Elections and Democracy in Nepal

Prem Darshan Sapkota and Srishti Adhikari
Elections and Democracy in Nepal
Elections and Democracy in Nepal

This is an occasional paper with an analysis of the Nepali elections from 2008 through 2022. This paper discusses whether and how elections have contributed to the development of democracy. Two elections for the Constituent Assembly and two elections for the House of Representatives are covered in this study.

Author: Prem Darshan Sapkota and Srishti Adhikari

Acknowledgements: This publication would not have materialized without the support of Tilak Pathak, Shehnaz Banu and Kranti Pageni

Cover Art: Promina Shrestha

Layout Design: Saurav Thapa Shrestha, Everything Creatives Pvt. Ltd.

Copyright © 2023 Purak Asia

www.purakasia.org

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of Purak Asia. To request permission, contact at info@purakasia.org.

ISBN: 978-9937-1-4187-1
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections and Democracy</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agencies</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election Commission</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security Forces</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election Observers</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judiciary</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1— PR Quota in the CA and House of Representatives as per electoral laws 9
Table 2— FPTP women candidates across the years 11
Table 3— Polling booths and staff mobilization over the four election years 15
Table 4— Election expenses across each election (in millions) 16
Table 5— Security mobilization breakdown across each election 18
Table 6— Number of election observers 18
Table 7— Political party details across election years 26
Table 8— Voter details across the four election years 38
Table 9— Independent candidates and winners 39
List of Figures

Figure 1— The five pillar interactive election framework 6
Figure 2— Election boycotters across the years 17
Figure 3— Election results by party 28
Figure 4— Nepal’s political spectrum 28
Figure 5— Seat percentage in parliament across the political spectrum 29
Figure 6— New parties in each election year 33
Figure 7— Comparison between emerging parties and traditional parties 35
Figure 8— Percentage wise comparison for total HoR seats for big three vs the rest of the political parties 35
Figure 9— Estimated percentage of registered voters among the voting age population 36
Figure 10— Elected seats by FPTP and PR 41
Figure 11— Post-election transfer of power 46
Figure 12— Comparison between electoral process score and overall freedom score 50
Figure 13— Percentage comparison between the electoral process and pluralism score and the democracy index score by the Economic Intelligence Unit 50
Figure 14— Timeline indicator comparison as per BTI analytics 51
# List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Constituent Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoC</td>
<td>Code of Conduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPN</td>
<td>Communist Party of Nepal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPN-M</td>
<td>Communist Party of Nepal - Maoist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPN-MC</td>
<td>Communist Party of Nepal - Maoist-Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPN-UML</td>
<td>Communist Party of Nepal - Unified Marxist-Leninist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPN-US</td>
<td>Communist Party of Nepal - Unified Socialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>Election Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPTP</td>
<td>First-past-the-post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HoR</td>
<td>House of Representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IED</td>
<td>Improvised Explosive Device</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>Nepali Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPR</td>
<td>Nepali Rupee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>Proportional Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPP</td>
<td>Rastriya Prajatantra Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSP</td>
<td>Rastriya Swatantra Party</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

The 2006 people’s movement in Nepal ended the king’s direct rule and led to the reinstatement of the parliament he had dissolved in 2002. The subsequent peace agreement signed in November 2006 saw the Maoists agree to give up their armed protest and join mainstream politics. With the monarchy and violence, historically twin threats to Nepali democracy, finally neutralized, Nepal in 2006 was poised for a democratic transition. The 2008 election marked Nepal’s transition from a monarchy to a democratic republic1 while the 2017 elections, after the promulgation of the new Constitution in 2015, marked Nepal’s transition from unitary to federal state. This period in Nepali history is marked by the government and political parties’ willingness to negotiate with multiple social movements and marginal groups to uphold issues of proportional representation and federalism. Given the significance of these changes, the four elections held in the last 14 years are a perfect juncture to study how elections have impacted the consolidation of democracy in Nepal.

Since 2008, for the first time in its democratic history, Nepal has held four consecutive elections. All four elections were deemed to have mostly been free and fair by election observers. The first two elections in 2008 and 2013 were for the Constituent Assembly, which also functioned as the parliament, and the last two held in 2017 and 2022 were held after the introduction of the federal structure. Since people are the ultimate authority in a modern democracy, the Constituent Assembly elections represent a crucial exercise in popular sovereignty by the Nepali people. Their involvement in picking and entrusting representatives to write the Constitution, speaks to their ownership of not just the Constitution but also the transition process.2

During the 2017 elections, the country voted in its first federal and provincial elections and after a gap of 20 years, for the reimagined local governments. The elections implemented constitutional provisions required to become a “federal democratic republic”. The most recent elections in 2022 were the first test of the practice and acceptance of the federal structure. Thus, each of these elections had their own significance but for this paper, the significance is in what the continuum means for Nepali democracy and what it indicates about democratic practices in Nepal.

---

1 The first session of the 2008 CA voted to declare Nepal as a republic state and thereby abolish monarchy from the country.

In common parlance, democracy is often simplistically reduced to regular elections conducted freely and fairly. However, the attempt in this paper is not to equate democracy merely to the presence of elections, but to gauge the impact elections have had on democratic practice in Nepal. Taking all four elections from 2008 till 2022, this paper will analyze whether we have progressed, regressed or remained stagnant and how elections have helped democracy mature in Nepal over the last 14 years. The paper uses observations and available secondary data to present a descriptive and analytical study across the four elections.

Elections and Democracy

Despite the ubiquitous use of the term "democracy", there are multiple definitions and understandings of what the concept actually encompasses. While in its most abstract form, Schumpeter defined democracy as a political method or institutional arrangements that allows individuals to compete for power through free competition for people’s vote, Diamond defined democracy as, "a system of government in which the people choose their leaders at regular intervals through free, fair, and competitive elections." Both of them emphasize the electoral aspect of democracy. Dahl built on the electoral element and added the assurance of liberal rights such as freedom of expression, association and information whereas O’Donnell claimed the rule of law was essential for the safeguarding of such rights. Thus, democracy can be said to have two distinct dimensions—one electoral and the other liberal.

Democracy enables citizens to make independent choices as a “continual collective struggle for liberation in every kind of polity” that empowers political agency for each individual and allows for a “shifting expression...

3 The paper has only used data for the House of Representatives elections for 2017 and 2022.


of collective will. It offers the possibility for perpetual change through independent collective action. Furthermore, it empowers people to hold their representatives accountable for their actions.

Elections have a strong association with democracy even though elections have been widely used by all kinds of regimes including autocratic ones. In the simplest terms, what distinguishes elections in a democracy and an autocracy is the level of unpredictability about who will be elected and what policies they will pursue. While autocracies use elections merely as a way to legitimize those in power, the crux of elections in democracies lies in the freedom citizens exercise to express their will through their votes and ultimately determine who represents them in government.

According to Wolkenstein, the canon of popular sovereignty is the bedrock of modern democracy. While the radical approach to popular sovereignty believes that it can only be exercised directly and as a whole by people, the second approach is more practical and claims that popular sovereignty is exercised when people authorize the representatives of their choice to act on their behalf in parliament during elections. This concept of indirect popular sovereignty ties in directly with the idea of representative government which takes the demarcation of the role of the citizen and the elected representatives as a given. This is possible because the division of labor between the two are clearly spelled out in the constitution endorsed by the very people who elect the representatives. They agree to obey the laws and policies that their representatives make. Since sovereignty is tied up to the Rousseau's notion of general will, tensions arise as a result of the difference between self-interest and national interest.

According to Dahl, participation and contestation represent two distinct dimensions of an electoral democracy. He argues that these two dimensions encapsulate eight institutional guarantees that are essential for what he calls polyarchy—the ideal state of true democracy. Although scholars have claimed conceptual ambiguities in the concepts of

---


11 Participation was originally referred to as inclusiveness by Dahl, see Robert A. Dahl, Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

12 Freedom of organization, freedom of expression, the right to vote, broad eligibility for public office, the right to compete for support and votes, the availability of alternative sources of information, free and fair elections, and the dependence of public policies on citizens' preferences.
participation and contestation, they are nonetheless important indicators as evidenced by their usage – “three quarters of the most commonly used indicators of democracy...measure variation on Dahl's two dimensions of polyarchy—contestation and inclusiveness.” Participation in general refers to the involvement of the citizenry in both elections as well as in political parties, while contestation indicates the "extent and fairness of electoral competition between parties and distinct interests.”

The four fold classification—authoritarianism, electoral democracy, liberal democracy, advanced democracy—describes democracy and its various subtypes. The true realization of democracy is an ongoing process and it can never be deemed to be complete as evidenced by the fact that even advanced democracies are struggling with emerging disconnections between citizens and their representatives. In this context, free and fair elections become even more important because they allow people to periodically select and empower representatives and provide an avenue for articulation of their agendas, creating "patterns for peaceful transfer of power in the event of changes in the political frame of reference." Thus, elections play an important role in the consolidation of democracy.

The term "democratic consolidation" originally spoke to the need of keeping new democracies secure and protecting them from the threat of authoritarian regression. It has now been extended to include multiple factors—avoiding democratic breakdown, avoiding democratic erosion, completing democracy, deepening democracy and organizing democracy. Despite the difference in opinion about whether consolidation is about


16 Semi-democratic regimes—one that holds more or less inclusive, clean and competitive elections but does not upload the freedoms of liberal democracy, see Schedler, "What Is Democratic Consolidation?"


preventing backsliding or about paving the way forward, O’Donnell says that there is “an unspoken teleology that all democratic regimes should consolidate after transition.” 21 Thus, regimes adopting democracy after a transition are expected to consolidate it if they are to cement the gains from the transition. Linz and Stepan have proposed three dimensions of consolidation: a) behavioral b) attitudinal and c) constitutional. 22 The behavioral refers to when no political group targets overthrowing the system, the attitudinal refers to when the majority even during points of crisis support democracy, and the constitutional when conflicts are managed through democratic institutions and processes. 23 This approach provides a blueprint to map how democracies are progressing and identifies which dimensions require additional efforts for improvement.

Conceptual Framework

Most of the dominant discussions on elections in Nepal during an election cycle are on the actions, roles, decisions and performances of the political parties. 24 Although political parties are a crucial component of elections, there are other components that have a significant bearing on how elections are carried out. In order to examine the evolution of elections in Nepal over the past 14 years, we developed the five pillar interactive election framework (Figure 1). This is a conceptual framework that is based on five pillars that support the electoral process: system, agencies, judiciary, institutions and people. The framework was developed based on our observations and reflections on the electoral process of the past four elections in Nepal. It incorporates all of the pillars that are needed to gain a holistic and principled picture on each election. We use this conceptual framework (Figure 1) to map the progress and changes in practices pertaining to elections in Nepal. Furthermore, we look at the interaction between these pillars to examine how and if they promote or interfere with the functioning of the other. This paper utilizes this framework to probe how elections have helped in the maturing of democracy in Nepal.

The first pillar is the **system** which refers to the structural and legal arrangements such as the Constitution and the electoral system which have a direct impact on when and how elections are conducted. The second

---


24 This is based on the media debates held during elections, internal reports and documents as well as observations made during election years.
is agencies which consist of all of the institutional support mechanisms that are required during an election such as the Election Commission, security forces, and the media. The third is the judiciary which functions as an independent arbiter in case of any disputes or conflicts regarding the electoral process or outcomes. The fourth is institutions which primarily refers to the political parties that supply the agendas and candidates as people’s representatives, contest in the elections, and ultimately take on the mandate of connecting the people and the government. The last is the people, which refers to the citizens who are eligible to vote and determine who gets to represent them in the parliament. Each of these pillars are independently significant, however, the interconnections between them are equally important when it comes to the functionality of elections and the legitimization of the process and outcomes.

