province. The key criterion of choosing the qualitative field location was accessibility, and therefore WMC went by the locations its partner organizations had the greatest reach in. These interviews sought to record the life experiences of the respondents in the public and private spheres since entering into politics

Additionally, a survey was used to examine the broader experience of women politicians and understand the specific issues and challenges these politicians face when contesting, getting nominated to the list, and/ or carrying out their duties since getting elected. To this end, a total of 750 interviews were conducted across 13 districts in the aforementioned provinces. District and ethnic disaggregation of the quantitative sample are illustrated in the tables below.

Interviews were conducted by a trained group of researchers using a semi-structured questionnaire. The quantitative data gathered in this study was analyzed using SPSS, while the qualitative narratives gathered were used to supplement the quantitative analysis.

District	%
Kurunegala	20.1
Badulla	20.0
Galle	19.9
Mullaitivu	8.0
Trincomalee	6.5
Jaffna	1.2
Kilinochchi	4.1
Nuwara Eliya	11.3
Kandy	2.5
Kegalle	0.1
Matale	2.9
Ampara	3.1
Batticaloa	0.1
Base	750

Ethnicity	%
Sinhala	59.6
Tamil	37.2
Muslim	3.2
Base	750

Findings

The findings of this study provide compelling insights into the background of the women politicians who contested the February 2018 local government election. Instead of letting data speak alone, in this report, an attempt has been made to let data speak to the current broader political discourse on the role of political representatives, functioning of parties, elections, and electoral engineering of parties. Within this broader structure of analysis, the study inquires how various conditions such as family background, status within the party, economic capacity, political knowledge and so on impact women politicians' ability to progress up the ladder of their political career. The women politicians who participated in this study can be

categorized into four types: 1) Those who contested wards at the election and won 2) Those who contested wards at the election and lost 3) Those who were successful in coming in through the list and 4) Those who were not successful in coming in through the list (those who were on the list but could not make it into their respective LGAs due to low votes for their party).¹ The main thrust of this study is to examine these four types of women politicians in relation to their background factors, in order to understand the profile of each type of contestant.. This identification is important in understanding the degree to which women politicians conform to or challenge existing structures and arrangements when attempting to reach their goal.

THE WOMEN POLITICIANS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THIS STUDY CAN BE CATEGORIZED INTO FOUR TYPES: 1) THOSE WHO CONTESTED THE ELECTION AND WON 2) THOSE WHO CONTESTED THE ELECTION AND LOST 3) THOSE WHO WERE SUCCESSFUL IN COMING IN THROUGH THE LIST AND 4) THOSE WHO WERE NOT SUCCESSFUL IN COMING IN THROUGH THE LIST.

1 Though the women who were included in the additional persons list were not expected to contest at any ward, they had to take part in their party's campaign programme across the entire electoral district, as opposed to the smaller jurisdiction of the ward that those who contested at the ward level were expected to campaign in.

The Political Party and the Woman Representative

To contest for a place in a legislative body it is not necessary for an individual to come through a political party. Since 1931, many have contested elections as independent candidates. However, since the 1970s, in the backdrop of widening political party bases, those who contested – and more importantly won – elections as independent candidates have declined significantly (Woodward 1975; Peiris 2014). Of late, therefore, those who desire to contest and win an election have to come through one of the key political parties. The Proportional Representation (PR) system has further strengthened the position of the party and its leadership against individual politicians/ representatives. Aspiring women politicians particularly depend greatly on the party organization and its national and local leadership for candidacy and subsequent winning. As such, parties have become indispensable for increasing women's representation in politics, even with the recent introduction of a 25% quota for women in local government bodies. In this backdrop, any

discussion on challenges to increase women's representation should take in to account the current nature and function of political parties in Sri Lanka.

In this vein, the findings of the survey demonstrate that past experience in, or demonstrated knowledge of, politics is not necessarily a key determinant in securing nominations either at the ward or district level. As shown in Table 01, among those who contested and won there are women politicians with varying numbers of years of political experience. Among those who contested wards and lost, 42% have more than 10 years of experience in politics, and the remainder less than that. This pattern remains with those women politicians who contested the 2018 local government election from their respective party lists. These figures suggest that the individual's political experience has only so much impact on their ability to fair well at elections. Interestingly, this trend is visible among male politicians too (Peiris 2014). Peiris (2014) demonstrates how the intense intra-party competition encouraged by the PR system has transformed the traditional local level political leadership into a fragile and highly competitive one, with increased possibility for an individual who is relatively new to politics to become a local political representative. The survey results of this study confirm the prevalence of this phenomenon even among women politicians.

ANY DISCUSSION ON CHALLENGES TO INCREASE THE ABILITY OF A WOMAN POLITICIAN TO BECOME A MEMBER OF HER LOCAL LEGISLATURE IS NOT DETERMINED BY HER INDIVIDUAL POLITICAL EXPERIENCE.

Table 1: Number of years of political experience by candidate type

	Candidate type (%)			
	Contested and Won	Contested and lost	Won from the list	Lost from the list
1 to 5 years	29.0	43.3	27.9	42.6
6 to 10 years	16.6	14.6	23.0	15.6
11 to 20 years	24.8	22.3	20.6	16.8
Above 20 years	29.7	19.7	28.5	25.0
Base	145	157	165	244

UNDER THE PR SYSTEM, THERE IS INCREASED POSSIBILITY FOR AN INDIVIDUAL WHO IS RELATIVELY NEW TO POLITICS TO BECOME A LOCAL POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVE.

According to the survey findings, not only does experience in politics have no strong correlation with the electability of women politicians, but their time in the party has no strong relationship with their electability either. This phenomena is clearly visible amongst the women who contested from the SLFP and the SLPP. A majority of the women politicians who participated in the study has only one to five years of experience with the party from which they contested (or were listed) for the February 2018 local government election (see Table 02). This is, of course, not a generalizable proposition as the participants were not chosen randomly. However, the presence of this pattern merits special attention. More than half among those who contested and won state that they only have one to five years of experience with their party. Interestingly, a similar proportion of those who managed to enter their

respective local councils through the list state that they too have only one to five years of experience. According to the survey findings, out of the women who contested and won but have only one to five years experience in the party, a majority (62%) does not have family members engaged in politics in the past or at present. Therefore, it shows that the women's quota introduced at the February 2018 local government election, has attracted a set of women into politics who are new to their respective party. The same pattern can be observed among the women politicians who managed to enter their local councils through the list put forward by their party.

ACCORDING TO THE SURVEY FINDINGS, NOT ONLY DOES EXPERIENCE IN POLITICS HAVE NO STRONG CORRELATION WITH THE ELECTABILITY OF WOMEN POLITICIANS, BUT THEIR TIME IN THE PARTY HAS NO STRONG RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR ELECTABILITY EITHER.

