

## Where are the Menstruators in the Parliamentary Election 2026 in Nepal

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### Abstract:

Parliamentary election 2026, scheduled for 5<sup>th</sup> March 2026, is a continuity and outcome of the Gen-Z movement of Nepal in 8-9 September 2025. With mixed feelings, the entire nation proceeded with it. This study aims to explore compatibility between current political discourses and the grassroots reality that has been experienced by the margin of the marginalized people, primarily menstruators. It employed the formal and informal meetings with voters from various walks of life and reached out to 450 participants, where 190 were menstruators. The data and information were extracted from observation of the field and media, reviewed political manifestos of 10 political parties in relation to menstrual discrimination, and an online survey from all seven provinces. In over 67 years of experience in elections in Nepal, there is a huge gap on understanding the purpose of this election, participants deviated towards the infrastructural or tangible development instead of formulation of policies in order to address mechanism for stable government for addressing social injustices, and establishing good governance where everyone particularly the marginalized individuals and groups could live with just and dignified way. Despite practicing menstrual discrimination in over 95 % households, and policies are in place on dignified menstruation to address all forms of menstrual discrimination, it is not considered a political agenda. The government, the Election Commission, political parties and other stakeholders need to work seriously to minimize such gaps and cultivate the culture of inclusive democracy from the kitchen to parliament.

**Key Words:** Dignified Menstruation, Discrimination, Inclusion, Democracy, Election

### 1. Introduction:

The population born between 1997 and 2012 globally, along with the digital world, is considered Generation-Z (Gen-Z). They mobilized Gen-Z, started a protest in Maithighar Kathmandu on 8 September 2025 against political instability, nepotism, and corruption with the thrust of their participation in governance affairs (Dahal, 2026). Later, the protest became violent and contagious across the country. Eventually, this movement changed the political landscape of Nepal. An interim government was formed on 12 September 2025 where Ms. Sushila Karki, former chief justice, served as prime minister with the mandate of holding parliamentary elections in six months; 5<sup>th</sup> March 2026.

With long-standing dialogues among political parties, Gen-Z leaders, and other stakeholders, the parliamentary election proceeds as per schedule for 5 March 2026. The political parties started their election campaigns and published their political manifestos. Likewise, the Election Commission also proceeds accordingly on behalf of the Government of Nepal. In the amidst

campaign of election commission and political parties, Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation (GSCDM)/Radha Paudel Foundation (RPF) employed this study. Because menstruators who are born with a uterus and ovaries are higher in population and votes than non-menstruators. The visible and invisible forms of menstrual discrimination (silence, taboo, shyness, stigma, shame, abuses, restrictions, violence, deprivation from services and resources) are found across the country. The Nepal Health Demographic Survey (2022) also confirmed the same; 69.7% in Sudurpaschim, 74.7% in Karnali, 64.7% in Gandaki, 61.6% in Lumbini, 80.6% in Madhesh, 68.7% in Bagmati and 75.8% in Koshi (MoHP Nepal; New ERA; & ICF, 2023). In other hand, according to the GSCDM/RPF's several reports, Nepal recognized a pioneer country to initiate the concept of dignified menstruation globally since 2017 because government of Nepal promulgating various policies around it such as national policy of dignified menstruation (2017), menstrua law, incorporation of dignified menstruation in to gender equality act (2021), included fifth year periodic plan of National Planning Commission (2024). Likewise, as a global historical milestone, the national assembly, a supreme policy structure of Nepal is anonymously endorsed the resolution motion on dignified menstruation on 21 March 2025 (The Rising Nepal, 2025).

Though the menstruators comprise 7-11 per cent in the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system of parliamentary election 2026 (Election Commission, 2026), they contributed significantly since the democratic history of Nepal since 1940 as caretakers, campaigners, and contestants. This paper is designed to examine the menstruator's space in the parliamentary election at large. This study has the following specific objectives: examine the voter's understanding of the purpose of the parliamentary election; explore the voter's understanding of political manifestos or promises, and assess the voter's understanding of menstrual discrimination as a political agenda.

