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## *Women's Political Representation in Sri Lanka: Does Finance Matter?*

**Isuri W. Siriwardhana**

Research Associate and Lecturer at the Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies (BCIS). She is also a Visiting Lecturer at Open University of Sri Lanka. She has done her Bachelor and Master Degrees in Political Science at the University of Colombo. Her research interests mainly focus on democracy, environmental democracy and political parties. Her current research work is based on Internal Party Democracy (IPD) in Sri Lanka.

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## Women's Political Representation in Sri Lanka: Does Finance Matter?

Author: Isuri W. Siriwardhana

### Introduction

*Election campaign is an important component for representative democracy. It provides a platform for candidates and political parties to disseminate their message to constituency and bring competitiveness to elections. Election campaign aids voters to identify the different policies represented by political parties and individual candidates. Further, it helps candidates to increase their vote base. Parties and individual candidates' receive unlike amount of finance from various revenues. Therefore, political parties and candidates' spending for election campaigns depend on received income. Due to this, under representative groups such as women, young candidates, first-time contesters and minority groups experience severe discriminations in the democratic election process in Sri Lanka.*

*Sri Lanka is one of the oldest democracies in Asia yet, gender inequality in the legislative bodies (parliament, provincial council and local governments) remains significantly high. Last seven decades, the election campaign process has undergone significant changes in the country. It has been developed up to political representatives employ professional campaign agencies to undertake their campaigns. Yet, it brings clear gender inequality. Mainly, compare to men, women representatives have limited elections campaign finance. Therefore, it is evident in Sri Lanka women representatives launch poor election campaign. Against this backdrop, the paper tends to explore campaign finance and its impact on women representation in Sri Lanka.*

### Literature Review

The growth of representative democracy in Sri Lanka commenced during the colonial period. The campaign finance process emerged during the same period and has been developed since then. Yet, the

scholarly literature on campaign finance in Sri Lanka is narrow. The most of literature has been focused on lack of regulations on campaign finance. Gajanayake (2014) Gunaratne (2017) and International IDEA handbook on political finance (2014) explore the absence of campaign finance regulations and its negative consequences on the free and fair elections Sri Lanka. The studies show that collecting and spending of unlimited campaign finance damage the electoral integrity, political parties internal peace and representative democracy in the country. These studies further show that unregulated campaign finance encourages abuse of state resources. Mobrand, Bértoa and Hamada (2019) investigate how absence of campaign finance increase corruption in South Asia, South East Asia and East Asia regions. The study examines how corruption risks associated with the funding of political parties and election campaigns in Asian countries, types of political finance regimes those countries have, and, why these regimes fail to tackle the risk of corruption. It explains that generally lack of regulations in the campaign finance earning and spending in Sri Lanka corrupt the political parties and individual candidates. Further, it states that absence finance reporting system and sanction of violating campaign finance regulations make the political system and elections more corrupted.

There are many scholarly contributions analyzed on politics and women representation in Sri Lanka. Jayawardena and Kodikara (2003) draw diverse aspects on women and politics. The literature bring explanations of main barriers and challenges women's equal representation. It mainly discusses insufficiency of a proper procedure or legislative mechanism/s to elect balance women representatives in the country's policy making bodies. Literature demonstrate how the electoral system and socio-economic parameters impact of shortage of women representatives in Sri Lankan legislatures. In recent years, there has been a significant body of literature on introducing the women quota system for local governments. Ranawana & Brown (2021), more focused has been given to the women quota system and the debates on it, and obstacles on introducing the women quota system in Sri Lanka.

Wimala de Silva's (1995) and Liyanage (2018) have explored the political parties' role in the women representation in Sri Lanka. De Silva's study mainly focuses on the United National Party (UNP), People's Alliance (PA) and Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). It brings comparison on women representation in the national level, provincial level, local level and *Gramodaya Mandalaya* in the period of 1993-94. Liyanage examines main stream political parties, left political parties, minority political parties and Sinhala nationalist political parties (the UNP, Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), *Lanka Sama Samaja Party* (LSSP), Communist Party (CP), Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), Tamil National Alliance (TNA), Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and *Jathika Hela Urumaya* (JHU)) and internal party practices on women representatives. De Silva states that women from political families climb the higher positions at the parties while other women candidates who do not have family background spend years to get a higher position at political parties and win a ticket to contest for the elections. Political parties lack of internal mechanism to permit to women candidates to contest for elections (national-provincial and local level) has been revealed by the Silva's study. Similarly, Liyanage critically analyzes the factors contributing to the relatively low presence of women in Sri Lanka's political parties and the significant disparities men and women participation in the political party's internal activities. Particularly, it shows how political parties provide limited platforms for women to play their roles in the male dominated and hierarchically organized party structures. Further, De Silva and Liyanage reveal that internal party's women wings and traditional roles