Table 02: Number of years of experience in the party by candidate type

	Candidate type (%)			
	Contested and Won	Contested and lost	Won from the list	Lost from the list
1 to 5 years	55.2	47.8	53.3	56.1
6 to 10 years	9.0	15.3	17.6	11.5
11 to 20 years	15.9	19.7	9.7	14.3
Above 20 years	20.0	17.2	19.4	18.0
Base	145	157	165	244

The fact that women without a long history in politics and party work are entering career politics can be seen both as a positive as well as a negative development with regards to increasing women's representation in politics. At the 2018 local council election, political parties were compelled to nominate women in some seats merely to satisfy the 25% requirement. According to some local party organizers, to fulfill the required numbers they had to desperately search for women who could be successful candidates. This partially explains why many women with less experience in politics and party work were able to enter local councils at this election. The sudden demand for women politicians has also given opportunity for male party officials to introduce their own choice – spouse, relative or someone close to them – as candidates, and thereby strengthen their position within the party ranks as well as their electorate.² One must not be extra critical of the development that women with less political experience and party history are entering into career politics, as it may not be that different from the case of local level male politicians.

THE FACT THAT WOMEN WITHOUT A LONG HISTORY IN POLITICS AND PARTY WORK ARE ENTERING CAREER POLITICS CAN BE SEEN BOTH AS A POSITIVE AS WELL AS A NEGATIVE DEVELOPMENT WITH REGARDS TO INCREASING WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS.

² This fact was revealed in our interviews and group discussions conducted in Badulla and Kurunegala.

Knowledge Provides an Edge

Women lag behind when competing with men in electoral politics. Factors such as electoral violence, corruption, and cultural norms that characterize Sri Lankan electoral politics work against the interests of women who aspire to venture in to a political career. During a group discussion the author asked some local level aspiring women politicians what they think would mark their presence in the male dominated local level party organization. Sharing their personal experience within local level party organization, a few women political activists said that they typically draw the attention of their male colleagues if they exhibit knowledge on policies, laws, and constitutional matters.

In the survey an attempt was made to examine the relationship between the political knowledge of local level women politicians and their electability. The study inquired into their subjective knowledge (how much knowledge they think they

A FEW WOMEN POLITICAL ACTIVISTS SAID THAT THEY TYPICALLY DRAW THE ATTENTION OF THEIR MALE COLLEAGUES IF THEY EXHIBIT KNOWLEDGE ON POLICIES, LAWS, AND CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS.

have) on i) laws governing local government ii) the constitution iii) the ideology of the party that they represent, and iv) the country's history. The survey findings reveal a positive correlation between the woman politician's knowledge and her electability. More of those who contested and won believe that they have knowledge on the laws governing local government than those contested and lost. In general those who contested from the list do not believe that they are 'very knowledgeable' on local government laws.

THE SURVEY FINDINGS REVEAL A POSITIVE CORRELATION BETWEEN THE WOMAN POLITICIAN'S KNOWLEDGE AND HER ELECTABILITY.

Table 3: Knowledge about laws governing local government bodies by candidate type

	Candidate type (%)			
	Contested and Won	Contested and lost	Won from the list	Lost from the list
Very knowledgeable	23.4	9.6	12.7	11.9
Somewhat knowledgeable	62.1	68.2	70.3	66.4
Little knowledgeable	14.5	19.1	16.4	17.2
Not knowledgeable at all	0.0	3.2	0.6	4.5

The pattern continues with regards to their knowledge on the constitution. Those who contested and won reported the highest percentage that claimed they have thorough knowledge of it (21.4%). A comparatively less percentage of women who lost the election claims that they studied the constitution thoroughly. In general, a majority of the women who contested from the list do not state that they have studied the constitution thoroughly.

All four types of respondents claimed to be either very knowledgeable or somewhat knowledgeable about their party ideology, with no great variations in the relevant cumulative percentages. This pattern holds in terms of their knowledge in the history of the country as well as the history of their respective parties. However, it should be reiterated here that on all these counts, those that recorded the highest percentages of knowledge were the ones who contested and won.

What has been discussed thus far as the knowledge of the candidate is actually their own assessment

about their knowledge. Therefore, it is difficult to infer the effect of their real knowledge on politics on electability. However, during the discussions with women politicians in Kurunegala and Badulla, the author witnessed that those women who claim to have knowledge on politics often exhibited greater awareness on politics and certainly higher knowledge than the others. What this shows is that factors other than political experience and knowledge may be instrumental in the ability of a candidate to win elections. Therefore, any effort in increasing their knowledge and political exposure would empower women politicians to not only survive in the patriarchal political system, but also to become better politicians. Such training would contribute towards sustaining the substantial political victory that women enjoyed due to the introduction of the quota system. Further, such knowledge-based training would contribute to the increase of women's substantive representation in addition to descriptive representation

Table 4: Knowledge about the constitution by candidate type

Knowledge about the constitution	Candidate type (%)			
	Contested and Won	Contested and lost	Won from the list	Lost from the list
Have studied it thoroughly	21.4	8.3	9.7	7.8
Have studied it to a certain extent	43.4	43.3	45.5	43.9
Have not studied it but have some idea about certain sections	22.1	37.6	29.1	36.1
Have no knowledge about it at all	12.4	10.2	15.2	11.5
Don't know	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.8

Table 05: Knowledge about the party ideology by candidate type

	Candidate type (%)			
	Contested and Won	Contested and lost	Won from the list	Lost from the list
Very knowledgeable	40.7	18.6	20.6	20.7
Somewhat knowledgeable	48.3	68.6	68.5	67.8
Little knowledgeable	10.3	12.2	10.3	10.7
Not knowledgeable at all	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.8

Table 06: Knowledge about the country's history by candidate type

	Candidate type (%)			
	Contested and Won	Contested and lost	Won from the list	Lost from the list
Very knowledgeable	33.8	17.8	15.2	16.9
Somewhat knowledgeable	53.8	70.7	69.7	69.4
Little knowledgeable	11.7	10.8	15.2	12.0
Not knowledgeable at all	0.7	0.6	0.0	1.7

ANY EFFORT IN INCREASING THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND POLITICAL EXPOSURE WOULD EMPOWER WOMEN POLITICIANS TO NOT ONLY SURVIVE IN THE PATRIARCHAL POLITICAL SYSTEM, BUT ALSO TO BECOME BETTER POLITICIANS.