## **2. Methodology:**

This study employed a primary source of data. For qualitative information, we visited Kailali, Dadeldhura, Baitadi, and Bajhyang from Sudurpaschim province, Nawalparasi east and west from Lumbini province, Syanja in Gandaki province, Chitwan, Lalitpur, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Makwanpur from Bagmati province, Rautahat, Sarlahi, Dhanusha from Madhesh province and Sunsari, Morang, and Jhapa from Koshi province. These places were chosen based on the hype of media and the areas of proposed prime minister, except Sudurpaschim. The field visit was made after publishing the political manifestos (17 February to 27 February) by political parties as defined by election commission Nepal. Team randomly reached out to the participants in respective fields, followed by contextual rapport building, such as having tea, betel leaf, buying fruits, working in the field, participating in meetings or assemblies, etc. The formal and informal group meetings are held at individuals' and groups had made at their home, workplaces (field or street vendors, pedestrians). A total of 450 participants engaged in meetings and interactions, where 190 were menstruators and 260 were non-menstruators. The representatives were from Gen-Z, youths, elders, indigenous, so-called brahmin and dalit, menstruator with disability and no one there from sexually minority groups (not identified). The observation of political campaigns is made while traveling these areas as well as during meetings. The secondary sources of data used while analyzing the political manifestos through their websites, online/offline news portals. Additionally, online portals such as websites of political parties, studies from google scholars, social media sites of media and political parties are used for exploring the studies that took place around the Gen-Z movement, the political participation of women and democracy in Nepal. For quantitative data, this study employed an online survey (Nepali) broadcast for a month (2

February to 2 March 2026) through various social platforms. Only five respondents (menstruator-1, non-menstruator -4) participated from Kaski, Kathmandu, Palpa, Achham who have bachelor's degrees.

### **3. Key Findings:**

#### **3.1. Examine the voter's understanding of the purpose of the parliamentary election**

In general, participants are not aware of the specific purpose of this election or primarily to legitimize a new parliament and government to fulfill the wishes of Gen-Z movements through series of policy formulation, including the constitution. Few participants from Lumbini and Gandaki province aware of the broader purpose of the election, expressed that this election is for exercising an advanced level of democracy and governance that invites the legitimate and sustained government, transparent rule, accountability to the people, independent judiciary, and fundamental rights and duties of the people and addressing Gen-Z issues and rights for making a prosperous nation. However, most of the participants expressed one or two elements of democracy and governance and intensively focused on development work nearby them such as black topped road, bridges, schools, and high-income-oriented employment opportunities (targeted at migrant workers indirectly). In Koshi province, participants were loud to scold particularly leaders from old political parties but did not have a say in specific tasks. In Sunsari, few were even hesitant to cast the vote for not having a land certificate for decades of long promises by political parties. In Jhapa, participants blamed to previous prime minister for not proportionately investing in development projects. In Madhesh, participants did not know the purpose of the election, but they are excited because there are candidates from their ethnic groups. Likewise, in Bagmati, they wanted to be involved in this election because they were disappointed with leaders and they wanted to see youths in government e.g. Prime Minister. In Chitwan, few participants knew the purpose of the election, primarily for policy formulation of the country and particular electoral area, if there is anything serious and urgent issues beyond the authority of the municipality and province. Similarly, in Sudurpaschim did not know the purpose of the election. In Baitadi and Bajhyang, they are super busy with their livelihood activities even they were not interested in the election 2026.

Meanwhile, participants from any walks of life got frustrated and angry with this election that was observed through their tone of language and gestures. They thought that this election was unintended and a waste of their money (revenue) due to selfish and blindfolded leaders though they did good deeds in the beginning days of democracy in Nepal. In Chitwan, Jhapa and Morang, elders expressed their anger due to deaths during the Gen-Z movement. They were very much emotional while recalling the deaths and destruction of public properties back to 8 and 9 September 2025. Thus, they liked to change leadership without knowing the purpose of the election and the party or the contestants in particular. The most common interest of them was to change the leadership of the state, which was deeply embedded due to deaths during the Gen-Z movement. They did not know the exact role of prospective parliamentarians. The poster, pamphlets were not hanged or pasted at their house as in previous elections. In general, there was no such excitement for the parliamentary election 2026. All respondents from online survey shared that the parliamentary election is for policy formation for country and their electoral areas.

#### **3.2. Explore the voter's understanding of political manifestos or promises**

In general, both menstruators and non-menstruators are not aware of political manifestos and they do not like to know too. They do not have trust over the promises of political leaders or their

statements mentioned in political manifestos. Other participants from Lumbini province thought that political manifestos focus on tangible things, mostly infrastructure, to please voters instead of paying attention on development of human capital and addressing social injustices. Few participants appreciated that the political manifestos due to included empowerment of youths. In Jhapa, women were gathered in the political party office after a long day's campaigning. They said they spontaneously joined the campaign by themselves because they were disappointed by the deaths of young children during the Gen-Z movement.

In all respective fields, non-menstruators are a little bit familiar with the political manifesto where they are demanding infrastructural development of their community and opportunities for employment. They are not interested in the violation of human rights, domestic violence are happening in every household or their surroundings. A Gen-Z in Jhapa smiled and said, *'such human rights issues are neither in the interest of political parties nor the citizens. It is too far to think'*. In Sunsari, a group of menstruators were alleged to political leaders and demanding for granting land certificate for casting vote regardless of their political manifestos.