of them. The women wings in the political parties play secondary role inside the parties and they are lack of independence and power to make active participation in the internal party activities. Bjarnegård at all (2022) have conducted an empirical study on gender and violence against political candidates in Sri Lanka. It shows show that, in post-conflict Sri Lanka, candidates use violence for electoral advantages over their political opponents. Men and women candidates experience different forms of physical and psychological violence during election campaign period. It findings further states that compare to men, women are victims of sexual violence.

However, the literature has not scrutinized lack of campaign finance as one of the barriers women candidates face to win the party nominations and elections. Therefore, the paper intends to explore hidden factors behind lack of campaign finance for women candidates in Sri Lanka. Further, the study expects to investigate how and in what ways that the campaign finance has become a barrier to increase the women representatives in legislative bodies Sri Lanka. Initially, the paper brings discussion on campaign finance and women representation in Sri Lanka. The second section explores the Socio-economic barriers in Sri Lanka and the way in which it impacts on women's campaign finance. Then chapter examines gaps in the campaign finance regulations and impact on women candidates. In the fourth part, internal political party's role in the context empowering women on campaign finance has been examined.

The research paper is developed based on primary and secondary sources. Archival research is done to collect secondary data. Interviews have been conducted to collect primary data. Face-to face interviews and online interviews were conducted with a JVP parliamentarian and National Coordinator (former) at Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV). All interviews were conducted in Sinhalese and later transcribed into English.

## **Campaign Finance and Women's Political Representation in Sri Lanka**

In general terms, political finance refers to all money in the political process. Ohman defines "political finance as the (legal and illegal) financing of ongoing political party activities and electoral campaigns (in particular, campaigns by candidates and political parties, but also by third parties" (Ohman, 2014:02). Mainly, political parties and candidates receive campaign finance from three different sources. There are public funding where the governments provide finance for political parties, private funding have been provided by individual and institutional supporters of the candidates/ parties and political party's own funding. Candidates use campaign finance in two categories. The first one is, 'early money', for "candidate to establish name recognition, gain exposure and organize a campaign team – hire staff, arrange for headquarters and set up a telephone service, among other things" (Ballington, 2003: 161). The second category needs to have "to successive meetings in different constituencies, clothes for interviews, overnight or weekend accommodation, and attending training sessions and party conferences, which are usually paid for personally" (Ballington, 2003: 161).

Sri Lanka's campaign finance process initiated with the introducing of representative democracy by the British. The formal regulations on campaign finance came into force in 1947 with the Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Order in Council. In the initial stage, political parties financially supported for their candi-

dates to undertake campaigns, yet majority of individual candidates relied on their own finance. For instances, “except in the Colombo districts and a few other areas of the Western Province, UNP candidates had to rely upon their own organization” (Woodward, 1969:67). When it comes to the SLFP,

....the central office could do little more than provide candidates with copies of the manifesto. Campaign fund came mainly from Bandaranaike’s private fortune, supplemented by whatever SLFP candidates could provide. For the most part, therefore, the candidates had to run their own campaigns, and there was little co-ordination from central headquarters (Woodward, 1969:91).

With the gradual growth of the electoral system and political parties, raising of campaign finance become an independent activity, where political parties and individual candidates find campaign finance by themselves. Nearly seven decades, Sri Lanka has been practicing representative democracy from national level, provincial level to local level. The election campaign field and methods of collecting finance have been undergone through significant changes. After introducing of Proportional Representative (PR) system and preferential vote system in 1977 elections and election campaigns become more competitive. Political parties and candidates tend to organize more attractive and influence campaigns since it has a dual task to fulfill. First, the political parties and candidates have to bring votes for the party and second they have to increase their own vote base. Therefore, the competitiveness arisen not only between political parties but also among the candidates from the same political party. An attractive campaign is the key strategy of winning preferential votes therefore, candidates believe election campaign is the best method to increase their vote base. Introducing of liberal economic reforms in 1977 to Sri Lanka, assisted to bring millions of finance to the election campaign field. It made the election campaign field more competitive and corrupted.