System

The constitution is the foundational document for any democracy. It outlines the electoral system based on the institutional context of a democratic political system. Popular sovereignty is institutionalized in a constitution through the division of labor between citizens and their representatives. Furthermore, the electoral system upon which all subsequent elections are based is also elaborated upon in a constitution. In Nepal, the four consecutive elections held from 2008 till 2022 were conducted under two
different constitutions: the first two Constituent Assembly elections were held as per the Interim Constitution 2007\textsuperscript{25} and the latter two as per the Nepal Constitution 2015.

Both constitutions had provisions for an independent Election Commission entrusted with the task of holding all elections.\textsuperscript{26} Furthermore, the Interim Constitution made provisions for a separate Constituent Assembly Court to oversee and resolve all complaints pertaining to elections.\textsuperscript{27} As far as resolution of electoral disputes are concerned, this provision exhibited good intent to ensure elections would be held in a free and fair manner. This responsibility was inherited by the Supreme Court for the 2017\textsuperscript{28} and 2022 elections for cases the Election Commission could not resolve to the satisfaction of all involved parties.

Both the Interim Constitution and the Nepal Constitution explicitly mention that, “sovereignty and state authority of Nepal shall be vested in the Nepalese people.”\textsuperscript{29} This is salient because the 2008 CA elections were the first elections that were held without a role for the monarchy. In fact, the Interim Constitution 2007 tasked the state with the responsibility of conducting “a free and impartial election for the members of the Constituent Assembly within Jestha 2064 (by June, 2007), acknowledging... that the sovereign powers of the State inherently lies upon the Nepali people.”\textsuperscript{30} Furthermore, Article 63, clause 6 in the Interim Constitution spelled out that any citizen aged 18 and above shall be entitled to vote in the Constituent Assembly election. The Constitution of Nepal 2015 ensures that any Nepali citizen aged 18 and above and residing within the realms of the state has the right to vote in any one election constituency in the federal, provincial and local elections. The laws that governed all four elections clearly outlined that the members of the Constituent Assembly and the Parliament would be elected through universal, confidential and equal suffrage. Another significant

\textsuperscript{25} The 2013 Constituent Assembly election was not envisioned by the interim constitution and hence the interim constitution was modified by presidential order to hold constituent assembly elections for a second time, see Carter Center, “Observing Nepal’s 2013 Constituent Assembly Election,” The Carter Center (2013), https://www.cartercenter.org/resources/pdfs/news/peace_publications/election_reports/nepal-2013-final.pdf, 6.

\textsuperscript{26} Article 128 of the interim constitution made provisions for an independent Election Commission to hold Constituent Assembly elections and referendums whereas the 2015 constitution, the provision for the EC was made in article 245.

\textsuperscript{27} Interim Constitution 2007, Article 118.


\textsuperscript{29} Interim Constitution 2007 and The Constitution of Nepal 2015, Article 2.

\textsuperscript{30} Interim Constitution 2007, Article 33 (a).
component of the two constitutions are the provisions for fundamental rights\textsuperscript{31} which are crucial for democratic consolidation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP</th>
<th>PR Quota in the CA and House of Representatives (HoR) in percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008/2013 (CA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalit</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adibasi Janajati</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madheshi</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khas Arya</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tharu</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backward Areas</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: PR Quota in the CA and the House of Representatives as per electoral laws.

In terms of legal provisions for participation and inclusiveness, both the constitutions were progressive in the number of fundamental rights. The right to open a political party is enshrined as a fundamental right in both constitutions\textsuperscript{32} Furthermore, there is a mandatory provision that there must be at least one third women representatives from each political party in the parliament\textsuperscript{33} and that 50 percent of all proportional representation (PR) candidates need to be women.\textsuperscript{34} Similarly, Schedule 1 of the Constituent Assembly Election Act, 2063 (2006) specified a minimum ensured proportional representative percentage for Janajati (18.9 percent each for male and female), Madheshi (15.6 percent each for male and female), Dalits (6.5 percent each for male and female), backward (2 percent each for male and female) and others (15.1 percent each for male and female) based on the population. The quotas for the PR in the CA elections and the House of

\textsuperscript{31} Interim Constitution 2007, Articles 12-32 and The Constitution of Nepal 2015, Articles 16-46.

\textsuperscript{32} Interim Constitution 2007, Article 17 Clause 2 sub-clause c, and Constitution of Nepal 2015, Article 17 Clause 2 sub-clause c.

\textsuperscript{33} Interim constitution 2007, Article 63 Clause 6 and Constitution of Nepal2015, Article 84 clause 8.

\textsuperscript{34} Constituent Assembly Election Act, 2007 and House of Representatives Act, 2017.
Representatives (HoR) elections since 2017 are given in Table 1.

The Constituent Assembly elections were held through a “mixed parallel system in which 240 seats were elected under a first-past-the-post (FPTP) system in single-member constituencies and 335 seats were filled by a list system of proportional representation (List PR) with quotas applied to the List PR section only.” The 2017 and 2022 elections were also held under a mixed-method electoral process with 60 percent (165 seats) of representatives elected from the FPTP category and 40 percent (110 seats) from the proportional representation category. The inclusion of the PR system in 2008 was a first in Nepal as a simple majority rule, which was the practice until then, was seen as inadequate to represent the complexity and diversity of the country.

Although proportional representation was given a larger share of seats in the Constituent Assembly, the way the PR list winners were determined was criticized by civil society and international observers alike. In 2008 and 2013, the political parties selected candidates from their open list after the election results were announced as per the decision of their central committee members. This practice meant that when people voted for a particular party, they were unaware of which candidate they would be voting for to represent them in the parliament. It also allowed party leadership undue power in picking and choosing amongst the open list. Hence, Nepal switched from an open list to a closed list from the 2017 elections which was a significant change after the experience of the Constituent Assembly elections. Similarly, while the seats for proportional representation were allocated based on a modified version of the Sainte-Lague formula without a legal threshold, for the 2017 elections and thereafter, a three percent threshold of total valid votes nationwide is used as a cut off for a political party to obtain a PR seat.

Across the four elections, the number of elected women representatives through the FPTP numbered 29, 10, 6 and 9 respectively. The huge numbers in 2008 were primarily because the Maoists, on the heels of the people’s war, fielded 42 women candidates from Dalits, Janajatis, and

Madhesi minorities and managed to secure 24 seats through their women candidates. The other two big parties Nepali Congress (NC) and CPN-UML together fielded 57 women candidates of whom only three managed to secure seats. As seen in Table 2 in terms of women candidacy, 2013 saw the highest number (667) of women candidates while 2017 had the least (146), the drop was also because the total number of seats went down to 275 in the House of Representatives. Despite the mandatory provision for 33 percent women representation, the percentage of women candidates for FPTP from the political parties has failed to reach double digits barring once in 2013.

One of the major criticisms about the use of the PR system has been the trend to include political leaders who have been in positions of power or business leaders with no apparent background in politics in the PR list. Examples include Girija Prasad Koirala by the Nepali Congress (NC) and Binod Chaudhary by the CPN-UML in 2007, Arzu Rana Deuba, Bimalendhra Nidhi by the NC and Krishna Bahadur Mahara by the CPN-MC in 2022. The PR list has become a safety option for senior political leaders who fear losing elections in the FPTP system or an avenue to influence policies as legitimate lawmakers for business people. Although a valid concern, this criticism says little about the system as a whole and more about the culture of political parties.

Table 2: FPTP women candidates across the years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FPTP CANDIDATE DETAILS</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of women candidates</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elected women candidates</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women candidates by political parties in %</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Collated from EC data.

Agencies

Election Commission

The categorization of agencies is made to include entities that play an important role not just in the process of elections but also in ensuring that the elections are free and fair. The first amongst such institutions is the Election Commission (EC). The EC is a constitutionally mandated body. Article 129 of the Interim Constituent of 2007 authorized the election commission to “conduct, supervise, direct and control the elections of Constituent Assembly” and Article 246 of the Constitution of Nepal 2015 has clearly spelled out that the EC shall “conduct, supervise, direct and control the election to the President, Vice-President, members of the Federal Parliament, members of State Assemblies and members of Local level”. The final decision for the disqualification of a candidate after the filing of nomination but prior to the declaration of the results is entrusted to the Election Commission. The work and functions of the EC were governed by the Election Commission Act, 2007 for the 2008 and 2013 elections and by the Election Commission Act, 2017 for the 2017 and 2022 elections respectively. The EC is responsible for formulating and implementing necessary acts, regulations, directions and procedures which guide the overall election process. The EC makes decisions regarding who to employ for the elections, provides permission for election observation to any national or foreign person or organization, formulates a code of conduct for the elections that needs to be abided by the Government of Nepal, all government employees, political parties, media, and the private sectors, and specifies the ceiling for electoral expenses incurred by political parties and candidates to name a salient few.

The EC is responsible for the resolution of electoral disputes, which is crucial not only to resolve conflict but also to inspire trust and confidence in the electoral processes. In 2008, the EC had a Complaint Settlement Committee in the commission and in 2013, it had an Electoral Dispute Resolution Committee. Elections since 2017 were guided as per the Electoral Dispute

---


While the legal provisions for dispute resolution have come a long way, its practice leaves much to be desired.

An important undertaking of the EC is to include all legally eligible adult in the electoral roll, and to continuously update and maintain it. In 2013, the EC created a biometric voter register which was intended to systematize the voting registration process and help solve issues of multiple voting and duplication. This was continued in 2017 and logistical issues with the actual handing out of the voter cards were circumvented by the EC with the announcement that any other government-issued ID card would suffice for voting if the individual’s name had already been enrolled. Thus, the EC has been improving upon existing practices while allowing voters to adapt to these changes without preventing them from voting.

Although the Code of Conduct (CoC) for the 2008 election looked good on paper, observers commented that it was not enforced well by the Election Commission as it took a mediatory approach to complaints and violations to avoid instigating any reaction from the political parties and their subsidiaries. In 2013, the EC appeared a little stronger and issued warning for cases of violations of the CoC but refrained from imposing fines. The EC was proactive in addressing complaints related to candidate registration although complaints about Election Day were left to the discretion of local election officials. In 2017, there were similar concerns over the lack of enforcement of the CoC with the EC publicly proclaiming it lacked the capacity to implement it. Though the lack of implementation has been a challenge, the EC has progressively included stricter provisions in the CoC, none more so than in 2022 when the restrictions ranged from limitations of 25 on the number of people for door to door campaign, restrictions on the use of posters and party symbol flags (a major indication of the arrival of elections in prior years), restrictions on the endorsement of candidates on social media, and so on. However, there was widespread criticism on the EC’s capacity to both monitor and implement the stringent CoC given its

---

53 Since the 2008 elections marked a transition from arms to mainstream politics for the Maoists, they were seen as very susceptible to incitement.
track record. While the CoC was called restrictive, particularly in the latter years, the lack of enforcement raises questions on the validity of the CoC and the credibility of the EC.

Voter education has been a constant feature of the EC. While a lot of resources were dispatched in the 2008 and 2013 elections, observations on the level of voter awareness varied. 2017 saw the EC use a large number of posters and TV advertisement to inform the public about the ballot papers and voting. This was crucial since the three tiered election was the first of its kind in the country and there was much confusion about the ballot papers. 2022 saw the EC switch a lot of voter education to social media platforms which though used extensively did not reach all parts of the country. Voter awareness programs which were conducted by many of the civil society members for the 2008, 2013 and 2017 elections were few and far between. This resulted in an increased number of invalid votes which defeats the purpose of the exercise of sovereignty.

One of the primary responsibilities of the EC is deploying election officials who carry out all the necessary arrangements from poll booth set up to coordination with security forces to seal and maintain records of ballot boxes. Across the years (see Table 3), we observed a slight dip in the number of polling booths in 2013, which was a result of the decreased number of registered voters. Thus, the number of polling booths and polling staff are a reflection of the registered number of voters. In terms of election officials, while in 2008, there were only two female officers among a total of 240, during our observation in 2022, we found a larger presence of women officers.

Table 3: Polling booths and staff mobilization over the four election years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POLLING DETAILS</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Polling Booths</td>
<td>20,888</td>
<td>18,457</td>
<td>19,809</td>
<td>22,227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Polling Staffs Mobilized</td>
<td>234,000</td>
<td>217,000</td>
<td>227,803</td>
<td>246,960</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Collated from EC data.