In Baitadi, most menstruators and non-menstruators had not received or accessed political manifestos from election contestants or other means. There was little to no exposure to written or verbal communication of candidates' commitments, development agendas, or policy priorities. Surprisingly, few menstruators shared that they were planning to vote for the first time at the age of 46, reflecting delayed political participation due to structural barriers starts from home. They also expressed that voting decisions are often based on personal familiarity, media hype, instruction made by their husband or seniors and friends.

On the other hand, in all respective locations, participants acknowledged that the political parties were not doing intensive door-to-door visits for voting campaigns as in previous elections. They speculated that it could be due to social media or that there was no courage to show their face with such allegations of corruption and casualties during the Gen-Z movement. The big political parties used the bikes, auto rickshaws, and vans for their election campaign with music. They stopped for a minute in main junctions. Assembly was very nominal of them. We observed small assemblies of around 100-300 people gathering in Jhapa, Morang, Sarlahi, Chitwan, Kathmandu of Nepal Communist Party United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), Nepal Community Party (NCP), Nepali Congress (NC), Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP). Some of the participants of the assemblies were holding manifestos of their respective political parties. However, through social media, other political parties like Pragatisheel Loktantrik Party (PLP), Gatisheel Loktantrik Party (GLP), Shram Sanskriti Party (SSP), Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), Ujyalo Nepal Party (UNP), Janta Samajbadi Party (JSP) were also doing campaigns, assemblies in various big cities and often sharing their political promises through various means.

In online survey, except one, all got the opportunity to go through the political manifestos of their preferred political parties or leaders. They all planned to cast their vote where they preferred to cast their vote based on agenda and personality of candidates by 50% and 50%.

### **3.3. Assess the voter's understanding of menstrual discrimination as a political agenda.**

In all respective fields, menstruators and non-menstruators even think that menstrual discrimination is urgent to include in political manifestos or consider as a political agenda. In most of the cases, participants, especially menstruators, were surprised while talking about menstrual practice and a few non-menstruator reflected as puzzled gesture. In Sunsari, a group of

menstruators agreed on how menstrual discrimination excludes them from participating in the kitchen and beyond.

None of the participants recognize menstrual discrimination as a political agenda, has significant role in political participation or participation in this election, including limiting their ability to engage in civic processes, access leadership opportunities, or influence political decision-making. This is how; they do not have any expectation, neither in political manifesto nor in planning of casting votes. In observation, proposed voting centers e.g. schools are not friendly for menstruators. It is not considered in to the guides or procedures of election commission (National Election Commission, 2026).

A total of ten political manifestos were reviewed as mentioned above. The word of menstrual discrimination or menstrual discrimination is an underlying cause of violation or human rights or domestic violence or dignified menstruation was not mentioned at all. The CPN (UML) and PLP mentioned the free distribution of menstrual pads in school where menstrual pad portrayed as a means of quality education or retention of girls in schools. NC mentioned work for home during menstruation (indirectly promoting menstrual leave). It also used the word of womb to tomb, gender violence, domestic violence, and reproductive health in silos. On the other hand, there is no connection with menstrual discrimination. JSP, SSP mentioned gender-based violence while RPP mentioned violence against women.

In online survey, all agreed that menstrual discrimination should be on the political agenda, but the reality is different, due to the negligence of political parties, it is a subject of cultural taboo and the nature of the menstrual discrimination and its impact in sustained nation building is equally ignored.

#### **4. Discussion:**

##### **4.2. Menstrual discrimination is everywhere**

Across all the respective fields, participants are practicing various forms of menstrual discrimination. In general, menstrual practices are in invisible form except in Sudurpaschim, floated with diverse euphemisms. Even the participants who claimed that they have been practicing dignified menstruation within individual and family, have been practicing various types of menstrual discrimination, such as not touching flowers, not cooking, or not participating in any religious activities, use separate bed, etc. In Jhapa, *a menstruator from Das Haluwai ethnic group shared that she and her three daughters were excluded for five days during menstruation due to the state of being considered dirty and impure.* They also do not acknowledge that these practices limit their political engagement at kitchen and beyond and impacting their bodily autonomy, making choices in both private and public spheres (Clickmandu, 2026). Menstrual discrimination constructs unequal power relations, reinforces the patriarchy and fosters exclusion in systemic and symptomatic way throughout the life cycle of menstruators in all diverse settings (Kathmandu University, 2025). This report further highlights that the menstrual discrimination is violation of human rights, domestic violence and has been ignored throughout the history of human rights and discourses of sexual and gender-based violence or prevention of domestic violence in all around the globe. Menstrual discrimination is also violation of constitutional right multiple times too.