With these significant changes in the election campaign filed political representatives face challenges. The entire election process depend on the wealth of the parties and individual candidates. Political representative’s financial power become one of the primary criteria to win the nominations from their respective political parties. Candidates with wealth and power welcomed by political parties. This is one of the burning factor for new comers and women candidates in the male dominating political party system and election campaign field in Sri Lanka. “There is a strong argument that is articulated, especially in developing democracies, that electoral finance is an increasing obstacle to women’s election to parliament and other representative institutions” (Ballington,2003:158). In the Sri Lankan context, female voices in the national to local legislatures significantly low. “Sri Lanka’s representation of women in Parliament has remained at under 6% and continues to be so, while in Provincial Councils it is 4% and at Local Government it has been under 2% for many years, up until the Local Government elections held in February 2018” (Ranawana & Brown,2021:06). Lack of campaign finance is one of the main reasons for this women underrepresentation in Sri Lanka.

Though the number of seats per district increased under PR, the electoral unit also became larger, coinciding with the ‘district’ conceptualized for administrative and development purposes. This means that candidates have to canvass for votes within a much larger electoral unit. While this has proved to be difficult and expensive for any contestant, women have found it even more so given their historically low economic status in general (Wickremasinghe and Kodikara, 2012: 793).

Sri Lanka introduced 25 percent legally mandatory women quota for local governments bringing an amendment to the Local Authorities Elections Amendment Act, No. 16 of 2017. The Act introduced mixed electoral system, both single- and multimember district (or ward) seats and PR system. The mandatory quota system is not applied to the provincial councils or national elections and there are no other policies or actions have been taken to increase the women representation in the legislatures.

## Socio-economic Factors: Impact on Women's Campaign Finance

The Women population in Sri Lanka belong to diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and there are significant socio-economic disparities between women and men. According to the Global Gender Gap Index 2021, Sri Lanka ranked in 116 place out of 156 countries scoring 0.670. According to the sub-index of economic participation and opportunity, Sri Lanka ranked in 132 place scoring 0.547. Sri Lanka's "economically active male percentage is 64.6% while female percentage is 35.4% in 2019<sup>1</sup>". This economic disparities remains as one of the main obstacles for women candidates to contest for elections since they are not economically stable to undertake an election campaign. A UNP female candidate, who contested for the local government election in 2018 stated that "it costs about 25 million rupees to campaign throughout the whole district" (Hamza, 2020). She is a lawyer by profession therefore, she would be able to find finance for her campaign. Yet, most of candidates from backward economic backgrounds would not be able spend this amount of finance to do an election campaign. It makes them reluctant to contest for elections. Local government is the smallest electorate in Sri Lanka and a candidate has to spend approximately 25 million for the election campaign. It shows that candidates who contest for provincial council and parliamentary elections have to spend more finance for their election campaigns. This is a challenge in Sri Lanka, as candidates canvass for votes within a much larger electoral unit, have to organize political rallies, print and exhibit posters and allocate finance for TV and radio advertisements. It is difficult and expensive for women candidates with their low economic status in general. A UNP women Municipal Councilor from Moratuwa stated that,

One of the reasons why women are fewer in the major parties is because of finances, if you want to run an election campaign you have to have a lot of money. I do not think women who come in have that amount of money to spend, making it one of the clear drawbacks (Hamza, 2020).

This barrier keeps women out of the public sphere. The election campaign field become more competitive with constant changes and developments. Campaign agencies, campaign script writers, television and radio advertisements, designing and printing banners and posters, and organizing political rallies are highly expensive, need both finance and human resources. These campaign agencies and companies marketized the election campaign field more since it has become a profit earning business entities in Sri Lanka. On the one hand, to do a productive and effective campaign with other candidates, women candidates have to hire these campaign agencies. Candidates would lose the election battle if they fail to do an election campaign. On the other hand, during election campaign, candidates have to employ a team

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1 <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/GenderStatistics/StaticInformation/ContributiontoEconomy/EconomicallyActivePopulationbySex2017-2019>

to support them. Feeding the supporters, supply liquor, pay salaries and other relevant expenditure have to be beard by the candidates. Women representatives find challenging to execute a quality campaign with these expenses.