---


57 The introduction of the biometric voter in 2013 and the criteria for registration meant that substantial portion (an estimated 25 percent of the voting electorate) of the population were not registered to vote.

With the holding of periodic elections, what has become apparent is that elections are a very expensive endeavor. The EC’s expenses doubled from 2008 to 2013 (see Table 4) and the increase in electoral expenses in 2017 was also substantial. Similarly, expenses related to security forces have also risen accordingly. Given concerns over the sustainability of electoral expenses, in 2022, the EC made a deliberate attempt to reduce spending. Expenses decreased by 801.44 million as compared to 2017, which is a welcome effort.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELECTION EXPENSES</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Election Commission in NPR</td>
<td>2,809.6</td>
<td>5,988.99</td>
<td>7,801.44</td>
<td>7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security Forces in NPR</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>6,840</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>10,737.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4: Election expenses across each election (in millions).*

Given political volatility, electoral uncertainty and time constraints that the EC has faced for each of the elections barring the last one, it is not surprising that despite its faults and areas of improvement, the EC has been largely commended, both by national and international election observers for its logistical preparations and operational arrangements in conducting the elections in a free and fair manner. What is apparent is that, while there are multiple lacunas, the EC has been gaining confidence in its role and has progressively improved its practices, voter registration and dispute handling mechanisms.

**Security Forces**

The involvement of the security forces during elections in Nepal, particularly the Nepal Army (NA), has invited skepticism and censure in the international arena. However, given the transition and the reality of the wider political context for our elections, there is an argument to be made for their widespread presence. Every election since 2008 has had groups or parties who have chosen to stay in the sidelines and boycott the elections, be it violent groups in Madhesh in 2008, communist factions like Vaidya's CPN-M in 2013, or another communist faction led by Biplav in 2017 and 2022. Vaidya's CPN-M in 2013 was a breakaway faction from the larger CPN-Maoist and the Nepal Communist Party- Biplav was a breakaway from the Vaidya faction. A detailed list of the primary boycotters is depicted in Figure 2.
Even though there has been a marked improvement in the security situation in recent times, holding elections amidst sporadic violent protests and improvised explosive device (IED) explosions is a challenge that the EC has dealt with over the years. This has necessitated the presence of security personnel in every election to varying degrees. Besides providing actual security, the security forces are also used to take them into confidence and have them act and respond positively to the holding of elections. The Nepal Army is primarily deployed in highly sensitive areas and maintains the outermost ring of security followed by that of the Armed Police Force, with the Nepal Police and temporary security personnel at the center.

As seen in Table 5, 2008 saw the lowest number of security personnel deployment, primarily due to the absence of the Nepal Army, which has otherwise had a steady presence in Nepali elections. The increase in the number of temporary security personnel, hired for a specified period of time by the EC, has been steep with numbers consistently rising with each election. The temporary security work under the Nepal Police and play an important role particularly on Election Day, maintaining queues, directing voters into the correct queues and providing overall assistance. The presence of the Nepal Police and Armed Police have been fairly consistent across the two constituent assemblies and general elections.

Of the four chosen election years, 2008 witnessed the most violence with nine killings, multiple bomb explosions, and assaults on candidates, political

59 The temporary police mostly consist of young people both male and female.
ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY IN NEPAL

Table 5: Security personnel mobilization breakdown across each election.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECURITY DEPLOYMENT</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nepal Army</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>61,000</td>
<td>68,000</td>
<td>71,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal Police</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>65,000</td>
<td>71,693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed Police Force</td>
<td>20,721</td>
<td>29,000</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>35,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary Security Personnel</td>
<td>Over 55,000</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>98,000</td>
<td>115,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Collated from EC data.

cadres, journalists and election staff. This caused voter intimidation and contributed to an atmosphere of fear for the general public that had just been through the decade long trauma of the Maoist conflict. Furthermore, it not only interfered with free campaigning but also highlighted the risk of voting for the voters. While the CPN-M and armed groups were largely responsible for the violent activities, the CPN-UML and NC were also involved in clashes in areas where they were considered to have a stronghold. Given the history of the Nepal Army with the Maoist, the Nepal Army was not mobilized for the 2008 elections. This changed in 2013 after the CPN Maoists led the government after their victory in the 2008 elections.

2013 saw the boycotting parties firebomb vehicles to enforce a 10 day transportation strike, which was foiled by security forces. Furthermore, attempts at road blocks and IEDs by the 33 party alliance led by the Vaidya faction of the Maoists were also neutralized by the Nepal Police and the Nepal Army's bomb squads. Thus, security forces played an instrumental role in minimizing violence and creating a semblance of order prior to the elections. On Election Day, their presence helped discourage further attempts at violence by opposing factions and provided security to election officials and voters in the polling booths. In addition to this, the security forces were also entrusted with the job of providing security to the ballot boxes until they were safely handed over at the counting centers.

The 2017 elections were held in multiple phases. Security measures were similar to previous years with the exception of an increase in the number of security personnel. The campaign period saw numerous attacks on political

---

61 Although the army was not officially mobilized, army patrols were visible close to sensitive areas.
party candidates and others and IED placements at polling stations which were intended to scare and intimidate however, this largely did not impact campaign efforts.\textsuperscript{64} The security presence provided a sense of safety to staff and political parties involved. However, there were a few instances where security barred observers from entering polling stations. Thus, although security presence during elections and at polling booths are regular sights for Nepali voters, sometimes under the direction of the election officer or otherwise, they can make calls to restrict access which can be seen as highhanded and against the principle of transparency.

2022 elections were the first federal elections that were held in a single phase. The security personnel mobilization was accordingly higher than before. Both prior to the elections and during the election day, good coordination from the security personnel was evident. On election day, in areas where there were a few bomb blasts by the election boycotters, the security upgrade was prompt.\textsuperscript{65} Checks at the entrance were tightened and prohibited items such as mobile phones were disallowed in polling centers. The precautions and preparation by the security agencies kept the atmosphere calm and voters were seen lining up even after the blasts in the morning. However, in some instances, the security personnel restricted access to election observers.

Election Observers

Election observers are an integral part of assessing and ensuring that elections are free and fair and in line with international principles of democracy. The 2008 election was held at a crucial juncture of democratic transition. It ushered the Nepali state from a monarchy to a people’s republic and took Nepali society from turbulent violence to peaceful coexistence. Because of this, it was imperative for the election to receive a stamp of approval from the national and international community alike. Hence, the Election Commission of Nepal invited international observer missions such as the Carter Center\textsuperscript{66} and the EU Mission to Nepal to maintain transparency and gain electoral credibility.

As seen in Table 6, of the four election years that we are looking at, 2008 saw the largest number of both international observation organizations (28) and observers (856), and domestic observation organizations (148) and observers (63,000). Since 2008 was the first elections right after the transition, there was great apprehension regarding both the process and success of elections.

\begin{footnotesize}
64 Carter Center, “Preliminary Statement” 2017, 10.

65 This was observed during the election observation in Bardiya on election day.

\end{footnotesize}
As expected, the number of international observers gradually declined with just two organizations and 15 international observers seeking permission from the EC in 2022. The number of domestic observers after the initial drop in 2013 has remained largely consistent with a slight decrease in 2022. However, what is noteworthy is the drop in the number of domestic observers, from 63,000 in 2008 to 10,000 in 2022. While the gap is huge from the first to the last election, it should be noted that for the two general elections since 2017, the numbers have been consistent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OBSERVER DETAILS</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>International Observers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Observers</td>
<td>856</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Domestic Observers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Observers</td>
<td>63,000</td>
<td>31,654</td>
<td>10,046</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Number of election observers

Source: Collated from EC data.

As the 2008 and 2013 elections were a practice in the ultimate exercise of sovereignty for the writing of a new Constitution, there was considerable interest from donor agencies to fund domestic institutions for election observation. This trend of a substantial number of both domestic and international observers continued into 2017 as Nepal put its constitutional mandate for a federal structure into practice through elections for the three tiers of government. The Carter Center and the EU which had been observing the elections since 2008 chose not to observe the 2022 elections. In 2017, observers were denied access at multiple polling centers as well as counting centers, a fact that was emphasized in the 2017 observation reports by both the EU Mission and the Carter Center. The access to observers was left at the discretion of the election officers and in some instances, security


forces.\textsuperscript{70} The restrictions in access and the lack of clarification from the EC in these instances raise transparency and accountability concerns. In 2022, the EC was also stringent in issuing permissions for domestic election observers. Observers were mostly assigned a booth or a municipality, keeping observation local and limiting access across municipal or district lines. Furthermore, election observation organizations who were critical of the restrictions in the code of conduct were asked for explanations and their election observation passes were delayed.

\textbf{Media}

The media has always been a strong supporter of elections in Nepal. Given our history of political instability, reluctance to go to polls and multiple election postponements, this support in favor of ensuring people get the opportunity to pick their representatives at regular intervals, as an exercise of their sovereignty, built pressure on political parties and helped maintain public morale. Furthermore, the media was crucial in creating a favorable environment for elections, especially when there were doubts on whether the elections would be timely. Both the 2007 Interim Constitution and the 2015 Constitution of Nepal have safeguarded the freedom of expression, freedom of the media to publish without censorship within reasonable limitations, and right to information. This has allowed media to give voice to multiple opinions without fear of reprisal from any party.

In 2008, the media acted as a check and balance by highlighting irregularities\textsuperscript{71} and reporting incidences of violence. Similarly, given its reach, it was used by the EC for voter awareness and to disseminate crucial information on time. FM stations in particular reached remote areas which were inaccessible to even print media. Although media played a notable role in covering the elections, one of the chief complaints was biased coverage and the limited access to media for smaller political parties.\textsuperscript{72} Election observation reports thus recommended that media houses adhere to neutrality in reporting and abstain from biased coverage, particularly in cases of conflict and violence.\textsuperscript{73}

2013 saw an increase in on the ground reporting as web portals focused on elections. In addition to this, social media, FM radios and live broadcasts

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71} Carter Center, "Observing the 2008 Nepal Constituent Elections," 2008, 60.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Carter Center, "Observing the 2008 Nepal Constituent Elections," 2008, 38.
\end{itemize}
by television channels increased accessibility to election updates, quickly making any violations known to the wider public. The EC also made use of electronic media for voter outreach program. Concerns over biased reporting by media outlets persisted in 2013, with the EC going so far as to ask the government to bar transmission of ABC Television until 5 pm the next day.\(^{74}\) Similarly, concerns over accessibility and coverage by national media outlets were raised by representatives from smaller regional parties. Despite good access to local media, they claimed that they were neglected by national media outlets.\(^{75}\) Although election observers stated that election coverage was largely balanced, there were multiple recommendations for the media to follow the code of conduct guidelines.

The 2017 elections saw a noticeable spike in the use of social media for election campaigns. The NC was the most active on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter followed by the CPN-UML and the CPN-MC.\(^{76}\) The primary political parties also had a greater presence in media outlets due to paid advertisements. The NC accounted for 29 percent of the advertisements on four TV channels while the CPN-UML accounted for 31 percent of the advertisement airtime on the radio and 37 percent of advertisement space on print media.\(^{77}\) Thus, traditional media was widely utilized by political parties to reach out to their constituencies.

The 2017 election marked the implementation of the federal structure with elections held for the local, provincial and the federal level. As this was the first time elections were being held under a federal structure, there was considerable confusion among the general public on what federalism meant and how elections would unfold. The media responded to this confusion by disseminating information to address these concerns and provide clarity. As a result, even though, media coverage and reports prior to 2017 were largely based on perceptions, opinions and issues, in 2017, the media, especially online, used data visualization to make election information and results more accessible and palatable to the general public.

Although the media was free to cover any stories, 11 journalists were placed in preventive detention after being cited as threats to public security and the electoral process.\(^{78}\) Furthermore, there were recorded cases of journalists being intimidated with some being manhandled by the police while

\(^{74}\) Carter Center, “Observing Nepal’s 2013 Constituent Assembly Election,” 2013, 43.