Women Politicians and Sources of Power

Politics is all about power – capturing, retaining and resisting. Irrespective of what level or in which theater politics is played out, it simply aims either at acquiring and preserving power, by means that may be good or “other than good”, as Machiavelli would have it. This means one (in this case, politicians) has to have the capacity to influence the decisions of others. Sri Lankan village studies and studies on political party mobilization illustrate how local level individuals emerge as influential actors in the neighbourhood or in the village (Jiggins 1979; Hettige 1984; Spencer 1990; Jayanthi 1992; Peiris 2018). All of them refer to economic capacity, status enjoyed within the cultural setting, and the horizontal and vertical connections an individual possesses within and outside of the village as factors instrumental in the making of such influence. The work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu posits that economic, cultural, and social capitals are crucial in forming one’s political power (Bourdieu 1977). Over the years, in Sri Lankan politics, some of these forms of capital lost their salience while others received new impetus as sources of power (Peiris 2018). For example, economic capacity and cultural status, factors that were key sources of power at the time of independence, have gradually declined in their salience while social connections – Social Capital as Bourdieu referred to it – rose as a very important source of power for local political actors. This is by no means to suggest that one source of power has replaced the other, but rather

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to say that some factors have got new impetus while other sources have come to play a marginal role. However, these sources of power (capitals) are convertible to other forms. For example, people can use their financial capacity to earn status within the village or build wider social networks with people in the village, as well as regional and national leaders. The aggregation of all these sources of power would eventually determine the level of political power one possesses. However, the political actor in this case plays an active role to keep his or her position of power at a higher level in relation to other contenders.

In this context, irrespective of whether it is a man or a woman, anyone desiring entry into politics, be it at

the local, national or international level, should have adequate command over, or access to, economic, cultural, and social capital. In a patriarchal society like Sri Lanka, men usually dominate the public sphere and women's affairs are mainly limited to the family and household (Tambiah 2003). Therefore, compared to men, women by default lag behind

men in terms of the above three forms of capital, unless they come from an elite family. This report employs the lens of these three forms of capital to understand what has made it possible for some women politicians to succeed while others have failed in their endeavour to enter local councils.

Financial Resources

A main deterrent for women becoming active in politics is the monetary aspect of the issue. Due to their more restricted access to financial and other forms of capital as compared to men, women are less able to find the money necessary for successful campaigning. They are also less likely than men to consider entry into politics because of the lower wages they receive, which leaves them with relatively less disposable income (Brody 2009). Previous scholarship has empirically established that the lack of adequate finances is a huge obstacle in considering politics as a career option (Kodikara 2009). The enlargement of the electoral unit – from small electorate to district electorate – has further hindered what little prospects women had to get elected because campaigning across large areas have become more capital intensive, pushing those with lower economic status (including women) out of the competition.

This study asked women political actors who contested at the February 2018 election (through open competition or the list) how much money they have spent on their election campaign. The findings clearly show that electability is strongly correlated to

their ability to spend money. Those who contested and won clearly demonstrated they have spent (an average amount of LKR 264, 191) more than those who contested and lost. However, even those who contested and lost reported to have spent an average

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sum of LKR 246,666. Interesting to note is that even those elected through the party list claim to have spent an average sum of LKR 155,160 while those who made an unsuccessful attempt through the list also have spent close to LKR 100,000. Although the table below provides the average sum spent on the election campaign by individual candidates, the real spending highly varies.

Table 07: Spending on the local election by candidate type

Candidate type (%)	Average Election spending (SLR)
Contested and Won	264, 191
Contested and lost	246, 666
Won from the list	155, 160
Lost from the list	97, 739
Total Average	179178.4

THE FINDINGS CLEARLY SHOW THAT ELECTABILITY IS STRONGLY CORRELATED TO THEIR ABILITY TO SPEND MONEY.

Discussions with some of the newly elected women local council politicians revealed that they actually spent in kind an amount that was roughly equal to the monetary figure they quoted. For instance, a woman politician from Badulla who contested and won the 2018 local government election, and who came from a family active in local politics (both her father and father-in-law have been connected to the local political apparatus for a long time, and her husband is currently holding office in the Uva Provincial Council), claimed to have used the

resources at her husband's disposal to contest the election.

Therefore, the financial capacity of the candidate will be critical for women to become successful candidates despite the introduction of a quota system. In this case, women who have got elected and have the desire to pursue a political career will seek to strengthen their financial capacities before the next election. Hence it would be tremendously difficult to keep these women away from corrupt patron-client politics.

Cultural Resources

The factors that uplift one's standing within the community can be called as cultural resources. This resource matters significantly in semi-feudal set ups like Sri Lanka where democracy exists in a strange cohabitation with hierarchical feudal networks. As in a typical feudal society, those coming from 'illustrious' families enjoy great recognition in their respective localities, which automatically grooms them as political leaders from a young age. In the early decade of electoral politics, priests, aryuvedic doctors, teachers, and senior government officials

(among others) held high status within villages. Their knowledge and skills attracted public respect and trust and hence fed the social perception that they are better qualified to hold political office than others. Hence in the early years of electoral politics, political parties approached them to form their local level leadership and to maximize their voter bases. Although cultural capital has become less salient compared to few decades ago, local level candidates still make an attempt to convince the voters that they possess various cultural resources – degrees,

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honorary positions, and references to the high status their ancestors enjoyed in society.

In the case of women politicians too, family background and the family's past role in politics are instrumental in electoral success. As Fleschenberg (2008) argues, women credibility as political leaders had much to do with this family background, more than their individual merit, though this is not peculiar to women given the feudal remnants still operative in South Asia. Historically Sri Lanka, as much of South Asia, has seen a trend of women from elite families with exposure to foreign education and socialization in high politics since a very early age coming into positions of power.

The findings of this study concur with the above observation that family background matters when contesting for elections. Those who contested and won seem to be the group to come from a political family the most (involved in politics in the past and presently as well – 34.9%; presently – 32.4%; in the past – 30.9%). In general, those who came from the list seem to demonstrate family connections to politics more than those who contested. Many women politicians who participated in the qualitative discussion claimed they have family connections to politics – in their immediate families or amongst their relatives. This hints at the instrumentality of family background in attracting the attention of parties in the first place, which then enables a woman to either contest or come in through the list. Noteworthy here is that a number of women had taken up the opportunity presented by the quota to either fill in for a dead relative, or to honour their memory as requested by the community. Kodikara (2009) has termed this the 'widows, wives and daughters syndrome', one that reflects a longstanding tradition in South Asian countries.