Incumbent female ministers, parliamentarians, provincial council and local government members would overcome the obstacle of finding campaign finance since they have already built the donor networks. Similarly, women candidates from political families economically more stable than other independent women candidates. They have both family power and financial support. Most of women candidates come from political families, have built the election campaign donor networks through their fathers, husbands, and brothers. As a result, they do not face challenges of finding campaign finance and they receive more financial support than other independent women candidates.

In the Sri Lankan context, politics has become an easy money earning method. Therefore, political candidates do not reluctant to spend finance for election campaigns. After winning elections, people's representatives spend first and second years of their term of office to earn money they spent for election campaigns. The rest of the years in the office, they collect finance for the next election<sup>2</sup>.

Yet, "many independent women candidates fail to get elected because they do not have the prerequisites to successfully contest an election today-money and muscle. Instead, time and time again we see that women elected to political office come from political families –who give them not only financial support but also access to traditional support bases" (Jayawardena and Kodikara, 2003: 24). These donor networks depend on patronage and clientalism. Incumbent leaders have built network with mega contractors, liquor shops owners, underworld thugs and collect campaign finance. After candidates are elected they support their donors to take liquor bar licenses, permits to do contracts and other illegal activities. The entire election campaign process depends on this give and take tradition. These connections are not only political but develop as personal levels. Independent women representatives do not receive this donor backing due to women are not able to build this kind of network with business community, liquor shop owners, underworld thugs and criminal gangs. With increase of competitiveness and expenditure of election campaign, underworld thugs came into the election process. Initially, politicians hire these thugs to protect the power of the politicians and to take money.

Political parties and individual candidates receive drugs dealing and other black market money. Initially, they start to help to mainstream political leaders and parties. Later, instead of helping for political parties and leaders, these underworld thugs join with mainstream political parties and start to contest for elections. Political parties tend to give nominations for them since they had enough money to spend for election campaigns.<sup>3</sup>

With this trend political parties have a tendency to give nominations for these thugs and black money owners than women representatives. Then the political parties know that they receive finance from these members to political parties and they have an adequate amount of finance undertake their election campaigns.

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2 The interview was done by Lankadeepa News Paper with Rohana Hettiarachchi, the Executive Director, PAFEREL, December, 2021

3 The interview was done by Lankadeepa News Paper with Rohana Hettiarachchi, the Executive Director, PAFEREL, December, 2021

Violence play a key role in the election campaign process. This is one of the reasons women members stay out of the election battle. Psychological, physical and sexual violence come with power and finance. “A woman candidate, for instance, mentioned that her campaign office was damaged and that all campaign posters were destroyed. Before the incident, she had been successful in getting people to come to her campaign rallies; as a consequence, she suspected that the perpetrator was another candidate (who eventually won the election) or supporters of that candidate” (Bjarnegård at all, 2022:49). With these violence, the expenditure become double as they have to start the campaign process from the beginning. Particularly, women candidates experience sexual violence than male candidates. Political candidates and parties spend finance for character destroy of women candidates. After candidate’s character has been destroyed, voters reluctant to cast their vote for women candidates. To rebuild the image, women candidates have to spend more money and time.

As a patriarchal society, gender stereotypes weaken the receiving campaign finance for women candidates. The perception society has on women is a fundamental reason for this. Do household activities and follow traditional lifestyle, as a daughter, mother and wife is the widely accepted role of women in Sri Lanka. Therefore, majority of women candidates do not receive support from their families and the society to do politics. This makes women’s hesitate to run for election and they are not ready to come out from their traditional role. And the society does not see women as political leaders. The perception the society gives does not promote to financial support for women candidates. Women’s involvement within a wider public sphere and interact with state machinery is considerably low compare to men. The country and its formal political setup is not women friendly in Sri Lanka. Due to women’s less political mobilization, lack of knowledge on politics and dis-connectivity from campaign finance networks in the country challenge to find campaign finance for women candidates. Women candidates think that spending money for campaigns is a waste because women candidates have limited opportunities to win the elections. Therefore, family and friends do not encourage women to contest for elections.

