

Position of Nepali Congress in the Electoral Politics of Nepal

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Abstract

Nepali Congress (NC) is one of the oldest political party of Nepal. It played a vital role to abolish the century long autocratic Rana rule in 1951. It fought against the party-less *Panchayat* system and the regressive step of the king. It opposes active kingship and communism. It believes in a representative democracy. It has participated in every election of Nepal that was conducted democratically. It won more than two-thirds majority seats in the first general election held in 1959. In every election, it stayed in the first or second position. This article tries to analyze the status of NC in the elections of Nepal. Data of seven general elections were examined in this article. Data were extracted basically from the reports of the Election Commission.

Keywords: Nepali Congress, democracy, election

Introduction

Background

Nepal has a short history of political parties. Among the currently functioning political parties, Nepali Congress is the oldest party of Nepal (Hachhethu, 2006). Praja Parishad and Prachand Gorkha were the primary political parties of Nepal. Later they disappeared from the political scenario of Nepal. Nepali National Congress and Nepal Democratic Congress unified each other in 1947 and became a new party, Nepali Congress (NC), which is still functioning. NC believes in a representative democracy. It believes in socialism, too. However, it is not in favor of communism. It has adopted democratic socialism (Nepali Congress, 2075 BS). It has participated in every election of Nepal, except the elections of the Panchayat period. The flag and election symbol (Tree) of the NC are the same from the beginning to date.

NC launched an armed revolt in 1950 against the autocratic Rana rule; consequently, the democratic political system was set up in the country in 1951. It won more than two-thirds (74 out of 109) seats of the House of Representatives (HoR) in the first general election of Nepal held in 1959 (Devkota, 2058 BS). The first elected council of ministers was formed for the first time in the history of Nepal in the premiership of NC's leader B. P. Koirala. But, it did

not go long. King Mahendra dissolved the elected council of ministers and outlawed the political parties on 15 December 1960 (Joshi & Rose, 2004). The active rule of the king went about 30 years long. NC and communists jointly fought against the party-less Panchayat system of the king. As a result, multiparty democracy was re-established in 1990.

NC won comfortable majority seats of HoR in the election of 1991. However, it relegated to the second position after the election of HoR, 1994. The result was the reflection of the confrontation among three leaders of NC (Poudyal, 1995). It lifted to first position after the election held in 1999 once again with its 111 members out of 205 HoR seats.

The Royal Palace massacre took place on 1 June 2001, when the then king Birendra and his immediate family members were killed (Thapa, 2013). A report filed by a commission, as well as eyewitness accounts, blamed the massacre on the then crown prince, Dipendra (Jha, 2014), who was declared king of Nepal immediate after the incident (Nepal Rajpatra, 2058/02/20) though he was on coma and died three days later. Then, Gyanendra, brother of Birendra ascended on the throne on 4 June 2001 (Nepal Rajpatra, 2058/02/22). From the early days of his kingship in 2001, he acted against of democracy. He dismissed elected prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and his ministry on 4 October 2002 (Nepal Rajpatra, 2059/06/18). It was his first step toward his father Mahendra's path of 1960. Finally, on 1 February 2005, King Gyanendra took over all powers of the state and even he declared himself the president of the ministry of the council (Nepal Rajpatra, 2061/10/19).

The king Gyanendra's step united the democratic and revolutionary forces of Nepal. On the one hand, the Seven Parties Alliance (SPA) who believed in a parliamentary democracy, were agitating against the king's regressive step. On the other hand, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) was running its 'people's war'. SPA and the Maoists reached the 12-Point Understanding on 22 November 2005 in Delhi. Through the Understanding, they agreed that the autocratic monarchy was the main hurdle for achieving peace, progress, and prosperity in the country; and they were not possible until full democracy was established by ending the absolute monarchy. Through a national democratic movement of all the forces rising against the autocratic monarchy from their respective positions full democracy would be possible (ASPECT, 2011).