Table 08: Family involved in politics by candidate type

	Candidate type (%)			
	Contested and Won	Contested and lost	Won from the list	Lost from the list
In the past and currently involved in politics	18.1%	10.9%	19.0%	16.2%
Currently involved in politics	6.5%	4.1%	6.3%	5.1%
In past involve in politics	21.7%	21.1%	15.2%	16.2%
Neither in the past not currently involved in politics	53.6%	63.9%	59.5%	62.4%
Base	138	147	158	234

Access to Social Networks

In Bourdieu's (1984) scheme, social capital refers to social resources in the form of networks and contacts that are based on mutual recognition. A social network is a social structure made up of relations between social actors, groups, or institutions. The general assumption is that active involvement in community life contributes to success in politics, as one is able to build the necessary networks that may later transform into votes and vote gathering mechanisms (like popularity). As already mentioned, Sri Lankan literature has well documented the role played by networks in electoral mobilization (Jiggins

1979; Jayantha 1992; Peiris 2018). Peiris (2014) illustrates how various business, cultural, and kinship based networks are utilised by political parties and candidates as vote gathering machines around the time of elections. Therefore, not only national and regional level politicians, but also individuals with political ambition usually play an active role in these networks. However, these networks are predominantly masculinized spaces and women mostly only have a very weak and subordinate form of engagement with them (need some reference).

Involvement in associations:

The survey attempted to examine the associational life, history, and current status of the women politicians who participated in the study. According to the findings, these women politicians in general claim that they were active as school kids as well as are currently active in their respective neighbourhoods, although whether this is in the capacity of leaders or participants remains unspecified. Nevertheless,

all respondents seem to have experience in public life. However, when asked about their involvement in associational life – participating and holding positions in various societies such as farmers society, funeral society, welfare society, and women's society – a relatively less percentage of women politicians said that they are very active.

Table 9: Active during school time by candidate type

	Candidate type (%)			
	Contested and Won	Contested and lost	Won from the list	Lost from the list
Very active	41.4%	42.7%	32.7%	39.8%
Active	56.6%	53.5%	63.6%	56.1%
Not Active	2.1%	3.8%	3.6%	4.1%
Base	145	157	165	244

Table 10: Active in neighbourhood events by candidate type

	Candidate type (%)			
	Contested and Won	Contested and lost	Won from the list	Lost from the list
Very active	59.3%	58.6%	50.9%	47.5%
Active	36.6%	37.6%	44.8%	47.5%
Not Active	4.1%	3.8%	4.2%	4.9%
Base	145	157	165	244

Table 11: Active in associational life by candidate type

	Candidate type (%)			
	Contested and Won	Contested and lost	Won from the list	Lost from the list
Very active	12.4%	14.0%	16.4%	16.4%
Active	35.2%	50.3%	41.8%	41.0%
Not Active	52.4%	35.7%	41.8%	42.6%
Base	145	157	165	244

The narrative stemming from these findings is quite counterintuitive. A female candidate's community involvement does not seem to be crucial in how they perform at elections, nor in fact in whether they are able to secure a place in the local legislature through the list. The qualitative interviews with the women politicians shed some light on this anomaly. During the group discussions, some women complained that they have been involved in village work and various associations on behalf of their party, but the male politicians who lead party affairs at the local level do not help them advance in their political careers. A further few women political activists

complained that when granting candidacy, these male politicians favour women who are either their relatives or close friends. Some women in the same group discussion privately voiced that male politicians cannot be blamed for not selecting those women; if they are in politics, they should know how to get the support of party leaders. This exchange illustrates how women's actions and activism in the public sphere alone are not enough; unless they submit to male dominance and its demands, woman political actors will not be able to climb up in the political ladder.

Support for their election bid

The study looked into the sources from which these women political candidates (as well as those who attempted to come in through the list) received support for their election bid: How much support they received from their family and relatives, neighbours, party leadership at the national and local levels, local elites, and women and men in the area. The ability to mobilize these individuals and groups can be considered as a good indication of the level of social capital these women politicians possess. In general, all the women politicians who participated in this study reported to have received support from their family and relatives to a great extent. Only a marginal percentage reported that there was no support, and next-to-no respondents said their families obstructed their campaigns. Those who lost from the list reported the least percentage to have received support from their family and relatives.

The findings clearly show that the ability to mobilize neighbours has a strong impact on electoral outcome. Those who contested and won reported to have received the most amount of support to a great

extent (70.3%), followed by those who won from the list (53.7%). However, those who contested and lost as well as those who lost from the list reported that they also received their neighbours' support but only to some extent. Of course the support of the neighbourhood is crucial for anyone who contests for a local council, because such support not only helps the campaign but also provides votes. Participating in the qualitative discussions, an elected woman politician said that she received great support from her neighbourhood as everyone in the area knows her through her years of social work, and her grandfather also engaged in politics in the area. Therefore, family background and women politicians' own activism both contribute to mobilizing the votes of the neighbours.

Unsurprisingly, those who contested and won report that they received the support of the national party leadership to a great extent. Conversely, those who reported that there was no support from the national party leadership were higher in percentage in the 'lost' categories compared to those who won. This pattern holds, and in fact intensifies, when it comes to the regional party leadership. Those who managed to enter their local councils either by contesting or through the list claim that they received the support of local elites, whereas a comparatively low percentage of the candidates who failed to enter the local council either by contesting or through the list think they received the support of the local party leadership to a great extent. This clearly shows that to be a successful candidate, despite the quota system, women need a strong relationship with the local and national level party leadership. Especially those who were proposed through the party list heavily depended on the party leadership not

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only for nominations but also for inclusion of their names in the list of candidates who would get into the local council once the election results were out. A number of women politicians who participated in the qualitative discussion complained that their names were included in the list only because it was mandatory to have a particular number of women on the party list, but once the election was over, the party leadership favoured its close associates.

As in the case of neighbours, those women politician who managed to enter local councils either by contesting or through the list, state more than others that they received the support of local elites. Support from both women and men in their respective localities was generally similar across categories. Interestingly, however, the data show that women politicians who contested and won received more support from men than women in their areas. This can be read as a suggestion that for women to be successful candidates in the current political system the support of men is more critical than the support of women in the area. However, one should not rush into such conclusions without further researching into the matter. The discussions that were conducted with a few women local politicians shed some light into this. Explaining her

electoral strategies, a respondent said she used men in the area to paste posters and campaign deep into the village. However, her husband helped her coordinate the process, since to mobilize men things like alcohol and cigarettes are necessary. Her opinion was that no one would come and help an election campaign unless such things are provided.

EXPLAINING HER ELECTORAL STRATEGIES, A RESPONDENT SAID SHE USED MEN IN THE AREA TO PASTE POSTERS AND CAMPAIGN DEEP INTO THE VILLAGE. HOWEVER, HER HUSBAND HELPED HER COORDINATE THE PROCESS, SINCE TO MOBILIZE MEN, THINGS LIKE ALCOHOL AND CIGARETTES ARE NECESSARY.