## **Absence of Campaign Finance Regulations: Challenges for Women Candidates**

Campaign finance regulations provide a level playing field for all contesting candidates. Further, it gives transparency and accountability on campaign finance income and expenditure. Delhi Declaration on Political Finance Regulation for South Asia introduced in 2015 in order to create an equal election campaign platform for every candidates and reduce corruptions. In Sri Lanka, a campaign finance regulation process introduced in 1947 under Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Order in Council. The Act provided a greater platform for regulate election expenditure of political candidates. However, the Act did not introduce a campaign finance income regulate mechanism. According to the Act, contested candidates ought to submit an expenditure report to the Election Commissioner within 31 days. Candidates’ failure to submit the report or if there are any issues related to the report, the Election Commissioner had authority to prohibit candidate’s sit or vote in the House of Representatives. Further, there was a method followed by political parties depositing finance under the party’s bank account. After introducing of PR system in 1977, the election campaign regulations came to end.



Absence of campaign finance regulation mechanism in Sri Lanka since 1977, has created significant disparities between men and women candidates in the election campaign field. Mainly, with unregulated finance, an imbalance playing field has been created. Candidates who have more finance than other candidates dictate the election campaign process, reach out to the electorate to collect more votes and utilize all or most of campaign platforms to execute a productive and attractive campaign. This impacts on women candidates since they do not have enough finance as well as power to do an equal and proper campaign. Existing campaign regulations assists to identify reasons caused gender inequality in the campaign field. Particularly, “disclosure may help assess the effectiveness of particular legislation on women’s successful campaigns and design new practices that can be tested” (Ballington and Kahane, 2014: 315). Further, according to Ballington and Kahane (2014) disclosure and monitoring mechanism help to assess and measure the quality of implementation of gender targeted quota and earmarking. Sri Lanka women candidates do not receive these benefits since absence of campaign finance regulations. Sri Lanka, individual donors, business community, companies, foreigners and other different institutions can donate unlimited finance for candidates and political parties without disclosure process. The absence of campaign finance regulations caused to remove gender sensitive factors related to campaign finance.

The Presidential Election Act, the Parliament Elections Act, the Provincial Council Elections Act and the Local Authorities Elections Ordinance prohibit vote buying both directly and indirectly. Yet, unregulated campaign finance bring enough finance for majority of male candidates, majority of them are men. It provides an opportunity for indirect vote buying. During election campaign candidates use diverse methods to attract voters. During election campaigns candidates provides free food for voters. “One candidate’s family members organized a lunch for people during election campaign time. A female voter who went and had lunch from there stated that I would give one of my preferential votes for that candidate, because they gave us a delicious lunch”<sup>4</sup>. Further, candidates participate for Sinhala Hindu New year festivals as the chief guest, provide money for these traditional festivals in the country, organizing sport meets and offer sponsorships, participate for religious festivals are some of the methods politicians use to attract voters. To do all these activities, politicians spend millions. In Sri Lanka it is essential to bring voters to political rallies to show that they have a large vote base than other parties. Particularly, if the party leader comes for the election rally they organized it in an open ground. To bring voters for these rallies, the politicians provide money, transport facilities, food, liquor and cigarettes for voters. Further candidates bring popular entertainers for their political rallies spending money. With unregulated election campaign finance, candidates use these indirect vote buying methods for increase the vote base. With limited finance women candidates could not go organize this massive campaign process, instead they use traditional methods as canvassing.

Sri Lanka practising two indirect public funding methods. They are “every political party or independent group are upon application permitted to use a total period of 45 minutes on radio and 45 minutes on TV. And free postage is available to secretaries of political parties, to disseminate election related

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4 The interview was done by Lankadeepa News Paper with Rohana Hettiarachchi, the Executive Director, PAFEREL, December, 2021

material” (Gunaratne, 2017:13). These mechanisms could benefit for women candidates. However, these two indirect public findings have not been connected with gender targeted indirect public findings. No earmarking mechanisms to encourage women candidates to contest for elections. Therefore, there is no guarantee that these two indirect public funding would be equally benefited for men and women candidates.

