Proceedings of the Panel on Data and Gender in Politics

Centre for Gender And Politics

About the Panel Discussion:

In the last three years, the team at Centre for Gender and Politics (CGAP) have worked with politicians, researchers in the field of gender, economics, politics and other related subjects and conducted surveys, in-depth interviews, and extensively reviewed existing research on the intersection of politics, gender and South Asia.

Through this roundtable, we aim to increase awareness on the subject and create an enabling platform for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to come together to promote a positive discourse on gender and politics in South Asia. In the last 3 years, 14 virtual and in-person panel discussions, dialogues, workshops and roundtables were hosted and broadcasted.

CGAP, in collaboration with Women in Leadership Conclave, organised a panel discussion on 9th March 2023 with experts on political data. The discussion explored the role political data can play in shaping decisions in politics, the scope for improving gender inclusivity and what kind of role data science can play in influencing these decisions.

About the discussants:

Manjula Gajanayake
Executive Director, Institute for Democratic Reforms and Electoral Studies (IRES)

Manjula Gajanayake is a researcher and elections expert in Sri Lanka. Before IRES, he has been the National Coordinator of Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV).

Rahul Verma
Fellow, Centre for Policy Research

Rahul Verma is a Fellow at the Centre for Policy Research (CPR). He is also Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at Ashoka University. His research interests include voting behaviour, party politics, political violence, and media.

The need to invest in Data on Gender and Politics

Giving the context of Sri Lankan political space, **Manjula** talked about the questions that were being raised in society on the increasing number of women representatives in politics and how gathering data was a more permanent way of answering those questions. **Rahul** talked about both the normative and empirical concerns of having data on gender and politics. On normative concern, he stressed on the fact that every group should get at least a fair share of their representation, if not higher. On the empirical concern, he reflected on how data is beyond just hard numbers and how the questions are the driving force, and to answer any question, various methods and data sources can be utilised. In such a world, everything is data and can be measured. Rahul also talked about how data is necessary to help identify gaps and evaluate policies. Adding to that, he also mentioned the need to be cautious with over-relying on data and recognising the insufficiency in data as well. He highlighted that data collection and interpretation could be a very political exercise, and as researchers, we must be careful of the intention of using a data point in any particular context.

Lack of Data in the Context of Research on Gender and Politics

Manjula talked about election data in Sri Lanka and the vast amount of it that exists in the public domain that is not being read, analysed or discussed. He also talked about the need to go beyond data on votes secured by electoral candidates and mainstream the use of rich election data. Giving the example of local government elections, Manjula stressed on going beyond the data on the number of votes and focusing on the stories behind the data. He also talked about the need for the government to give prominence to publishing more data in this domain and also hinted on the importance of data security in this space.

Data-driven Decision Making and Innovations in Using Existing Data

Rahul referred to the Indian context, where there is simultaneous data scarcity and overproduction of data. On data scarcity, he talked about the lack of updated rounds of long-standing sample surveys as well as census. On the other hand, there are also piles of data and that leads to a problem of asking the right questions and analysing the data we have. He pointed to the need to reflect on the research questions being raised in the domain of gender and politics. He also alluded to the lack of training researchers on using data, particularly in our universities. Lastly, Rahul also talked about the fact that research is undervalued by both government and organisations in the advocacy space. He stressed on the need to build symbiotic relationships in the research community and

have deeper engagements on this subject to create a culture and research and a ground where the data can be used in a more useful way. **Manjula** talked about the need to have inclusive data, highlighting the gap between population and registered voter data in the context of Sri Lanka. Providing the case of voters with disabilities, he underscored the need to work towards an inclusive election process by understanding the gaps in data. Manjula stressed on the need for efforts of multiple stakeholders, including government, civil society organisations, international organisations and the election commissions to put their hands together on such exercises.

Using Data to Shape Politics and Talk About It

Rahul discussed the different kinds of data being collected by different ministries, departments, and organisations in India and how there is a lack of synergy in all this data collected as everyone is collecting data for their own usage. He pointed to how collating these data together would be nearly impossible given the scale of data collection in India. He talked about how in such a context, one cannot do fine-grained analysis of data. Rahul also discussed the green shoots in the data and their critical importance, where we see more women entering the workforce, politics, having fewer children, and marrying later. He underscored the need to understand these data points and train researchers to use data effectively. Drawing on the fact that data collection is a political exercise and that there is no such thing as perfect data, Rahul stressed on the need to ensure credibility in such exercises through transparency in the process. Data is as credible as the researchers' intentions might be.

The session is moderated by **Sugandha Parmar,** Director, Centre for Gender And Politics.

The proceedings are drafted by **Hoyasala Devi K**, Chair - Women in Policy, Women in Leadership Conclave 23. Edited by **Sakshi Hallan**, Member, Technical Advisory Unit, Centre for Gender And Politics.

The full discussion can be watched at ▶ Data and Gender in South Asian Politics

Check out more about our work: www.cgapsouthasia.org / www.womenforpolitics.com

Interested in collaborations to host roundtables? Email us at contact@cgapsouthasia.org