Table 12: Support Sources by candidate type

		Candidate type (%)			
		Contested and lost	Won from the list	Lost from the list	
Family and relatives	To a great extent	86.8%	83.9%	87.2%	78.2%
	To some extent	11.1%	14.8%	11.0%	18.1%
	No support	.7%	.6%	1.2%	2.5%
	Obstructed	0.0%	.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Neighbours	To a great extent	70.3%	40.6%	53.7%	42.8%
	To some extent	26.9%	56.1%	41.5%	51.0%
	No support	.7%	1.9%	1.8%	4.1%
	Obstructed	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	.4%
Party leadership -National	To a great extent	54.5%	30.1%	42.6%	19.5%
	To some extent	31.0%	50.0%	30.9%	41.5%
	No support	13.1%	17.3%	21.0%	33.2%
	Obstructed	.7%	0.0%	0.0%	.8%
Party leadership -regional	To a great extent	57.6%	38.7%	54.6%	28.5%
	To some extent	36.1%	52.3%	39.3%	55.4%
	No support	3.5%	5.2%	3.1%	13.2%
	Obstructed	0.0%	.6%	1.2%	0.0%
Local elites	To a great extent	42.1%	24.5%	25.9%	18.4%
	To some extent	40.0%	58.1%	55.6%	54.0%
	No support	13.8%	14.2%	14.2%	23.0%
	Obstructed	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%
Women in the area	To a great extent	56.6%	46.5%	45.4%	36.6%
	To some extent	38.6%	47.7%	49.7%	58.0%
	No support	1.4%	3.9%	1.8%	3.7%
	Obstructed	.7%	0.0%	.6%	0.0%
Men in the area	To a great extent	61.4%	28.4%	41.0%	25.3%
	To some extent	35.2%	65.8%	51.6%	57.7%
	No support	0.0%	1.9%	3.1%	12.4%
	Obstructed	0.0%	1.3%	.6%	.4%

This study clearly highlights the important role played by the social capital that women politicians possess in mobilizing electoral support, for almost all the women political actors who participated in the study claimed to have the support of their family member, relatives, and neighbourhood. However, only some have enjoyed the greater support of national and regional party leadership, as well as local elites, and they managed to enter into local councils either through the list or by contesting. Therefore, as in the

case of male politicians, despite the quota system, in order for women to be successful politicians they need to improve their economic, cultural, and social capitals that eventually determine their level of power and how influential they could be. To this end, they will have to deploy their own strategies that will provide them an edge over their male counterparts. However, whether such strategies could always be found within democratic norms is a question to be pondered.

What do Women Politicians Perceive as Obstacles to Their Political Future?

Lack of Finances

Women politicians who participated in this study point to the lack of finances to spend on politics as the biggest obstacle to for their political career. It was already discussed (under financial resources) how the lack of finances deters women from considering entry in to a political career. In a patronage democracy such as Sri Lanka, not only do politicians give out goods in expectation of votes, but voters too either vote or promise their votes in return for goods. Uyangoda (2010) elaborating this point states that “the recognition of the presence of patron-client relations in the political process and the appreciation of how they work is vital to the understanding of how political power works in Sri Lanka in a framework of state-society relations” (p.61). Therefore, either politicians should have their personal wealth or other means of providing patronage in order to sustain their political career. Although in the past politicians used their personal wealth for politics, lately they use their access to state resources to sustain their patronage networks (Peiris 2014). This means, according to literature on electoral politics in Sri Lanka, that politicians should possess enough personal wealth or necessary connections with national level politicians, bureaucrats, or people with wealth to stay in politics. Not many local level politicians – be them men or women – possess such wealth before coming to politics, but some develop wealth generating avenues by manipulating their connections and power once they get elected. Although this study does not provide comparative

data to conclude that male politicians possess more skills than women politicians for such strategies of wealth generation, the interviews conducted with women politicians clearly state that women are ‘underdogs’ in terms of generating finances for their politics. They expect their regional and national politicians to make financial allocations to carry out work in their neighbourhood, but many complain that internal politics and personal favoritism have deprived them of such assistance. As a result, they find it difficult to face those who voted for them. However, a woman politician who recently got elected to the Baddulla Municipal Council stated that she does not have such difficulty as her husband is a Minister of the Uva Provincial Council. The survey shows that a comparatively higher proportion of women who got elected to

WOMEN POLITICIANS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THIS STUDY POINT TO THE LACK OF FINANCES TO SPEND ON POLITICS AS THE BIGGEST OBSTACLE TO THEIR POLITICAL CAREER.

local councils highlight the lack of finances as an obstacle to their political future. Therefore, unless external financial assistance can be secured for women politicians who get elected to local councils, the future of their political career is at risk.

Challenges from opposition parties:

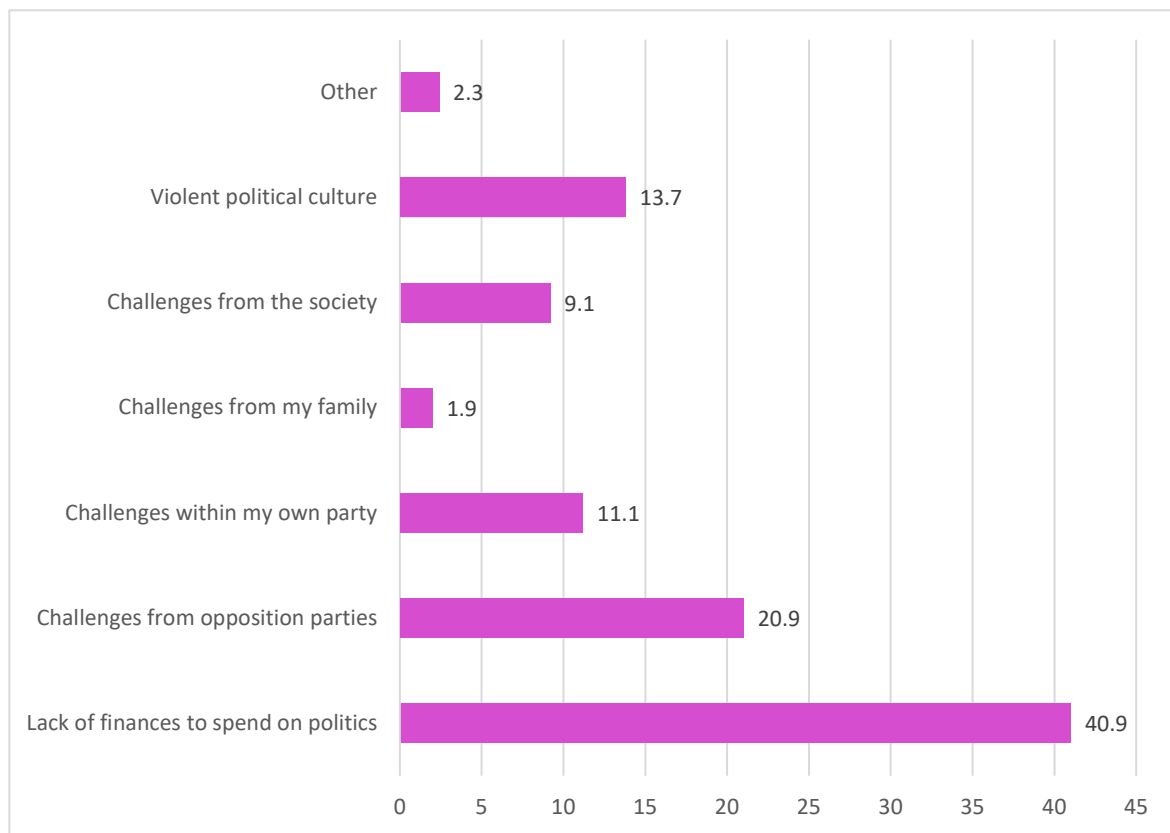
Women politicians, especially the newly elected, face challenges from opposition parties within the council as well as their electorate. According to the survey findings, one fifth of the women politicians – those who got elected as well as lost – consider challenges from opposition parties as an obstacle to for their political career. Within the council's masculinized space, women politicians' voice is suppressed by the way the men argue – with derogatory vocabulary and aggressive articulation. However, many women stated that they soon got used to that and now they have no fear of