\(^{75}\) Carter Center, “Observing Nepal’s 2013 Constituent Assembly Election,” 2013, 44.


covering local elections. Others received threats in the form of letters, phone calls, and social media posts.\textsuperscript{79} These acts raise questions on exercising fundamental rights and the larger project of democratic consolidation.

While the use of social media was seen in the prior two elections, the 2022 elections saw an unprecedented rise in use across multiple platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok. Candidates and political parties used social media teams to not only reach out to their constituencies but also to navigate general sentiments.\textsuperscript{80} However, this brought on the challenge of misinformation and false stories smearing political candidates and misleading voters. The EC chose to counter this through a very stringent election code of conduct which CPN-UML initially objected to citing that it curtailed the rights of citizens.\textsuperscript{81} Social media policing was a losing battle for the EC as the EC lacked means to ensure compliance by social media companies while the general population chose to intentionally and unintentionally circumvent the rule.

Another significant difference was media access to polling centers. The media mostly had access to polling centers in prior elections, with only a few isolated exceptions. In 2022, there were multiple reports of media people being refused entry and access to polling centers with the decision to grant access residing on the whims of the election officer.

Print media for the most part was neutral in its coverage, although, as per usual practice, most of the coverage was centered on the big parties. The NC and CPN-UML had the most coverage with CPN-MC a distant third with less than the half of the coverage of either of the top two.\textsuperscript{82} Online media were not as circumspect with their coverage with some outlets openly aligning themselves with a political party or a candidate.\textsuperscript{83} Furthermore, building upon the data visualizations work from the 2017 elections, this time around, the media added a comparative dimension and used local election results as projections for provincial and federal elections.


\textsuperscript{80} Based on interaction with political party cadre in Chitwan.

\textsuperscript{81} Tika R Pradhan, “Election Commission Has Stricter Code of Conduct but Lacks Mechanism to Monitor It,” The Kathmandu Post (May 2, 2022), https://kathmandupost.com/national/2022/05/02/election-commission-has-stricter-code-of-conduct-but-lacks-mechanism-to-monitor-it.


\textsuperscript{83} “ANFREL Pre-Election Assessment Mission Report,” 2022, 40.
Judiciary

The role of the judiciary pertains to the handling of any disputes that are either not resolved by the Election Commission or pertain to constitutional questions. In a one-off and highly controversial case in 2013, the Chief Justice acted as the prime minister, as part of a common agreement with all the political parties, to break the political deadlock and hold elections for the second Constituent Assembly.84 In 2017, the Supreme Court ordered the government to “hold the polls at the local, provincial and federal levels within January 21, 2018, as required by the statute, for full implementation of the Constitution.”85 These are clear instances of the Supreme Court playing a role in enforcing the holding of elections.

In terms of rulings regarding the general population, the Supreme Court has been progressive and ruled in favor of the rights of the people. In a landmark decision, the Supreme Court in 2014, “directed the government to provision for voter’s ‘right to reject’ all candidates in elections henceforth by formulating appropriate laws.”86 When the right to reject option was not implemented in the 2017 elections, the SC issued another directive to formulate a law to proceed with the right to reject option for voters.87 The government and the EC are yet to practice this ruling as the parliaments since the court’s decision have failed to pass the required law. The ruling shows that the people are the ultimate sovereign and have the right to reject all candidates fielded by political parties if they consider them to be either unworthy or not in line with their own or national interest.

Similarly, in 2018 the Supreme Court issued a mandamus order to the government to ensure the right to vote for all Nepali citizens living abroad.88 This ruling, in favor of allowing all those with a Nepali citizenship and voter identity card issued by the EC, was significant not just because it underscored the civic rights of all citizens but also the fact that elections are supposed to reflect the will of the citizens in their entirety. Thus, the Nepali judiciary has upheld the fundamental rights granted through the

---


Constitution and ruled in favor of ensuring all citizens have the opportunity to have their voices heard.

Although the EC is the primary institution for handling any grievance or conflict, the 2007 Interim Constitution made provisions for a constituent assembly court (Article 118) to handle any complaints regarding elections. For the 2017 and 2022 elections, the Supreme Court deliberated upon outstanding conflicts with regards to the elections. In 2022, the Supreme Court issued an interim order against the EC to cease any action against the 'No Not Again' campaign organizers. This order nullified the EC's warning against the campaign organizers, recognizing their right to voice their opinions. Similarly, in 2022 the Supreme Court ruled to uphold the candidacy of Toshima Karki, who had had her candidacy annulled by the EC. On the other hand, it ruled to uphold the EC's decision to cancel the candidacy of Raju Gurung of the CPN (Unified Socialist). These rulings and decisions further indicate that the legal recourse is not only available to one and all but it has been put to use by different parties and agencies at different junctures during elections.

Despite the presence of these emblematic cases, the delay in decisions by the constitutional assembly court or the constitutional bench have consistently been mentioned in election observer reports since 2017. In 2017, the NC candidate Pradip Poudel filed a writ petition at the Supreme Court demanding a rerun of parliamentary polls in his constituency of Tanahun-2, however, he is yet to receive a verdict on the case even after being elected as a member of parliament in the 2022 election.

**Institutions**

Institutions in this particular context refer to the primary institutional bodies that connect the people with the state, namely the political parties. A well-functioning democracy has multiple political institutions that compete with each other to form a government, shape public policy and
maintain linkages with their constituencies.\textsuperscript{93} Thus, political parties are the institutions that obtain the trust of the people and convince them to recognize their candidates as their representatives and lawmakers.

Since Nepal practices multi-party democracy, there is no dearth in political parties registered with the hope of competing and representing their constituencies. Both the 2007 Interim Constitution and the 2015 Constitution of Nepal guarantee political pluralism and freedom of association. Two rights that both foster and protect the existence of political parties in Nepal. Political parties can be registered with the EC once they obtain signatures of at least 10,000 registered voters supporting their application. The number of registered parties over the years, as seen in Table 7, indicate that the right to freedom of association has been fully utilized by political parties. Furthermore, the presence of multiple political parties in parliament underscores that contestation, a crucial component of democracy, is very much in practice in Nepal. The sharp decline in the number of parties that obtained the status of a national party in 2017 (5) and 2022 (7) from 2013 (30) and 2008 (25) is the result of the implementation of the 3 percent threshold to qualify for a PR seat.

Table 7: Political party details across election years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POLITICAL PARTY DETAILS</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registered political parties</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating parties (FPTP)</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating parties (PR)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parties that obtained the status of National Party</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parties in the parliament</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Collated from EC data.

Despite the large number of parties that contest elections, the major three parties, NC, CPN-UML and the CPN-MC have consistently secured the majority of seats while the five other parties, as seen in Figure 3, have secured enough seats to place them in a position to impact government formation. A single party has never gained majority vote, except in 2017 with the left alliance of the CPN-UML and the CPN-MC. The two parties unified to form a single party in 2018, but then broke into three factions

between the 2017 and 2022 elections.

Given the sheer number of political parties, it is perhaps unsurprising that they range across a spectrum. Figure 4 below showcases the major parties94 with a clear indication that Nepal has its fair share of left leaning parties with the CPN-UML and the CPN-MC at the helm. Janata Samajwadi Party, which represents the issues of the Madhesh and its indigenous communities, believes in socialism. The new Janamat party has also taken up issues of the Madheshi community, farmers and the idea of Swaraj. Both these two parties are between the demarcation of left and center. The Nepali Congress has been consistently holding the center. The up and coming Rastriya Swatrantra Party (RSP) claims to represent the center right95 whereas the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP)96 holds the right most position in the context of Nepal.

People are free to form political parties according to their beliefs and ideologies. They can then make their case for people to vote for their representatives in elections. One example of democracy in practice is the continuous participation of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), which advocates for the reinstatement of the monarchy and the Hindu state. Even though this stands in direct opposition to the secular republic imagined in the Constitution, RPP can still participate in elections because our Constitution believes in pluralism.97

People use their freedom of association to form political parties, but they also choose between the political parties across the spectrum. As seen in Figure 5, the left has consistently gained the most number of the seats with the center running second. The number of seats for the left can be attributed to the heavy presence of left leaning parties, although the lion’s share is generally split between the CPN-UML and the Maoist Center. The right, though a constant presence, has seen sharp rises and declines. The increase in 2013 was because with the intense discussion on retaining the secular state as proclaimed by the 2007 Interim Constitution, people who wished for a Hindu state voted overwhelming for the RPP. Their resurgence in 2022 after a sharp decline in 2017 can be attributed to the strategic coalition with the CPN-UML in some constituencies and the impact of new leadership. From a comparative perspective, the rise of the center right in

94 The parties were chosen based on either their continued presence in the parliament across the four election years or the diversity that that reflect through their representation.


96 In the aftermath of the 2006 movement, the faction RPP (Nepal) stood for monarchy which eventually merged into its mother party RPP so we have chosen to use RPP for the purposes of the spectrum.

97 Article 74 of the constitution clearly states that Nepal shall have a parliamentary form of government based on pluralism.
Figure 3: Election results by party.

Note: Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal is now Janata Samajbadi Party, Tarai Madhesh Loktantrik Party is now Loktantrik Samajbadi Party, and Raatriya Prajatantra Party Nepal is now Raatriya Prajatantra Party.

Source: Collated from EC data.

Figure 4: Nepal's political spectrum.

Note: The spectrum was constructed primarily based on two works, see Krishna Hachethu, Political Parties of Nepal (Social Science Baha, 2006) and Sujeeet Karn, "Political Parties, old and new," Conciliation Resources (2017).
2022, primarily due to the Rastriya Swantantra Party (RSP), after negligible representation across the previous three elections, is noteworthy.

Political parties campaigned to reach their respective constituencies in each of the election years. In 2008, political parties held door to door campaigns, corner assemblies and a few larger rallies in city areas. In certain areas, such as the Maoist’s strongholds in the hill regions and the Tarai, candidates struggled to campaign freely. Besides the CPN-M\textsuperscript{98} who campaigned on social issues and equality, the other parties’ campaigns were personality driven\textsuperscript{99} and did not have any resounding message except for generic promises of sustainable peace and progress. There were no restrictions to campaigning and candidates were free to campaign from the day after their nomination. The smaller parties complained about the misuse of state property from vehicles, media and security personnel by the big three parties who were a part of the interim government.\textsuperscript{100}

![Figure 5: Seat percentage in parliament across the political spectrum. Source: Collated from EC data.](image)

2013 saw more of the same in terms of campaign methods, although there was a noticeable lack of mass meetings and nation-wide campaigns by national leaders in comparison to the 2008 election. Candidates focused on smaller group interactions with organized groups such as women’s groups, cooperatives, youth clubs and held motorcycle rallies in addition to door to door campaigns. Even national leaders campaigned primarily within

\textsuperscript{98} CPN-M was the chief outsider as this was the first time they had been a part of the electoral process since they took up arms.


their own constituency but they did not convey the larger political party’s message to the general public. As before, there were very few debates and discussions on policies and programs and political debates revolved around blame games with the opposition. Candidates across the board prioritized their personal chances for winning over victory for the party as losses during elections were seen to be devastating to political careers within the party. As in 2008, candidates were free to campaign the day after their nomination.

In 2017, political parties continued with door to door campaigns, rallies with visibility materials such as party flags and t-shirts, and organized assemblies. A new addition was the use of social media to reach out to their constituency. Candidates used Facebook LIVE to convey their message and reach out to a wider demographic. The CPN-UML and CPN-MC joined hands to create a left alliance\(^\text{101}\) and ran unitedly for the federal and provincial elections. This prompted other parties including the Nepali Congress and other smaller parties to create a “democratic alliance” which was later joined by other parties in order to beat the PR threshold.\(^\text{102}\) The campaigns and slogans for the 2017 elections were focused on development and prosperity with populist ideas such as metro rails, east-west railways, and smart cities. The Madhesi-based parties who were not happy with the Constitution campaigned for a constitutional amendment whereas the RPP pushed for a Hindu state and the reinstatement of the monarchy.