As SPA and the Maoists invited, the civil society, professional organizations, various community organizations, people of all communities and regions, the media, intellectuals, and all Nepalese people actively participated in the peaceful people's movement. After 19 days of the movement, the then king Gyanendra delivered a royal message on 24 April 2006 (Nepal Rajpatra, 2063/01/11). In his message king, Gyanendra is convinced that "the source of state

power of the kingdom of Nepal is the Nepalese people, and that sovereign state power of Nepal is inherent in the people of Nepal". By this, the Nepalese people won democracy. The role of NC was significant in these processes of peace and the establishment of democracy in the country.

The spirit of the people's movement, 2006 was to form the Constituent Assembly (CA) through election. The first CA election was held in 2008 and the result of the election was not in favor of the NC. The radical force, Maoists got more votes in the election and NC relegated to second place. However, NC had played a positive and constructive role within and out of CA to manage the transitional political environment of the country. NC had basically adopted the ideology of the constitutional monarchy. Taking a turn, NC accepted the federal republic system as a political ideology after the fifth amendment of its constitution was held on 25 September 2007 (Nepali Congress, 2075 BS). The leader of NC and the then prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala submitted a resolution declaring Nepal a 'federal democratic republican nation' in the first meeting of the CA held on 28 May 2008. The motion had been passed with a majority (Nepal Rajpatra, 2065/02/15). CA's declaration was a logical outcome of the nineteen-day people's movement of 2006 (Jha, 2014). Then, Nepal entered into the new republic political system.

The first CA could not draft the new constitution in the given time and the next CA election was held in 2013. In the election, NC got the first position once again. The CA had passed a new constitution after 21-months of deliberation with a resounding majority. President Ram Baran Yadav signed on five copies of the constitution as a head of the state on 20 September 2015. The then prime minister Sushil Koirala played a vital role in enacting and promulgating the constitution as the head of the government. These two prominent personalities were from the NC.

First elections were held in 2017 after the implication of the constitution of Nepal to elect the representatives of federal, provincial, and local levels. Because of the coalition between the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) before the election, NC could not do better in the HoR election, 2017; only 23 candidates of the NC won through the first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system. However, it got the highest popular votes in the election.

Research Problem

NC is one of the oldest and largest political party in Nepal. It fought against the autocratic political system and played a significant role in the establishment of democracy in the country. Evidence of the result of national elections in Nepal proves that NC is one of the

popular political party of Nepal. It won a comfortable majority in the parliamentary elections and formed governments several times. It relegated to the second position in some of the elections. Tentatively, conscious Nepali people know the position and status of NC in the political scenario of Nepal. Nevertheless, the systematic study of the status of NC in elections is still lacking in the academic field. This article tries to bridge this research gap by answering the following research questions:

- What was the position of the NC in the context of nationwide votes in the general elections of Nepal?
- What was NC's status in terms of candidacy, winners, and nearest rivals in the elections?

Research Objective

The general objective of the article is to analyze the positions of NC in the general elections of Nepal. Its specific objectives are as follow:

- To analyze the nationwide votes of NC in general elections of Nepal.
- To examine the status of candidates, winners, and nearest rivals of the NC in the elections.

Methods and Materials

Nepal has launched ten general elections, including one referendum. The first general election was held to elect 109 members of HoR in 1959 and the last general election was held in 2017. The second general election held in 1980 was a referendum to gather the people's opinions regarding whether they wanted to establish the multiparty system or continue the Panchayat system with reforms. Under the third amendment of the constitution of Nepal (1962), two direct elections were held to choose 112 members of Rashtriya Panchayat in 1981 and 1986 respectively. These were the third and fourth general elections of Nepal. In the line of multiparty democracy, as fifth, sixth, and seventh general elections were held to elect the 205 members of HoR in 1991, 1994, and 1999 respectively. Nepal conducted two elections of CA in 2008 and 2013 respectively. These elections were registered as the eighth and ninth general elections of Nepal. The latest general election was held to choose the members of HoR in 2017.

The referendum of 1980 was conducted to give a choice to the citizens of the political system; that was not for choosing candidates or parties. Similarly, direct election of Rashtriya Panchayat i.e. third and fourth general elections were based on party-less Panchayat system. Thus, the remaining seven general elections of Nepal have been analyzed in this article. Data of

these elections have been based on the report of the Election Commission, the authorized constitutional body to conduct and manage elections in Nepal. First-past-the-post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation (PR) electoral systems were used simultaneously in the last three general elections. The data of both electoral systems have been analyzed in the article.