electorates due to the work of the members of their opposition party. This is directly related to their lack of access to financial resources. They find it difficult to attract the support of their constituency if they are incapable of providing assistance to people. In addition, compared to male politicians, women politicians find it particularly difficult to visit their constituency as much. For example, to attend a funeral or medical emergency of her supporters at night, or travel far distances alone is culturally challenging for women politicians in the existing patriarchal order, whereas male politicians – either of their own party or the opposition – can interact with the constituency without any social barriers. Interestingly, the challenges posed by opposition parties are mainly felt by the women politicians who failed to get into the council either by contesting or through the list, or, the women who have to maintain their political career without being in power.

WITHIN THE COUNCIL'S MASCULINIZED SPACE, WOMEN POLITICIANS' VOICE IS SUPPRESSED NOT ONLY BY THE LOGICAL PROWESS OF THE ARGUMENTS OF OPPOSITION MEMBERS, BUT OFTEN BY THE WAY THEY ARGUE - WITH DEROGATORY VOCABULARY AND AGGRESSIVE ARTICULATION.

such masculine presentation within the council. Meanwhile, some other respondents stated that male politicians in fact started behaving well in the presence of women politicians, and they found no serious challenge to work within council.

Women politicians feel vulnerable in their

Figure 01: The Biggest Obstacle to Women's Political future

Violent Political Culture

Violent political culture is the third most popular factor that women politicians consider as an obstacle to their political future. No political party or politician explicitly claims that they maintain gangs or thugs for their political work, but politicians, especially from major parties, maintain the capacity to unleash violence whenever it is required (Peiris 2014). Such violence takes place not only as killings, assaults, shooting, and burning of properties, but also in various subtle forms. Local scholarship on electoral studies widely acknowledge the existence of electoral violence since the very outset of electoral politics in Sri Lanka (Jiggins 1979; Jupp 1978; Peiris 2014). Furthermore, violence in the political sphere is considered as one of the most widely acknowledged factors that keeps

women away from politics (Bardall 2018; Dyer et al 2019). The physical assault involved in politics “can heighten women’s vulnerability and discourage political activity which necessarily entails working late at night and traveling alone. For the vast majority of ordinary women and even for many men, violence may act as an inhibiting factor in considering a political career for themselves” (Kodikara 2009, p. 20). In addition, since women are peculiarly vulnerable to gendered forms of violence, it is a great challenge for them to stay in politics. According to the finding of the survey, the women who got elected into local councils – by contesting or through the list – are the ones who raised concerns about violent political culture the most (Table 13).

Table 13: Obstacles to Political Future by Candidate Type

	Candidate type (%)			
	Contested and Won	Contested and lost	Won from the list	Lost from the list
Lack of finances to spend on politics	47.2%	34.0%	41.5%	41.5%
Challenges from opposition parties	19.0%	26.9%	23.9%	15.3%
Challenges within my own party	2.8%	14.1%	6.3%	17.8%
Challenges from my family	0.7%	4.5%	1.3%	1.7%
Challenges from the society	12.7%	7.7%	8.8%	8.5%
Violent political culture	14.1%	11.5%	17.0%	13.6%
Other	3.5%	1.3%	1.3%	1.7%
Base	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Challenges Within Own Party

In general, 11% of the women politicians who participated in this study state that their political career is challenged within their own party.³ The women who contested and lost as well as those who lost from the list are the ones who are more likely to think their political future is challenged within their own party. Patriarchal structures within the party keep women politicians as foot soldiers, and hardly see them as individuals with leadership potential unless they represent a prominent political family. Especially the women who contested and lost at the 2018 local government election feel that challenges within their own party are an obstacle to their political careers.

The qualitative findings of the study point to a trend where women who do get into politics are in the main relegated to handle what may be termed 'women's affairs', such as livelihood development

of women, divorce, domestic violence and/ or neglect, child protection, women's rights, etc. The issue with this development is that women are not consulted in decision-making processes that concern adjudication, taxation, resource allocation, and such other areas fundamental to governance. While it is important that issues traditionally considered to be 'women's affairs' are represented in decision-making processes – after all, this is one of the key arguments in favour of introducing the women's quota – it should not be the case that women only participate in making decisions on such issues. Rather, they should be active participants in decision-making related to all areas of governance not only because they have a right to be involved, but also because their lives are operative in these spheres too.