Given all the legal and logistical elements that had to be put into place, the timeline between candidate nomination and the first phase of polling in 2017 was tight. Only a 39-day window was provided for campaigning for political parties. Similarly, the PR lists and symbols were finalized late which did not allow smaller parties to communicate their symbols to their voters in adequate time.\(^\text{103}\) Furthermore, the EC fixed the order of symbols in the ballot paper as per the number of seats in the 2013 elections. The established parties appeared first, which put the smaller parties at a disadvantage. 2017 also saw the aura of leadership dominate political party messaging with KP Oli becoming synonymous to the CPN-UML. The fear of loss for well-established leaders was apparent as the electoral law only allowed candidates to stand in a single constituency.\(^\text{104}\)

2022 saw a massive proliferation of social media campaigns, which was a

\(^{101}\) They claimed that they would ultimately merge as a single party after the elections.


\(^{103}\) Carter Center, "Preliminary Statement," 2017, 10.

\(^{104}\) During the 2008 and 2013 elections, national leaders often contested elections from multiple constituencies to safeguard their place in parliament. However, Clause 14 of the Election to the Members of the House of Representatives Act, 2074 (2017), prohibited double candidacy of a single individual.
result of the burgeoning influence of social media and the reduction of the campaign period to 15 days by the EC to curb overspending on campaigns.105 Door to door campaigns and assemblies were also held to rally the crowds. While previously campaigns relied on mobilizing cadre based networks and inundating the masses with posters, party flags and party merchandise, in 2022 all the major political parties hired professional IT experts to assess the social media presence of opponent candidates and circulate their messages. In our conversations with journalists and party cadres, we were informed that professionals from India and even Nepalis working in the US were hired to run the social media unit of the campaigns.106 While political parties traditionally relied on local cadre and local committee assessment on their popularity and chances of winning, 2022 saw political parties and candidates engage election strategists to frame campaign strategies and formulate election messages.

This time around, the coalition government of Nepali Congress, CPN-MC, CPN (Unified Socialist), People’s Socialist Party and Rastriya Janamorcha formed an alliance they termed the “democratic left alliance” to contest parliamentary elections. Although the alliance of the NC with the left forces was deemed unnatural by many in the general public, the parties justified the coalition claiming that it stood against the threat of anti-constitutional populist moves of CPN-UML’s KP Oli during his tenure as the majority prime minister. The CPN-UML joined forces with the rightist RPP in another unnatural alliance. Thus, political parties across the spectrum formed pre-election alliances to contest elections. The gaining popularity of the ‘No Not Again’ campaign107 made it apparent that people were tired of the old party leaders and were seeking new faces and looking for change. Thus, political campaigns did not focus on policy reforms and were instead used to explain and justify the alliance to the general public.

A notable trend is evident upon the examination of the manifestos of Nepal’s political parties, specifically the Nepali Congress (NC), the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML), and the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist Center (CPN-Maoist Center) from 2008 to 2022. Despite their ideological differences, these parties demonstrated a consensus on several policy priorities. Over the span of fifteen years, certain policy objectives have consistently appeared in each party’s manifesto since 2008. The three big parties have been focusing on free education, the production of at least 5,000 MW of electricity, and infrastructure development like the construction of


106 This information was received during conversations during our Biratnagar and Chitwan pre-election observation trip prior to 2022 elections.

107 This was a citizen led social media campaign that called for a stop in the dominance of the elderly and multiple election winners who despite multiple shots at power failed at making any substantial contribution and called for a change in electoral candidates.
international airports, mid-hills highway, and the postal highway every year since 2008. Interestingly, the manifestos also reveal the degree of influence among the competing political parties. For instance, the Nepali Congress took the lead in introducing the pledge for health insurance for all, which was later adopted by other parties. Similarly, the Nepali Congress prioritized railway development in 2013, a steady feature in the manifestos of the CPN-UML and CPN-MC since 2008. While some policy priorities have remained unchanged over the course of four elections, there have also been shifts in certain areas. An example of this can be observed in the agendas related to electricity. Initially, all parties focused on completely eradicating load-shedding by 2013, the focus since then has shifted to providing free electricity up to 30 units to every poor household, increasing access to electricity to all citizens in two years, and electrification of every area in five years.

Political parties utilize slogans in their campaigns and manifestos as a means to appeal to potential voters. These slogans are carefully crafted to be attention-grabbing and often include a call to action, urging individuals to support a specific party. Some popular examples are – “Arulai heryau patak patak, maobadilai herau yes patak (You saw everyone multiple times but this time give a chance to the Maoists),” “This time the vote is for RPP,” and “Mangsir char, Oli Sarkar (Mangsir 4, Oli government).” Occasionally, slogans directly discourage voters from supporting other parties, as seen in the slogan, “The people’s choice is UML as the Congress are old and the Maoists are violent.” On other occasions, slogans simply consisted of concise and captivating statements filled with rhetoric, such as, “Excellent education and culture, strong foundation of the country's development” and “People’s Voice, Prosperous Society.” Although some slogans included certain agendas like “Universal Healthcare” they often lacked specific timelines and targets, remaining vague in nature. For a more comprehensive look, refer to Annex 1.

110 Manifesto of CPN-Maoist Center, 2022.
113 Manifesto of CPN-UML, 2022.
Since Nepal practices multi-party democracy, each election year has seen the advent of new parties that represent distinct perspectives from society. Figure 6 showcases all the major new parties that either represented a unique political message or stood up for a distinct identity/community and had substantial public backing\textsuperscript{118} during elections. Parties that were formed as offshoots or after breaking away from an established party with a well-established national leader at the helm have not been included.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure6}
\caption{New parties in each election year.}
\end{figure}

The 2008 elections witnessed a significant increase in the number of new political parties because the interim constitution lifted the restriction on parties formed on the basis of religion, community, caste, ethnicity or region\textsuperscript{119} thereby making it possible for parties from the Madhesh and other

\textsuperscript{118} This was determined on the basis of the number of seats that they were able to win in the parliament.

ELECTORAL ATLAS OF NEPAL

April: After 12 point agreement with the Maoist, seven party alliance led the Second People’s movement (Jana Andolan II). King Gyanendra forced to step down with the massive street protests.

November: The government and Maoists signed a peace agreement to bring an end to the decade long “people’s war”.

The Constituent Assembly was dissolved without producing the Constitution.

Local, the House of Representatives (HoR) & Provincial Assembly elections were held. Left alliance win with the largest number of seats, followed by Nepali Congress.

On September 20, the Constitution of Nepal was promulgated.

The Second Constituent Assembly election takes place.

Local, the House of Representatives (HoR) & Provincial Assembly elections were held. Nepali Congress win with the largest number of seats followed by CPN-UML and CPN- Maoist (Center).


Two elections were held during the Panchayat system i.e. 1981 and 1986. Referendum on system of government was held on May, 1983

Parties participated: 9
Participating candidates: 786
Voter turnout: 42.19%

Parties participated: 44
Participating candidates: 1345
Voter turnout: 66.15%

Parties participated: 65
Participating candidates: 1442
Voter turnout: 61.8%

Parties registered: 130
*Parties participated: FPPT-121; PR-122
Participating candidates: FPPT-512; PR-10,799
Voter turnout: 78.34%

Parties registered: 74
*Parties participated: 65
Participating candidates: FPPT-3947; PR-8701
Voter turnout: 66%

Parties registered: 86
*Parties participated: FPPT-P61; PR-47
*Participating candidates: FPPT-2412; PR-2199
*Voter turnout: 61.85%

Parties registered: 91
*Parties participated: FPPT-P56; PR-49
*Participating candidates: FPPT-P945; PR-2273
*Voter turnout: 68.6%

NOTE: 2017 and 2022 data reflect HoR elections only

SOURCE: The above data is collated from the Election Commission Nepal
ethnic groups to form independent parties and contest in the elections. As new entrants to mainstream politics, the Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) was the most widely discussed both in media and in public discussions. The Madhesi Janadhikar Forum and the Tarai Madhesh Loktantrik Party made their debuts as the voice of the Madhesh in 2008. Chure Bhawar Rastriya Ekta Party was another addition that was born as an opposition to the idea of a united Madhesh to defend the interests of the hill communities residing in the Madhesh.

2013 witnessed the rise of Thauhat Tarai Party Nepal which represented the voices of the Tharus, an indigenous community from the Tarai. The most noteworthy addition in 2017 was that of Bibeksheel Sajha Party, which through its combination of young voices and established professionals, made their entry into politics claiming to be the alternative party, particularly for the urban population.

2022 saw the emergence of three new parties that were very distinct from each other and represented distinctive masses. The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) led by the charismatic Rabi Lamichanne initially rode on the waves of victory of the independent mayoral candidate Balendra Shah, and ultimately became a refuge for those who wished to run as independents in the federal elections. Furthermore, RSP was widely seen as a new face by a general public fed up with the traditional parties. Nagarik Unmukti Party represented the voices of the Tharus while Janamat party represented the voices of the Madhesh, farmers and indigenous communities in the hills.

While new political parties have emerged in each election, how they have fared should also be considered. Figure 7 shows the percentage wise total seats that new parties have managed to win over the years. The highest percentage seen was in the 2008 election (49%) which was primarily due to the huge wins of the CPN-Maoist. 2013 (0.67) and 2017 (0) saw dismal performances from new parties, with no representation in 2017. 2022 has seen a modest increase (11%) in the seats won by new parties.

The emergence and the success of new political parties in 2022 have generated an outpouring of calls for the traditional political parties to reform and reenergize their vote base. These calls have mainly come from hardline political party supporters and cadres who see new parties making inroads into their vote banks. Figure 8 showcases the combined win percentages of the three big parties namely, the NC, CPN-UML and the CPN-MC. Although the CPN-Maoist were also considered to be a new party in 2008, since then, they have sealed their reputation as one of the established parties and are

---

120 Balen Shah as he is widely known ran as an independent candidate and won the elections for mayor of the Kathmandu Metropolitan City.

121 This was formed by the former secessionist leader CK Raut who had advocated for an independent Madhesh and was seen as a radical party.
Figure 7: Comparison between emerging parties and traditional parties.

Source: Collated from EC data.

Figure 8: Percentage wise comparison for total HoR seats for big three vs the rest of the political parties.
included amongst the three major parties. The highest percentage win for the big three was in 2017 when they occupied 86 percent of the total seats in the House of Representatives. Although the numbers have gone down in 2022, they still represent above 70 percent of the electorate and have, as of yet, managed to hold the vast majority of seats amongst them.

People

The people in this section refer to all Nepali citizens that are of voting age. Elections as a practice involves making arrangements to enable and encourage eligible citizens to exercise their fundamental right to vote. In 2008, total registered voters reached 17.6 million. This was the result of an extensive door to door voter registration campaign in which voter enumerators update the voter list. However, strict rules for migrant workers, the ongoing Madheshi movement in the Tarai, and a lack of inclusion of landless and freed Kamaiyas in the door to door campaign resulted in the exclusion of a number of eligible voters from the voter list. Furthermore, the EC’s decision to use 15 December 2006 as the cutoff date for eligibility for voter registration meant that young people who turned 18 by the time elections were held in April 2007 were denied their right to exercise their adult franchise. On a positive note, the provision for the People’s Liberation Army, Nepal Army and prisoners to vote, even if it was just for the PR list, was a commendable initiative undertaken by the EC. Although the 2008 election was marred by violence and voter intimidation, a substantial number of the registered voters, 61 percent for the FPTP and 63 percent for the PR, turned up at the polls.