##### **4.3. Political manifestos ignored the rights of menstruators**

Non-menstruators led the drafting and finalized the political manifestos though political leaders did home visit at the name of collecting ideas and suggestions as well as call through social media platforms. As a systemic inequality created and reinforced by menstrual discrimination in Nepali society, such drafting committees are fully biased towards the gravity of menstrual discrimination which is widespread in over 95% households across Nepal, regardless of class, caste, education, religion, region etc. (GSCDM, 2025). As systemic impact, menstrual discrimination is considered as private and women's issue. This is how, political parties including menstruators deliberately failed to recognize menstrual discrimination as a political agenda. Exceptionally, a NC candidate from Nawalpur west, included dignified menstruation in his personal manifesto. Two political parties; CPN UML and PLP, mentioned the distribution of menstrual pad which neither dismantle the complex and multifaceted menstrual discrimination nor this menstrual pad is available as menstruator's choice, nor dismantle the menstrual discrimination or eliminate exclusion nor protect the planet nor help the pocket of menstruators. NC, CPN (UML), JSP, SSP used the word of gender inequality and eliminate gender-based violence and RPP used violence against women. According to the reports submitted to UN by Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation/Radha Paudel Foundation argued that the menstrual discrimination is cause and outcome of various types of sexual and gender-based violence, domestic violence and violation of human rights (GSCDM, 2025). Such words or programs have already failed to address the complex nature and gravity of menstrual discrimination e.g. home is the factory of domestic violence or violation of human rights because it is the place where unequal power relations and patriarchy takes place due to discriminatory menstrual practices as a vicious circle. Likewise, the words of gender equality and social inclusion also failed to address the complexity and gravity of menstrual discrimination from UN to local and vice versa (Kathmandu University, 2025). 7-11% participation of menstruators as contestants also an outcome of menstrual discrimination where menstruators yet to account from kitchen to parliament (Clickmandu, 2026). UNP mentioned the elimination of poverty and malnutrition among children and women but not mentioned menstrual discrimination, where it plays as compounding factor for poverty and malnutrition among children and women.

#### **4.4. Lack of access to political manifestos:**

The participants who need to engage for the daily living, they deprived from access to political manifestos as well as direct interaction with candidates. The massive use of social media and effect of algorithms, often limited access with internet, they deprived from having correct information regarding the election campaign and manifestos. In other hands, menstruators from indigenous communities, with an uneducated background, can't articulate the political manifestos due to language barriers because political manifestos are published and aired in Nepali language which is not compatible for indigenous and rural communities.

#### **4.5. Stakeholders failed to educate of the purpose of the parliamentary election 2026:**

Historically, the first parliamentary election held in 1959. Over the 67 years of history, and the participants who cast votes in past also did not know about the purpose of parliamentary election. It is absolute failure of government, election commission, political parties or other stakeholders including media. The significantly low number of participations in online survey is also an example of such failures. Participants unaware about the purpose of this election, the required skills and knowledge of candidates, the positionality of political parties to address current social injustices and other national and local issues and their role in parliament including parliamentary committees. Their brain was washed and guided by media hype, effect of algorithm where they

possibly engaged with misinformation and disinformation. The blanket understanding may not be healthy for a just and prosperous nation, including addressing geopolitics.

## **5. Recommendation:**

- I. Centering the menstruators in all political campaigns is urgent and important because they comprised of 51% population of this country. As a result of menstrual discrimination, they are in margin due to systemic inequalities from the kitchen to parliament in all diverse settings.
- II. Menstrual discrimination is the most common human rights violation, cause and outcome for many sexual and gender-based violence due to its role in construction of unequal power relations and patriarchy and has been missing historically. Thus, it should be a political agenda to eliminate all forms of menstrual and gender stereotypes and accelerate their participation from the kitchen to parliament.
- III. Politics has grip to govern all policies and entire state therefore political education should be continuous process and primary agenda of government, election commission, political parties and concerned stakeholders. The mode, tools and techniques need to be compatible with the need of voters focusing on needs and priorities of menstruators.

## **6. Conclusion:**

The half of the population of this country comprises menstruators and they possess additional sets of rights due to the state of having uterus and ovaries and their functions. In over about seven decades of discourse of the election, the position of menstruators has been observed as subordinates, caretakers, voters, etc., as lower instead of equal human beings as like non-menstruators. Along with other compounding factors a never touched, ignored and sidelined issues that is menstrual discrimination as an underlying barrier for excluding them from informal conversations at kitchen to formal discussions in communities to parliament. The political parties, government of Nepal, the election commission and other stakeholders are known about the widespread and deeply prevalent nature of menstrual discrimination but do not acknowledge it formally. On the other hand, these stakeholders failed to grab the opportunities as a pioneering country for dignified menstruation, including having tangible policies around it. The political parties have failed to acknowledge the complexity of menstrual discrimination as an institution and educate the public as an important and urgent responsibility to build justful and prosperous country as they envisioned in their political manifestos.

## **Funding:**

No any fund for this study.

## **Acknowledgement:**

The study team would express gratitude to all participants for their response with hospitality during meetings and interactions.

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