³ It should be noted here that the figure is indicative of the percentage that picked this alternative among several others, including the dominant issue of lack of finances

Challenges Within Own Society

When asked about the challenges posed by society, only about 9% of the women politicians who participated in this study viewed society as an obstacle to their political future.⁴ It is important to note that the women who contested and won highlight these societal challenges more than others. However, previous studies indicate that cultural constraints are a key reason why women keep away from politics (Leitan and Gunasekera 1998; Liyanage 1999; Leitan 2000; Pinto Jawawardena and Kodikara 2003; Jayawardena 2002). The public-private dichotomy and women's designated role in the private sphere has led them to internalize the notion that politics is not for them (Tambiah 2003). Transgressing these boundaries is often viewed as culturally inappropriate, and disturbing the traditional dynamics of the domestic space (Kodikara 2009). Ashworth (1996) and Baden (2000) opine that "perceptions of the roles women should play in governance may be coloured by the roles they are expected to play within the household and community" (as cited in Brody 2009, p. 4). These findings invite us to inquire into the type of women who were attracted to the 2018 local elections under the newly introduced quota. Another structural constraint laid down by culture is the 'double burden' of women, whereby the expectation to fulfill their responsibilities both at home and in outside engagements effectively dissuades women from joining something as time and energy consuming as politics (Brody 2009). As the domestic expectations mentioned here are taken not to apply to men, they are typically not pressured out of participating in the political sphere. This has resulted in a longstanding practice of defining politics as an exclusively male sphere, creating a very challenging environment for the women who do manage to get into politics. "[T]he apparent patriarchal party culture based on social

practices and camaraderie between male party members, which is advantageous towards men" makes it difficult for women to compete equally at elections. Voters compound this problem by continuing to "disregard women candidates as suitable politicians" (Wickramasinghe and Kodikara 2012, p. 795). As the next section illustrates, women who do succeed in politics tend to come from families where the men are already active in politics, or have strong connections in the field.

Role of Men in Women's Politics

As the findings so far suggest, women coming from families already active in politics, and/ or have access to finances stand a better chance at getting into politics, whether through contesting or the quota. What is noticeable in both these cases is that men in the family seem to be maneuvering the situation to fit their greater agendas. For instance, qualitative discussions with female politicians suggested in one instance that the family holds powerful positions in the Provincial Council, and wanted her to run for the Local Council election so that they may hold sway over that institution as well; in another, a woman whose husband was in business entered into politics using his money for campaigning. Even though it was not explicitly stated, it is likely that calculations of the husband's business benefitting out of political leverage were at play here; two others who had lost their father and husband respectively entered into politics "to carry forward their legacy and honour their memory"; yet another case where the husband was employed as a staff member of a Minister, and

⁴ It should be noted here that the figure is indicative of the percentage that picked this alternative among several others, including the dominant issue of lack of finances

the duo had been 'helping around' in politics for over three decades. These examples may suggest that women's agency is seriously undermined in such situations. However, they also point to the fact that patriarchal structures and calculations have enabled them access to politics, which they otherwise might not have had. Therefore, while patriarchy might hinder most women's prospects

for entry into and success in politics, it has also been instrumental in the success of yet other women. What this in turn hints at is that though having these women in may increase descriptive representation in local government authorities, their inclusion most of the time actually serves to reinforce patriarchal structures and politics, rather than undermine them.

Political Aspirations

In order to consolidate the gains of the quota, it is very important to invest in women who have a long term vision for a career in politics. Since much of the financial and temporal resources of women's organizations and activists are spent on training and educating current and/or prospective women politicians, identifying those with a vision for themselves in the political sphere will ensure that their energies are not wasted. According to the survey results, those who have already tasted a win at the 2008 local government election are much more likely to accommodate aspirations for national or provincial politics than those who have not. The

majority of those who contested and won through the list aspire to contest for the Provincial Council in the future. A substantial proportion of the women politicians who participated in this study state that they would remain focused on the local council. Especially a majority of the women politicians who failed to enter the council through their party lists states that they wish to remain focused on local councils. As expected, those who failed to come in through the list recorded the highest percentage that wishes to leave politics in future, followed by those who contested and lost. However, in general, a very low percentage of women politicians states that they contemplate leaving politics in future.

Table 14: Political aspirations by candidate type

	Candidate type (%)			
	Contested and Won	Contested and lost	Won from the list	Lost from the list
One day I will contest for Parliamentary election	21.1%	19.4%	19.5%	11.9%
I will contest for the Provincial Council in future	41.1%	45.8%	44.5%	33.1%
I would like to focus on the Pradeshiya Sabha (or Urban Council or Municipal Council) for the time being	29.1%	23.2%	31.7%	39.0%
I am planning to leave politics in future	4.3%	8.4%	3.7%	14.0%

Strengthening Women through Training

The lack of leadership skills, confidence, and/ or sometimes even literacy may dissuade women from contemplating a career in politics for fear of being ridiculed by their more experienced male counterparts. Therefore, building the capacities of women representatives and candidates is a crucial requirement in ensuring their participation in decision-making is meaningful and effective, an understanding corroborated by all respondents in the qualitative component across locations. Having better trained women in these positions will also increase the credibility of the woman candidate/ politician (Kodikara 2009; Brody 2009; Fleschenberg 2008). In terms of the training they have received, those who contested and won

(57.2%), followed by those who won from the list (50.3%), reported the highest percentages of those who reported they received a lot of training. Among those that claimed to have had no training, the highest percentage came from the group that lost from the list (13.5%), followed by those that won from the list (10.3%). However, as Kodikara (2009) cautions, an assessment needs to be made on how far training programmes contribute to the actual growth of their beneficiaries in terms of preparing them for candidacy as well as the challenges that arise once in office (p. 42-44), in order for these training needs to be meaningfully addressed.

Table 15: Level of training by candidate type

	Candidate type (%)			
	Contested and Won	Contested and lost	Won from the list	Lost from the list
Lot of training	57.2%	42.7%	50.3%	41.0%
Some training	35.2%	49.7%	39.4%	45.5%
No training	7.6%	7.6%	10.3%	13.5%

Local Level Women Politicians and their Perception on Electoral Politics

Women are kept away from politics not only by their material conditions but also due to the ideological framework that they belong to. Therefore, often women do not even attempt to enter into politics due to their perception about politics. The survey posed a mixed set of statements that reflect the current discourse on women and politics to

examine how much the women politicians who participated in this study subscribe to them.

An overwhelming majority of women politicians who participated in this survey believe that the introduction of a quota for women at local government elections will help women enter into

politics, irrespective of the candidate type – whether contested or through the list. A significant majority of them think violence in politics will reduce if women join politics. About three fourth of women politicians who participated in this study feels that women candidates can engage in pre-election campaigns without any hindrance, and their district leaders help them climb up in the party hierarchy. However, unlike others, the women who contested and won express slightly low agreement with the above positive statements. It seems that those who contested and won emphasize the challenges they had to overcome to get elected more than the positives. Despite their positive assessment about the above aspects, the respondents also agree that family life and sexual violence, sexual favouritism within parties, and violence within and between parties are hindrances for women to engage in politics. It is interesting to note the views on these challenges of the women politicians who contested and won. Of course the majority of those women

candidates who contested and won admit the existence of these challenges, but the proportions are lesser than the other women politicians who participated in this study.

In general, a majority of the women politicians who contested for the 2018 local government election think that women support women candidates. Though the majority agrees with other women that women mostly support women candidates at elections, the women who contested and won subscribe to this idea less.