The introduction of the biometric voter register for the 2013 elections required citizens to register at registration centers with their citizenship certificate prior to the elections. The adoption of this practice meant that citizens who were temporarily outside the country were excluded and many internal migrants living outside their constituency either did not

123 There was a requirement for permanent residency or a “leaving certificate” from the VDC of one’s permanent address to register in the voting list.
127 Besides the killings, abductions, explosions and assaults described in the security forces section, there was also an increased presence of armed groups, particularly that of the CPN-M and Young Communist League which contributed to an atmosphere of fear.
128 The EC began a three phase voter registration program in September 2010.
have legal certificate or were unable to queue up for long hours to register. This brought down the number of registered voters, as seen in Figure 9, with an estimated 25 percent of the voting eligible population not included in the registration process.\(^\text{129}\) This is significant portion of the potential electorate who were unable to make their choice of representative. However, voter turnout at 78.34 percent for the 2013 elections was record breaking, the highest since Nepal adopted the democratic system in 1990. Thus, given the failure of the first Constituent Assembly to deliver a constitution, the Nepali electorate turned up in record numbers to select representatives that they believed would both represent their will and deliver a new constitution.

The 2017 elections posed a significant challenge for the EC, as it had the responsibility of conducting three tiers of elections in accordance to the newly introduced federal structure. The EC updated its 2013 voter register and reopened registration for additional voters. It was commendable that after the local elections, the EC opened voter registration again for the federal and provincial elections, adding close to 1.4 million new voters to the list.\(^\text{130}\) However, there were other issues of disenfranchisement such as the lack of voting provisions for polling staff and security personnel, who numbered over half a million, even though the practice had been a part of the previous two elections.\(^\text{131}\) Furthermore, an estimated, 1,70,000 youth who turned 18 between the registration deadline and the election day were also excluded from registering.\(^\text{132}\) Thus, there were definite areas for improvement for the EC to include the maximum number of eligible voters


\(^\text{130}\) Carter Center, “Preliminary Statement” 2017, 8.

\(^\text{131}\) Carter Center, “Preliminary Statement” 2017, 3.

to the voter register and to respect each registered individual’s right to vote. The 68.67 percent voter turnout, although almost a 10 percent drop from the 2013 election, was a respectable show of voter’s rights.

The 2022 elections saw a further increase in voter registration with over 90 percent of those eligible to vote included in the voting list. The EC also introduced online form applications in a few districts to streamline the process. As per the 2017 House of Representatives Election Act provision for separate polling stations for “provisional voters,” the EC reinstated this practice for the 2022 elections for PR votes. However, multiple observers found that the list of eligible provisional voters were often incomplete and did not include all of the polling and security personnel involved. These glitches in implementation need to be ironed out in future elections. The turnout for the elections was the lowest since 2008 at 61.41 percent which was well below anticipated numbers.

While voter registration numbers and voter turnout are useful points of reference to see how adult franchise is being practiced in a certain country, another component which should not be left out is the percentage of valid and invalid votes. As seen in Table 8, Nepal has consistently had a significant percentage of the votes cast declared invalid. The introduction of the new system in 2008 could have contributed to a higher number of invalid votes as people voted for a proportional system for the first time. The number of invalid votes went down in 2013 with only 3.2 percent being declared invalid. Similarly, in 2017, the complexity of the ballot paper coupled with the inadequacy of voter education might have contributed to a rise in invalid votes (5.17%). Although there were concerns over the large numbers of invalid votes in 2022, the alliances formed by the political parties, which made voting difficult, particularly for the local elections, could have contributed to the higher number of invalid votes. Unless the invalid votes were intentional, as some claimed in 2022 as a sign of protest against unnatural alliances among the political parties, the lack of progress in reducing the number of invalid votes is a concern. People who turned up to choose their representatives at the polls failed to have their votes counted.

Despite the court ruling, eligible voters abroad, estimated to be 4 million in 2022, have never had the privilege of voting from abroad. While the delay is mostly due to the logistical and financial arrangements involved, it is a concern that the issue persists and has not been addressed, especially because of the growth in the number of Nepalis residing outside the country. Another group that has consistently struggled to be included in the voter registration list are marginalized communities such as Madheshi Dalits.

---

133 Provisional voters include government employees, Nepal Army, Nepal Police and Armed Security forces residing in barracks, prisoners and detainees and staff and security personnel employed during elections, and senior citizens residing in homes managed by the Government of Nepal.

134 The Madheshi Dalits are on the double spectrum of vulnerability and have one of the lowest literacy rates in the country at 34.5 percent.
and internally displaced migrant workers.

In a democracy, any citizen who meets the criteria defined in the constitution of a land also has the right to stand independently in elections. The numbers in table 9 underscore this notion that any citizen has the opportunity to contest in elections and serve as a representative if elected.

Voters raised different issues during each of the elections years. In 2008, voter concerns centered around the completion of the peace process and the writing of a new constitution. Furthermore, issues of representation, federalism, and inclusion were major topics that directed people’s votes. At the policy level, people wanted improved services and new roads in rural areas. In 2013, voters wanted the second Constituent Assembly to deliver the Constitution and sought accountability from political leadership. Furthermore, they wanted assurances about employment, social security allowances, better education facilities, improved services, road access and an end to load shedding. In 2017, voters were primarily concerned with the stability of the government, social security for labor, economic development, better infrastructure, viable job markets and enhanced facilities for farmers. In 2022, the primary agenda of the people were youth representation, new leadership, sustainable development, concerns over brain drain,
employment opportunities, sustainable infrastructure projects, healthcare and fertilizers for the farmers. While health, education, employment and infrastructure have been consistently on voter’s agendas across all election years, the others indicate changes in the priorities of the people.

Discussion

The multiple transitions that Nepal has undergone over the past 14 years have required a re-imagination of the system and a reworking of the legal framework in accordance to the 2015 Constitution of Nepal. Since the implementation of the new Constitution, the performance of the system has been criticized because of the system’s difficulty in delivering a majority government and the constant changes in government resulting from negotiations done to form and maintain coalitions. While the lack of a majority government is more than merely a result of the system, it is important to note that each election has paved the road ahead and elections results reflect the choices that the Nepali people have made for their country. Although the system might not seem to have delivered from a stability perspective, both the elections and the system in place have thus far represented the people’s will.

The biggest strength of our mixed electoral system and legal framework is in the weightage they have given to the notion of inclusiveness and the provisions thus made to ensure both participation and representation. However, when it comes to practice, implementation has been selective and there are cases of non-implementation of special provisions intended to ensure adult franchise for the maximum number of citizens possible. The EC has cited logistical difficulties and chosen to add bureaucratic red tape in implementing special booths for provisional voters. Political parties have repeatedly cited the potential for marginalized groups to secure wins through direct election and have used this justification to limit the number of seats given to women and Dalits for the FPTP seats.

Although the PR system has been in practice for four consecutive elections, multiple questions have been raised about its necessity and the way it is practiced. While some have raised concerns over the increased expenses due to the increase in the number of representatives, others have claimed that the PR system has resulted in instability in government because it gives a disproportionate amount of power to smaller parties. Although the PR system has been cited as a cause for the lack of a majority government,

---

135 As an ethnically and geographically diverse country, Nepalis are bound to have multiple perspectives and priorities which get reflected in their choice of representatives.

Figure 10: Elected seats by FPTP and PR.

Note: Madheshi Janadhikar Forum Nepal is now Janata Samajbadi Party, Tarai Madhesh Loktantrik Party is now Loktantrik Samajbadi Party, and Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal is now Rastriya Prajatantra Party.
Figure 10 shows that even with just the FPTP votes, the CPN-Maoist was the only party that came close with a 50 percent share of FPTP seats in 2008. The very nature of political parties and the diversity of the country seems to suggest that coalition governments are an inevitable part of democracy in Nepal, at least in the present context.

In 2008, the EC faced the challenge of holding a historic election with major security concerns and with political negotiations constantly in flux. Over the years, the EC has gained confidence in fulfilling its responsibilities with greater efficiency. One of the examples of this was in 2022 when the EC released a press statement defending the five-year term condition as set forth by Article 85 Clause 177 of the Constitution in response to an amendment bill in the parliament seeking to extend the term of the then current parliament. Since 2008, the EC has come a long way in terms of creating and aligning legal frameworks for elections. However, more than a dozen electoral laws currently govern our elections, a condition that has caused several inconsistencies between regulations and directives and in implementation. Therefore, the EC needs to work on consolidating electoral laws so that they are all in alignment.

While the introduction of the biometric register and online application system are a welcome addition for the majority of the population, some groups have struggled to both understand and access these changes. For example, Madhesi Dalits, who have a low literacy rate, require additional support in navigating the process and filling the application. Although inclusiveness and positive discrimination are mainstays of the Constitution, the EC has failed to consider the special needs of marginalized communities and persons with disabilities when it comes to voter registration and on voting day. The denial of the provision for provisional voters to vote for PR seats in 2017 was a regressive move by the EC. Although attempts were made in 2022 to rectify this, the efforts were not adequate and many election and security officials were barred from casting their vote. Thus, the EC has lacked sensitivity in its efforts to provide special considerations for the electorate.

The EC has been proactive in introducing restrictive provisions in the Code of Conduct. In 2017, it dictated the time, length and space for political party advertisements and airtime in the media. In 2022, it prohibited public endorsements and vetting for any candidate on social media. While the Code of Conduct is applicable to various entities including political parties, government officials and the media, the latest attempt to regulate the expression of people’s choices and voices on social media is contrary to the fundamental rights of the people and is against the spirit of the Constitution. Unless the act is criminal, the EC does not have the right to dictate or police
people’s expression.

Voter education has consistently been a point of concern in election observation reports and the media. While political parties used to actively involve themselves in voter education in the past, with the arrival of social media and candidate focused elections, their views and activities on voter education have become myopic. Civil society organizations were also actively involved in voter awareness, however their numbers have dwindled with the withdrawal of donor support for electoral activities.\(^{138}\) Thus, the Election Commission has had to bear the majority of the burden for voter education. From one perspective, the delegation of voter education to the entities responsible for it is an indication of the institutionalization of the democratic processes. However, on the other hand, lack of voter education has led to a larger number of invalid votes and deprives participating citizens from having their votes counted.

The media has taken on the role of an avid observer during electoral proceedings and has provided the space to report events, opinions, perspectives and facts. More recently, media outlets have also started using data for their analysis and reporting. Fact checking initiatives and the general public have taken to social media to question media content, particularly if they are misleading or contributing to disinformation. Thus, there is increasing scrutiny of the media with people demanding greater accountability from the very entity that they expect to keep the authorities accountable.

While the media’s adherence to the Conduct of Conduct has not been perfect, the mainstream media in particular have consistently improved and kept themselves accountable. Furthermore, when the EC has unduly chosen to exert its authority on matters beyond its jurisdiction in the name of the Code of Conduct, the media have stood up and defended their actions. In 2022, the EC emailed Setopati, an online portal, demanding the removal of a news report within 24 hours without waiting on an explanation. It accused the news report of character assassination of an electoral candidate and his family.\(^ {139}\) Setopati refused to bow down and stood by its report, ultimately forcing the EC to retract its request for clarification from Setopati.\(^ {140}\) This defense of both the media and citizen’s freedom of expression indicates that, even when challenged, fundamental rights are being defended and protected.

\(^{138}\) In 2008 and 2013, and even until 2017, there was a lot of donor support for voter education during election years.


\(^{140}\) "निर्णय आयोगले निर्णय लिन्छ बिनाहीन सेतोपाटीलाई सोचिएको स्थानक," Setopati.com (November 6, 2022), https://www.setopati.com/politics/286164.
Social media has played an important role in media and elections since 2013 and was initially used as a platform to connect with candidates and political parties. However, the 2022 elections saw a rise in premediated misuse of social media to spread fake news and false information regarding candidates. Anticipating misuse, the EC incorporated very stringent social media restrictions, some that even went so far as to infringe upon the rights of the media and citizens. Therefore, there has been a decline in maintaining clean streams of communication and information as curating and policing social media content has become very challenging.