There are regulations for candidates yet cannot be considered as women friendly mechanisms. The Declaration of Assets and Liabilities Law No. 1 of 19756 makes mandatory for nomination received candidates to make declarations of assets and liabilities. An Amendment was introduced under Act No. 74 of 1988. It states that Declaration of Assets and Liabilities should be made within 03 months from the date of nomination. Further, if a candidate is being elected to the parliament, he/she should submit a declaration before he/she seated in the parliament. It should be hand over to the Election Commission or Returning Officer. However, the data illustrate a gradual decline in submitting Declaration of Assets and Liabilities by the candidates. In 2015, 35 percent have submitted their Assets and Liabilities Declaration. It has been declined gradually to 29 percent in 2020 general election<sup>5</sup>. The Declaration of Asset and Liabilities does not provide specific benefit for women candidates. Yet, it gives transparency on assets of political representatives. However, majority of politicians reluctant to submit the report. Further, Sri Lanka gives particular period to complete the election campaign. “Limiting the duration of the campaign could potentially contribute to levelling the field for women candidates, given that prolonged campaign period can incur high costs in the from travel, accommodation and additional campaign materials” (Ballington and Kahane, 2014:313). In the Sri Lankan context, due to the wide gap of receiving campaign finance for male and female candidates, the limiting the campaign period does not make significant benefit for women candidates in the election campaign field.

## Women’s Campaign Finance and Internal Party Practices

In Sri Lanka, political parties receive finance from various revenues. Political parties receive finance through party member’s annual membership’s fee, party’s trade unions and party affiliated professional organizations. Some political parties in Sri Lanka earn finance through renting their office buildings. For an instance, “Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) and SLFP receive millions of finance renting party owned buildings. Parties do not deposit this money under party’s bank account. Instead of that, they make a party trusteeship council and party foundations. Therefore, these finance are not regulated”<sup>6</sup>. During election time, political parties receive finance from private donations, party foreign branches and other various unanimous donors. These receiving finance handled by a centralized group within the party, most of the time party leader and her/his close members. The book keeping and issuing receipt are not practicing regularly and accurately. This is a common method followed by majority of political parties in Sri Lanka. Within this centralized finance handling process, there are no internal party gender sensitive

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5 The interview was done by Rahul Hettiarachchi from ADA with Manjula Gajanayaka, National Coordinator (former) at Centre for Monitoring Election Violence

6 Interview with Manjula Gajanayaka, National Coordinator (Former) at Centre for Monitoring Election Violence

policies to provide campaign finance for women candidates. Party leaders and his/her close clan use these finance for their election campaigns. No transparency and accountability on income and expenditure of these finance.

Political parties internal candidate selection process is neither independent nor transparent. There is no candidacy, selectorate and internal voting method to selection candidates inside political parties since party leaders and highest decision-making bodies play the central role in the process. Therefore, candidates do not need early money since they commence election campaign after receiving nominations. However, political parties consider several criteria to give election nominations. Out of them, candidate's loyalty to the leader and the party, the amount of finance a candidate can spend for the party and his/her own election campaign, donor networks they have and candidate's ability to win elections are the most considered criteria regardless of their ability in the policy-making process and governing. The fundamental task of candidates is to bring more votes to the party from other parties. These pre-requested criteria burden for women candidates. In this regard, receiving nominations for women candidates is considerably low since they are not able to fulfill party criteria.

*Table 01. Candidates at parliamentary election by year and sex*

Year	Both Sexes		Male		Female	
	Number	Percentage	Number	%	Number	%
2004	6060	100%	5685	93.8	375	6.2
2010	7680	100%	7223	94.0	457	6.0
2015	6151	100%	5582	90.7	569	9.3

Source – Census and Statistic Department, Sri Lanka

<http://www.statistics.gov.lk/GenderStatistics/StaticInformation/WomenEmpowerment>

*Table 02. Candidates at Provincial Council Elections by year and sex*

	Year	Both Sexes		Male		Female	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
All	2004	4863	100	4490	92.3	373	7.7
Provincial Councils	2012/2013/ 2014/2020	11,269	100.0	10499	93.2	770	6.8

Sources – Census and Statistic Department, Sri Lanka

<http://www.statistics.gov.lk/GenderStatistics/StaticInformation/WomenEmpowerment>

*Table 03. Candidates at Local Government Authorities' election year and by sex*

	Year	Both Sexes		Male		Female		Gove. Authorities
		No	%	No	%	No	%	
All provinces	2011	34992	100	31425	89.8	3567	10.2	322
	2018	57336	100	38867	67.8	18,469	32.2	340

Sources – Census and Statistic Department, Sri Lanka

<http://www.statistics.gov.lk/GenderStatistics/StaticallInformation/WomenEmpowerment>

All three tables show that number of male and female candidates contested for the parliamentary, provincial council and local government elections as number and percentage. It clearly depicts that female candidates contest for elections significantly low in Sri Lanka. In parliamentary and provincial council elections at least 10 percent female candidates have not received nominations to contest for elections. Further, it shows that Sri Lanka does not have minimum standards to ensure considerable women representation in the parliamentary and provincial council elections. There is a 10 percent to 32 percent dramatic increase after introducing of the 25 percent women quota system for local governments in 2018. Gender balance nominations cannot be requested from political parties since parties depend on private funding and absence of gender-targeted public funding mechanism.