It is quite interesting that more than two third of the women politicians think 'politics is most suitable for men'. However, women who contested and won are less likely to accept this proposition. This raises suspicion about the real intentions of these women in contesting for the local government election. During personal interviews with some women politicians, a number of women admitted that they came in to politics to represent their husband. In some cases the wife was given candidacy because the husband did not get the 'ticket'.

Table 16: Perceptions on Electoral Politics

Propositions about Women and Politics	Agree
Introduction of a 'quota' for women at local government election will help the cause of women entering politics immensely	96.3%
Violence in politics will reduce if women join politics	83.8%
There is no hindrance for women candidates to engage in pre-election campaigns	75.3%
The district leadership of my party helps women climb up in the party hierarchy	75.3%
Family life hinders women from engaging in politics successfully	71.4%
Politics is most suitable for men	69.9%
Sexual violence and sexual favouritism within parties is a hindrance for women to engage in politics	69.5%
Violent politics within and between political parties is a hindrance for women to engage in politics	65.7%
At elections, women support women candidates most	64.3%
Women cannot rise in politics within the existing political culture	53.4%

Table 17: Perceptions of Electoral Politics by Candidate Type

	Candidate type (%)			
	Contested and Won	Contested and lost	Won from the list	Lost from the list
Introduction of a 'quota' for women at local government election will help the cause of women entering politics immensely	95.1%	96.2%	99.4%	95.9%
Violence in politics will reduce if women join politics	75.4%	89.7%	83.5%	89.2%
Family life hinders women from engaging in politics successfully	57.9%	82.2%	71.4%	75.4%
There is no hindrance for women candidates to engage in pre-election campaigns	68.1%	75.2%	82.3%	74.5%
Politics is most suitable for men	55.6%	75.5%	74.2%	73.4%
Sexual violence and sexual favouritism within parties is a hindrance for women to engage in politics	61.8%	69.3%	75.9%	72.0%
The district leadership of my party helps women climb up in the party hierarchy	85.0%	71.5%	81.4%	66.8%
At elections, women support women candidates most	57.2%	72.6%	64.6%	66.0%
Violent politics within and between political parties is a hindrance for women to engage in politics	65.7%	69.5%	64.6%	62.8%
Women cannot rise in politics within the existing political culture	43.3%	59.7%	48.8%	58.0%

It is clearly evident that those who contested and won think somewhat differently to the other women politicians who participated in this study. While being moderate about the positive climate for women to contest elections, they are also less pessimistic about the other negativities that impact women's entry into politics. It was learnt during the personal interviews with women politicians who performed well at the election that they contested by following the strategies of men in the electorate.

They admit that women face many of the above challenges when contesting elections, but they also believe that politics is an 'unholy arena' which women have to learn to adapt to if they are serious about surviving in politics. Making a somewhat radical suggestion, a woman political actor in her 60s said that like men use their muscle power, women should find things that are unique to them when contesting elections.

Conclusion

The women's quota, introduced in February 2018, has significantly increased women's representation in local level democracy. It has paved the way for otherwise politically marginalized local level women political actors to enter into local councils. However, despite this significant victory, there still remain many questions related to issues such as how local women political activists have benefited from the quota system, what were the challenges they faced when contesting – or attempting to enter through the list – for the election, what challenges they face in surviving in politics, and what would make them stronger competitors in the male dominated sphere that is electoral politics. Based on interviews with local women politicians who contested for the 2018 local government election, this report made an attempt to shed some light on answers to the above questions, thereby discussing what needs to be done in order to sustain the victory of women representatives.

Local level women politicians believe that the introduction of the quota system is clearly a positive step towards increasing women's representation at the level of local government. In addition, the study suggested that the introduction of the quota system has paved the way for many new women faces – outside of political families and parties – to enter into career politics. This is a positive development in terms of attracting more skillful women into politics who can compete with their male counterparts. However, the danger is that these women could weaken the bases of women's activism within political parties in the long run unless they are absorbed into the party structure while simultaneously made to work with women's organizations.

To this end, parties should reactivate their party organization structures, provide ideological orientation to these new women politicians, and women's organizations should provide training on issues such as electoral politics, democratic political institutions, gender politics, and political representation of women.

Some women enter politics either to represent their husbands or to strengthen their husband's political career. They have more advantage than other women candidates as they possess the resources and social networks of their husbands.

Irrespective of their intention, if these women are provided knowledge on politics, governance, and party functioning, these women could remain in politics and rise as strong autonomous politicians.

Irrespective of whether it is a man or woman, whoever desires entry into politics at any level – national, provincial, or local – s/he should possess power that is comparatively higher than their contenders. Financial capacity, status, and social contacts together determine an individual's ability to command power within a group. The study shows that women who possess comparatively higher capacity to spend money, are knowledgeable, and have the capacity to seek assistance of their neighbours, party leaders, and even men in the constituency have a higher possibility of winning elections.

Therefore, parties should change their attitude towards their women supporters. They should focus on women with various capacities to play leadership roles within the party structure rather than focusing on women whose role is limited to being loyal foot soldiers.

Civil society organizations should approach more the women with the capacity to play leadership roles (in other words, with economic, cultural, and social capital) for their various capacity building and political awareness trainings. This would be meaningful in ensuring substantive representation over time, as these women are more likely to have political ambitions than their counterparts who possess relatively low levels of said capital.

Male politicians usually dominate the discussions and decision making processes within the party organization, and hardly pay attention to the voices of their female colleagues. However, women politicians state that their educational qualifications and knowledge on political matters allow them to command the attention of male politicians.

Building women politicians' knowledge on areas such as governance, constitutional matters, and political history would provide them an edge over male politicians who possess a comparatively stronger voice within the party.

Although the introduction of a quota has helped them to enter in to local government bodies, unless women have ready access to financial resources, in Sri Lanka's patronage based political system, they will not be able to build their support bases or maintain extensive social networks that would be essential for their re-election.

It is not possible for civil society organizations to avert women politicians from getting into corrupt practices. Instead of rejecting them, civil society organizations should work with them to strengthen women's representation. While the entire political system functions on the patron-client relations, women politicians alone will not be able to survive in politics on the basis of policies and principles. Therefore, one must not place the burden solely on women to clean up the corrupt political culture in the country.

Violence in politics, patriarchal social norms in the society, and patriarchal practices within party structures hinder women entering into politics and surviving in it. However, the women who contested and won seem to ascribe relatively less importance to such challenges. This suggests that women who have the potential to compete with men are the ones who are willing to fight them on their own turf.

While campaigning against violence against women in society, sexual violence in politics, and discrimination against women within the party, women politicians should be encouraged to play politics as their male counterparts. In this case they may not be able to balance their family life and politics or meet cultural expectations of woman.

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