The electoral process has been on an upward trajectory because even if one of its working pillars is not functioning at full strength, the other pillars redistribute the weight and help keep the electoral structure from crumbling altogether. Despite the concerns over the timeline for decisions from the Constitutional Assembly courts during the 2008 and 2013 elections, what is evident across the four elections is the positive role that the judiciary has played in its rulings concerning people’s right to participate and contest in elections, and its protection of the freedom of expression. Its decisions on extending voting rights to registered citizens abroad and the right to pick none of the options on the ballot paper are significant, especially since the government, parliament and the EC have been non-committal on these issues and chosen to ignore or postpone the need to make necessary arrangements.

While concerns over violations of the code of conduct and the use of legal loopholes to circumvent quota provisions by political parties have been genuine, political parties have also shown the aptitude to pass legal provisions to discipline themselves. This is an example of democracy in practice, as political parties must ultimately adhere to the will of the people. The shift from an open PR list to a closed PR list is a case in point. The previously practiced system of an open PR list was widely criticized for being undemocratic and letting political parties exercise undue influence on who gets selected after the election results are out. This was discontinued after political parties themselves passed a legal act mandating the immovability of the final list once it is submitted to the EC. Furthermore, while there is no legal prohibition against the repetition of the PR candidates who have already serve a term in the parliament, a few political parties have voluntarily adopted a no repetition rule for successive elections.141

Another significant development regarding political parties is on how they chose to contest and seek public support and approval. In the past, new

141 CPN-UML initially introduced this rule of not repeating the same candidate for a PR seat in successive elections through its central committee decision in 2013. Although the NC also made a similar decision in 2017, they were unable to put it into practice for the 2017 elections. However, in the 2022 elections both the CPN-UML and the NC stuck to their decision of not repeating candidates who had already secured a PR opportunity.
parties emerged through violence (CPN-Maoist) and protests (Madheshi Janaadhikar Forum, Tarai Lokatantrik Party), however, new parties now adopt democratic means to register with the EC and contest in elections. This shift in the fight for the right to associate and contest in elections is evidence of a maturing democracy and is a step towards democratic consolidation. In addition to this, some of the boycotting groups that traditionally opted to use violence as a sign of their protest have chosen to remain outside the system and voice their disengagement peacefully. However, some parties, such as the Biplav faction of the Nepal Communist Party have continued to use violence to disrupt the electoral process. This has hampered free campaigning and participation on Election Day.

Despite a range of political parties across the political spectrum, there has been a consistent lack of a policy spectrum that would allow for the differentiation of political parties. Initially, Nepalis voted for parties according to ideology and family practices, this gradually shifted to voting for political personalities. Both the political parties and the general public have not invested in offering and demanding policy priorities and solutions, respectively. The media has also been missing in this aspect, content on concentrating on the rhetoric, slogans and personalities. This is an indication of how Nepalis as a society and country have struggled to incorporate discussions on public policy in electoral campaigns and debates.

In terms of trends for electoral campaigns, political parties have increasingly adopted candidate mobilization over party mobilization for elections. Previously, candidates used to receive support from their respective parties both in terms of cadre mobilization as well as financial support. However, political parties have now overwhelmingly started to entrust all responsibilities to the candidates themselves. This has sidelined women, Dalits and persons with disabilities as the responsibility for resource mobilization, both human and financial, are sometimes too overwhelming for them. In 2022, we even spoke with a Dalit women cadre who had been proposed by her political party for candidacy but chose to back out because the resources needed were too daunting.

The people have also been proactive in their engagement with democratic processes and concerns over fundamental rights. Although the turnout at elections have fluctuated for multiple reasons, election results show that the people do evaluate the performance of political parties and the government and are unafraid to vote across party lines and even give

142 The Vaidya faction of the Maoists which were responsible for major acts of violence during the 2013 elections have peacefully boycotted the subsequent elections.

143 Refer to Figure 4.

144 This was disclosed during a conversation with the team during one of our observation visits.
chances to alternative parties. Furthermore, this evaluation done through a peaceful electoral process reflects the people's verdict. This underscores the fact that both the people and political parties have fully adopted and accepted the democratic practice of elections.

As evidenced in the most recent elections, people have also started questioning their representatives on their performance and demanded to know what they would do differently. In a society that revered their political leaders and did not question them, this is significant. It is an indication that political socialization is gradually taking on democratic character. With the widespread use of social media, people are also continuously engaging with what is going on and are unafraid to voice their opinions. When warranted, they have gone so far as to appeal to the courts to have their fundamental rights respected, the right to vote abroad and right to reject are two standout examples of this initiative.

While the youth have historically been important for democratic movements in Nepal, a certain generation of youth grew up without any interest in politics, particularly after the people's movement of 2006. However, the young population's engagement in elections has been promising of late. In 2022, with the wave of independent candidates, the youth were proactive in their engagement. They made efforts to get registered, voiced their opinions on social media, and dared to challenge and go against long held family determined voting patterns. Furthermore, in a society where people have been content to resort to fatalism as far as politics is concerned, the youth were able to generate hope and excitement over alternative political choices. The association of hope with elections and politics in general is a very positive sign for democracy in Nepal.

In terms of trends in voter behavior, the 2022 election results revealed that, along with the youth, women broke away from traditionally held family influence and voted for new faces. While political parties could confidently rely on their voter bank in the past, with certain areas being labeled strongholds, voting patterns show that the people are no longer tied to a singular party. Voters have consistently voted across party lines with some changing lanes permanently. However, identity based voting has remained largely consistent across the last 14 years. The votes from the Madhesi community have been consistently divided amongst the Madhesi parties whereas Tharu votes have been channeled towards the Tharuhat party and lately, the Nagarik Unmukti Party.

The holding of elections alone is not sufficient to suggest democratic consolidation. The peaceful handover of power is also crucial to gauge if the exercise of elections were successful. As seen in Figure 11, the last four

145 The overwhelming support for the independents and RSP, particularly in the urban centers can be partially attributed to youth support.
Elections have seen the baton of government pass from one party to another each time. This indicates that Nepal has passed the two turnover test,\(^{146}\) often cited as a proxy for regime consolidation,\(^{147}\) even when we separate the first two and the second two elections. Furthermore, it also indicates that undue influence on the election by the ruling government\(^ {148}\) has not been significantly exercised. Although the Maoists initially expressed reservations about the 2013 election results, they ultimately accepted the Sushil Koirala led NC government. The time gap between the handover of power also bears a second glance. The longest handover was in 2008 because of multiple factors including the time required to figure out the new process and the elections for the president and the vice president. The time taken by the EC for the final declaration of all election results have also affected the timeline. However, in the most recent 2022 elections, the gap was merely that of a month which shows significant progress as compared to the four, three and three months required in prior three elections. Therefore, we can say that our processes are becoming more efficient.

Perhaps because this transition started based on a political consensus after multiple rounds of negotiations,\(^ {149}\) both the government and political parties have played an important role in negotiations with dissenting factions, whether it be during the Madhesi protests of 2008 or with boycotting parties in the latter years. Prior to the 2008 election, a team of seven political parties set up by the government\(^ {150}\) held multiple rounds of dialogue to come to an agreement with the Madhesi Janaadhikar Forum in 2007\(^ {151}\) and the Samyukta Loktantrik Madhesi Morcha (United Democratic Madhesi

---

146 This test first proposed by Huntington believes that when the party that won the election right after the democratic transition loses the subsequent election and hands over the power to the winning party and the second winning party upon losing the subsequent elections peacefully transfers power to another party, two turnover of powers are considered to have taken place, see Lambach et al, Nonviolent Resistance, 2020.


148 While the code of conduct violations for the use of state resources have appeared in election observer reports, no election holding government has tampered with the process to tilt the results in its favor.

149 The preamble of the Interim Constitution clearly states that the Interim Constitution was prepared through a political consensus. Further, Article 38 of the Interim Constitution explains “political consensus” as the one “reached between the seven parties – Nepali Congress, NCPN (UML), Nepali Congress (Democratic), Janamorcha Nepal, Nepal Saddhawana Party (Anandidevi), Nepal Majdur Kisan Party, Samyukta Bam Morcha Nepal and NCP (Maoist) on 22 Kartik 2063 (November 8, 2006)”.

150 This team was led by Ram Chandra Poudel, Minister for Peace and Reconstruction.

## Election and Transfer of Power

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELECTION YEAR</th>
<th>GOVT DURING ELECTION PERIOD</th>
<th>ELECTION RESULT</th>
<th>HANDOVER OF POWER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>NC leader Girija Prasad Koirala led coalition government</td>
<td>CPN Maoist party became the first party</td>
<td><strong>After 4 months</strong>- CA elected the Prime minister on 15 August 2008- Puspa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda), leader of CPN Maoist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Khil Raj Regmi, Chief Justice of Supreme Court led interim government to election</td>
<td>NC party became the first party</td>
<td><strong>After 3 months</strong>- CA elected the Prime minister on 11 February 2014- Sushil Koirala, leader of Nepali Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>NC leader Sher Bahadur Deuba led coalition government</td>
<td>CPN UML became the first party in the legislative government. They ran election in alliance with the CPN Maoist Center</td>
<td><strong>After 3 months</strong>- Legislative Parliament elected the Prime minister on 15 February 2018- K.P. Sharma Oli, leader of CPN UML</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td>NC leader Sher Bahadur Deuba led coalition government</td>
<td>NC became the first party in the legislative government. However, their five party election coalition did not secure majority</td>
<td><strong>After 1 month</strong>- Legislative Parliament elected the Prime minister on 25 December 2022- Puspa Kamal Dahal, leader of CPN Maoist Center</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 11: Post-election transfer of power.
Similarly, in 2019, the Oli led government successfully brought CK Raut, who had been fighting for an independent Madhesh into mainstream politics. Although efforts were also made in 2021 by the government and a three point agreement was signed with the Biplav faction of the CPN, the agreement was not as successful.

A comparison of the rating of the electoral process and the overall freedom and democracy index, as shown in Figure 12 and Figure 13, reaffirm that Nepal is gradually progressing in terms of the electoral process. Predictably, 2008 scored low on both indexes and 2013 is the only year where the scores from the two indexes are at the same level. From 2017, the scores by Freedom House are more optimistic with 2022 seeing a rise to above 80 percent. The scores for the democracy index show smaller progress which can be attributed to the fact that it also looks at pluralism. This is further substantiated by the BTI Transformation Index as seen in Figure 13. A comparison of the before and after of each election barring the 2022 elections shows that the scores for political participation and stability of democratic institutions have improved after each election. Thus, elections have had a positive impact on the progress of democracy in the country.

152 The united front consisted of the three major Madheshi parties at the time: Sadhabana Party, Madhesi Janaadhikar Forum, Nepal and Tarai Madhesh Loktantrik Party and the agreement was signed in February 2008.


156 The data applicable for 2022 is not out yet.
Figure 12: Comparison between electoral process score and overall freedom score.

Source: Collated from multiple Freedom House reports by the writers. The scores were converted to percentages for comparison.

Figure 13: Percentage comparison between the electoral process and pluralism score and the democracy index score by the Economic Intelligence Unit.

Source: Collated from multiple Economic Intelligence Unit reports by the writers. The scores were converted to percentages for comparison.
Figure 14: Timeline indicator comparison as per BTI analytics.

*Note: The figure does not have data after the 2022 elections because the transformation index for 2023 which covers the 2022 elections is not out yet.*
Conclusion

In each of the four elections that have been analyzed in this paper, the Nepali electorate expressed their sovereign will by prioritizing the need of the time: in the 2008 elections the people conveyed their desire for peace, in 2013 they voted for identity based representation, in 2017 they desired stability, both political and economic, and in 2022 they found hope in alternatives and new faces. The two hallmarks of democratic political relations: contestation in the horizontal dimension and participation in the vertical dimension,\textsuperscript{157} have been put into practice in Nepal. On the horizontal dimension, political parties have regularly competed against one another in elections to represent the people in the legislature with the winning party also getting to form the executive. On the vertical dimension, the majority of the voting age population have been registered to vote and have picked their choice of representatives consistently. The changes in the winning party at each elections and the infusion of new parties in parliament are evidence that the people's verdict has been delivered through elections.