However, the JVP, voluntary introduced equal campaign finance sharing process within the party. The JVP's parliamentarian, Vijitha Herath stated that,

We (JVP) collect campaign finance through donor forms. When donors give money for the party or individual candidates, we deposit all money in the party's bank account not under individual candidates' accounts. It helps us to keep transparency in the finance collecting process since we know who give finance and how much they give. During election time, we distribute campaign finance equally among party members regardless of their gender, ethnicity or religion. Therefore, there is no competition inside the party to collect funds from legal or illegal sources. We do our book keeping process properly. Hence, these things brings internal democracy, transparency and accountability in finance handling process<sup>7</sup>.

The JVP's voluntary decision on finance sharing encourage women candidates to contest for election. Other political parties do not follow internal transparent mechanism to support their respective party candidates. Therefore, JVP women candidates do not receive the level playing field in the elections. Political parties have established women wings through their respective constitutions. One of the main

7 Interview with Vijitha Herath, Member of Parliament (JVP)

objectives of establishing women wings is empower women members of the party. Yet, women wings play traditional roles as supportive affiliated bodies. de Silva explains women wings role as:

Their main activities are directed towards welfare work, income generation, providing behind scene support at meetings and swelling the ranks at rallies. Benefits that can be obtain (e.g., from poverty alleviation programmes) are a powerful draw for some women to join the *Kantha Samiti* of the ruling party. But even for women who are genuinely interested in politics, membership of a *Kantha Samithiya* does not pave the way to mainstream politics and political leadership" (de Silva, 1995:240).

Income generating for the party is women wing's key activity. These finance go to party's administrative and other relevant activities. Yet, women wings do not have particular role or programme to provide financial support to women candidates of their respective parties. Except women wings, political parties have party unions and professional organizations as party affiliated bodies. These affiliated bodies offer financial support to the mother party but not for women candidates. Political parties, women wings or other affiliated bodies do not have earmarking programme for women candidates since most of the parties depend on private funding. Political parties do not conduct training programme to campaign fundraising and how to do a political campaign. "Most of women candidates do not have experience on how to raise campaign finance and to do an attractive campaign. Political parties do not want to organize workshop on donor programmes for women candidates. Political parties ask us to conduct training programme for women candidates on fund raising, spending finance, how to do political campaign"<sup>8</sup>. Lack of internal party democracy, internal party institutionalization and lack of inclusiveness center the party financial power to the mother body of the party.

## Conclusion

The objective of the paper is to explore the way in which campaign finance impact on women representation in Sri Lanka. The paper brings three aspects, social-economic factors, absence of campaign finance regulations and lack of internal party mechanisms to provide financial support for women candidates to investigate the how campaign finance impact on women's equal representation in the country.

Thus, there are severe differences between men and women in the socio-economic and political standards. Therefore, it is a challenge for women to find campaign finance since socio-economic norms widen the gap. Lack of family and social support prevents campaign finance revenues for women candidates. Incumbent leaders, patronage politics and clientalism play decisive role in the campaign finance collecting process which is dominated by popular political parties and individual candidates. With these barriers women fight to build more reliable donor networks for themselves. Absence of laws and regulations has opened all revenues to collect and spend finance for political parties and individual candidates

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8 Interview with Manjula Gajanayaka, National Coordinator (Former) at CMEV

without any limitations. The zero disclosure process widens the issue further creating a major imbalance in the level playing field, which directly impacts women candidates. Eventually, it widens the imbalanced gender representation further.

Except JVP, other political parties have not taken any constructive steps to ensure an equal level playing field for women candidates who contest for elections under the banner of their respective parties. The male-dominated political parties, centralized decision making authority and lack of transparency in internal party finance handling reflect absence of internal party democracy. It is further proven through traditional women wings and old-style role they play inside political parties. Parties have not taken progressive steps to provide campaign finance for women candidates, training them on campaign finance raising and spending, and introducing of an internal loan system. With lack of campaign finance women candidates are not able to deliver their message to the electorates properly.

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