After the transition that began with the people's movement of 2006, as a democracy, Nepal had no choice but to consolidate. On the behavioral dimension, Nepal has managed to solidify the gains of the peace process by bringing dissenting factions into mainstream politics and persuading violent groups to give up violence.\textsuperscript{158} On the attitudinal front, Nepalis have also risen to the occasion. When faced with a crisis after the failure of the first Constituent Assembly, Nepalis demonstrated their support for democracy by creating the conditions to hold a second Constituent Assembly even when it was not imagined in the 2007 Interim Constitution. Furthermore, the addition of new parties to the parliament also shows the Nepali people's belief and hope in the democratic processes and how entrenched democratic culture has become. On the constitutional dimension, political actors have used the legislative for resolutions and debates and resorted to reaching out to the judiciary when all else has failed. The formation of the parliamentary committee to address the Maoists' concern over the election results in 2013 and the decision of the constitutional bench on the dissolution of the parliament by then Prime Minister Oli,\textsuperscript{159} are a few examples of conflicts being resolved through democratic processes. Furthermore, when needed, the pillars have redistributed the responsibility of paving the way for democratic practice, thus ensuring that trust in democratic institutions and processes remains intact.

\textsuperscript{157} Lambach et al, Nonviolent Resistance, 2020, 16.

\textsuperscript{158} Although a few dissenting groups continue to use violent means, they do not represent a significant political group.

The indicators\textsuperscript{160} for electoral process and democracy have both shown an upward trajectory which is a positive indication for democratic consolidation in Nepal. In terms of observable indicators of consolidation\textsuperscript{161} the first is democratic survival. We can see that Nepal has managed to slowly but steadily build the legal and institutional framework and foster a democratic political culture that supports the growth of democracy. The second indicator is peaceful turnovers of power which Nepal has witnessed twice over each for the constituent assembly elections and the general elections. While improving upon delays and making the process for transfer of power more efficient are works in progress, we have had peaceful transfers of power. The third indicator is democratic quality which is outside the scope of the present work, but would be a natural follow up for future research.

\textsuperscript{160} Refer to Figure 12 and 13.

\textsuperscript{161} These indicators of observable implications are borrowed from Lambach et al, Nonviolent Resistance, 2020, 18.
Bibliography


BTI Transformation Index, https://atlas.bti-project.org/?view=1*2022*CV.CTC.SELNPL.*CAT*NPL*REG:TAB.


## Annex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Parties</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Free from violence: Sustainable and Peaceful democracy</td>
<td>• Only Congress can Institutionalize change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Promote and Protect entrepreneurship and investment</td>
<td>• Two-thirds to the Congress for the Protection of Democracy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Food Security: Fight against Hunger and Malnourishment</td>
<td>• Share Prosperity, Not Poverty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Employment for All</td>
<td>• 7 provinces based on identity and ability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Make Nepali Congress win in the Constituent Assembly Elections</td>
<td>• Provision of Free, Compulsory and easily Accessible Education till higher secondary level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Establish a Multiparty Federal Democratic Republic based on Pluralism</td>
<td>• Programme will be initiated to ensure Health Insurance for all Nepali citizens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prioritize timely implementation of Melamchi Drinking Water Project to end the problem of drinking water in Kathmandu valley</td>
<td>• Encourage maximum Women Participation by ensuring 33% Representation in all the sectors of the state.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### NEPALI CONGRESS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Vote for Tree symbol- a basis of prosperity and development</td>
<td>• Protection of the constitution; Stability for a prosperous Nepal; Social Security from womb to grief; Employment for the youth in Nepal; and a Balanced foreign policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Congress’s win, Everyone’s benefit</td>
<td>• Others Talk, We Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hill, Moutains and Terai, Congress Connecting Everyone</td>
<td>• Coalition government led by Congress for next 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The vision of Nepali Congress, Higher and Sustainable Economic Development</td>
<td>• Health Insurance for all in next 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• End of Poverty, the destination of Congress</td>
<td>• Implement Digital Nepal Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Women Empowerment, the pledge of Congress</td>
<td>• Complete East-West Highway, Prithvi Highway from Muglin to Pokhara, Nijgadh Kathmandu Fast -track and various corridors from East to West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wish of Congress, Social Security for All</td>
<td>• Free Education sector from political interference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Parties</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| CPN- UNIFIED MARXIST-LENINIST | • Establish Federal Democratic Republic  
• Constituent Assembly Elections: Democracy, Sustainable Peace and Progress  
• Let us Abolish all forms of Feudalism  
• Multiplicity and Diversity: Specialty of Nepal  
• National campaign to Abolish Illiteracy. Compulsory Education till grade 8 and Free Education till grade 12. Higher Education will be made Accessible and of High Quality  
• Emphasis on Electricity based Transportation  
• Provision of Free Basic Health Services | • UML’s campaign for Inclusive Democracy, Federalism and a strong Republic with multiple identities  
• Th people’s choice is UML as the Congress are old and the Maoists are violent  
• Institutionalize Federal Democratic Republic  
• Seven Provinces based on Multiple Identities  
• Basis for Equality, Education, Health, and Employment for all, Happy Nepali and prosperous Nepal  
• Connect at least 95% of Communities with Road Networks.  
• State funds will be mobilized to bring all citizens to a Health Insurance Scheme. |
| | 2017 | 2022 |
| | • The basis of Independence, Prosperity, and Socialism, the people’s leftist government at all levels  
• Change and Achievement under the communist leadership, Justice and Prosperity in the communist plan  
• The communist power and government is here, Two Third is sure  
• Bringing Gas Pipes to each home and Developing Railways  
• Poverty Free nation in 10 years  
• Employment for 10 lakhs in 10 years  
• Promote the East West Highway into 6 lanes by 5 years | • Mangir 4, Oli’s government  
• Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali  
• We Changed the Map of the Country now we will ‘Bring Back Our Land’  
• Our campaign is not for me, neither for UML but for You and Your Children’s Future and the Self Respect of the country  
• Campaign of Prosperity through UML’s leadership  
• Basic health services in all Palikas  
• Develop 5 lakhs Employment and Self-Employment Opportunities every year |
### Political Parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPN-MAOIST CENTRE</td>
<td>• You saw everyone multiple times this time give a chance to Maoist</td>
<td>• Proposal of 11 provinces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• New Nepal and New Leadership, First President of Republic Nepal Comrade Prachanda</td>
<td>• Vote for Federalism and Transformationists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Education, Health and Employment, the basic right of every Nepali</td>
<td>• Two thirds for Maoist if you want constitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The same mantra of people’s war and people’s movement, an Independent and People-Oriented Federal Democratic Republic</td>
<td>• Stable government, speedy economic development, majority to Maoist for the change in the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Arrange Permanent Settlements for Slum Dwellers</td>
<td>• Literacy campaign all over the country to Eliminate Illiteracy in 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Establish Health as fundamental rights and implement the concept of “Health for All”. Provide free basic health services to everyone</td>
<td>• Atleast 50,000 Self Employment Opportunities to Youths every year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Comprehensive literacy campaigns to End illiteracy completely in 5 years</td>
<td>• Free the country from Loadshedding in 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Combined Slogans and manifesto with CPN-UML.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Coalition for Protection of the Constitution, Stability and Prosperity and Vote for Coalition candidates this time</td>
<td>• Maoists made Brighter Nepal, Maoist will make Prosperous Nepal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Basis of Socialism- the Light bearer Maoist government</td>
<td>• Sacrifice for change, Vote for Maoist for Prosperity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide one Scholarship each to Study Medicine and Nursing in each Palika every year</td>
<td>• Operate 500 Electric Buses in the valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Operate 500 Electric Buses in the valley</td>
<td>• Discourage strikes in education sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discourage strikes in education sector</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Parties</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Vote for ‘Halo’ for Peace, Security, Employment and Constitution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• End Poverty and Unemployment to make all Nepalese people Empowered and Happy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Future destination: Economic Revolution and Building a Beautiful, Clean and Prosperous Nepal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Implement the concept of one house one employment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Non-aligned foreign policy to protect national interests and self-respect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Each municipality will be developed as a smart city</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unemployed youth above 25 years of age will be given “unemployment allowance”.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “This time the vote is for RPP. The Decision of Nepal is in the hands of the Nepali people”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Good Governance: We will be Destroyed but not Corrupt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• We will accept everyone’s friendship but not interference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Free and Equal Education, Health, and Justice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Local investment for youth and local employment opportunity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• People’s right, sustainable infrastructure development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clean drinking water and clean toilets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Parties</td>
<td>2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **JANATA SAMAJWADI** | • “Vote for the Umbrella Symbol for Education, Health, Employment, and Identity for All”  
• Federalism, Prosperity, Good Governance, Social Justice and Socialism  
• People’s Voice, Prosperous Society  
• Our destination: Federal Socialist Democratic Republic  
• The need for Constitutional Amendment/Modification and Rewriting |
| **LOKTANTRIK SAMAJWADI** | • Identity, Federalism and Democratic Socialism  
• “Excellent Policies, Intentions, Ideas, and Culture LOSAPA’s Leadership and LOSAPA’s government”  
• “Education, Health, Agriculture and Infrastructure LOSAPA’s four pillars for development”  
• Resolutions of Madheshi, Women, Craftsmen, Tharu and Tribes, Democratic Socialists the only option  
• “Own Municipality, Own Government- With LOSAPA”  
• Plans and Campaigns of LOSAPA Nepal- Protection of Agriculture, Respect for Farmers  
• The government of LOSAPA, Respect for old Aged Citizens |
| **RASTRIYA SWATANTRA** | • Choose the One Who Knows  
• We will neither do Corruption nor leave the ones who does Corruption  
• Excellent Education and Culture, Strong Foundation of the Country’s Development  
• The end of Gender Discrimination is the ultimate Destination of Rights, Opportunities and Self-Respect  
• We envisage a society where one does not have to leave the country for Employment  
• One Field, One Crop- Happiness of Farmer’s Life  
• Safe Highway and Road Network is the Basis of Easy Travel |
| **JANAMAT PARTY** | • Establish Cashless Economy  
• Universal Healthcare  
• 20 lakhs Employment and 1 crore Afforestation  
• Employment in each House  
• Establishing the Real Sovereignty of the people, Ending Discrimination and Building an Egalitarian society.  
• Addressing farmers’ issues including Farmers Card, Farmers Pension, Timely Fertilizers, Crop Insurance, and Crop Compensation |
About the Authors

Prem Darshan Sapkota

Prem Sapkota is the Deputy Executive Director of Purak Asia with more than fifteen years of expertise managing grantmaking initiatives in Nepal while working for a global philanthropic organization. In the aftermath of the peace process in 2007, he pioneered the use of social dialogue to bring together divergent ideas and thoughts across the country through initiatives like Lokmatko Khoji. He has also contributed to innovative youth initiatives including Youth Action Fund, New Media and Debate, which were crucial in fostering a culture of debate and motivating young people towards critical thinking. He led the Policy Fellowship Program and developed the idea for consortium grants on elections, which brought together a number of groups to work on free and fair elections.

Srishti Adhikari

Srishti Adhikari is a Program Manager overseeing the Democracy and Governance portfolio at Purak Asia. She has a decade long experience of working in the nonprofit sector. Over the years, she has been involved in managing a scholarship program, grants management, strategic planning and writing.
In each of the four elections that have been analyzed in this paper, the Nepali electorate expressed their sovereign will by prioritizing the need of the time: in the 2008 elections the people conveyed their desire for peace, in 2013 they voted for identity based representation, in 2017 they desired stability, both political and economic, and in 2022 they found hope in alternatives and new faces. This publication is the first of the occasional paper series of Purak Asia. It offers a comparative view on the progress made or the lack thereof in the four subsequent elections in the last 14 years in Nepal. The writers use the five pillar interactive election framework on the two elections for the Constituent Assembly in 2008 and 2013 and the elections for the House of Representatives in 2017 and 2022 to see whether and how elections have helped in the maturing of democracy in Nepal.