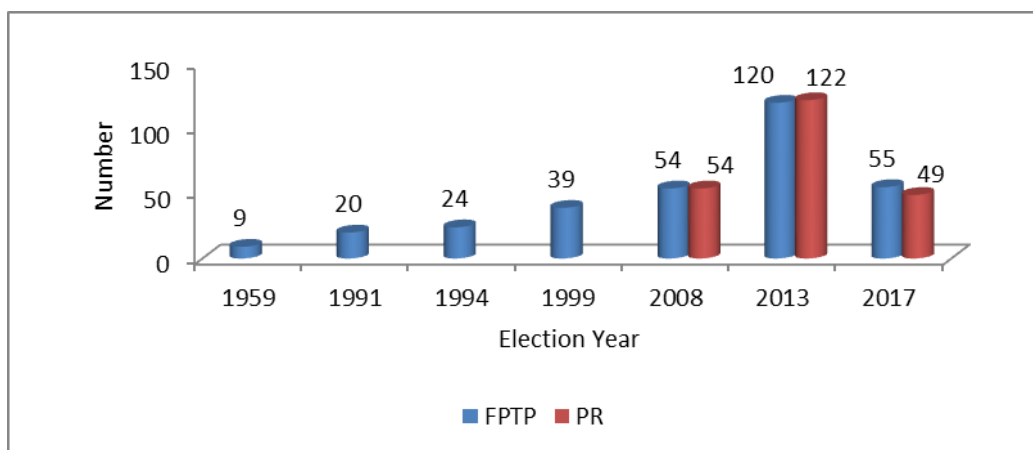
Results and Discussion

Nepali Congress and other Political Parties

At the beginning of multiparty democracy, there were very few political parties in Nepal. As figure-1 shows, only nine parties contested in the first general election of Nepal held in 1959. The numbers of political parties grew in the next CA election held in 2013. It again decreased in the parliamentary election of 2017. Act Relating to Political Party, 2073 BS has a provision that to be a national party, any party should have got at least three percent of the total national valid votes. Only five political parties could cross this threshold in the general election of 2017 (Election Commission, 2074 BS). NC was one of these five parties. These pieces of evidence prove that NC is a major political force in all of these national elections of Nepal.

Figure 1

Number of Political Parties participated in General Elections of Nepal



Note. Data Extracted from the Appendix.

Nationwide Votes Share

As table-1 demonstrates, candidates of NC obtained 37.23% votes of total valid votes from the country in the HoR election, 1959. It was the highest percentage of votes in comparison to other parties. NC has stayed in the first position continually HoR elections held in 1991, 1994, and 1999 in terms of obtained nationwide vote percent. It relegated to the second position in CA election 2008 and it reached the first position once again in the next CA

election, 2013. Despite a coalition between two larger communist parties, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), before the election, NC obtained the highest number of popular votes in HoR election 2017 in FPTP electoral race. However, it obtained slightly fewer votes (49,652) than the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and got the second position in the PR electoral system in the HoR election, 2017. These evidences prove that NC has obtained majorities of votes in national elections of Nepal.

Table 1

Votes Obtained by Nepali Congress in National Elections of Nepal

Election Year	Electoral System	Total Valid Votes	Votes in Number	Votes in Percentage	Position
1959	FPTP	1,791,301	666,898	37.23	First
1991	FPTP	6,969,061	2,752,452	39.50	First
1994	FPTP	7,384,277	2,545,287	34.47	First
1999	FPTP	8,649,664	3,214,786	37.17	First
2008	FPTP	10,306,120	2,348,890	22.79	Second
	PR	10,739,078	2,269,883	21.14	Second
2013	FPTP	9,044,908	2,694,983	29.80	First
	PR	9,463,862	2,418,370	25.55	First
2017	FPTP	10,045,436	3,590,793	35.75	First
	PR	9,503,618	3,111,643	32.74	Second

Note. Data Extracted from the Appendix.

The candidacy of Nepali Congress

Table-2 shows that NC fielded its candidates at all of the constituencies in two HoR elections held in 1994 and 1999 and both CA elections held in 2008 and 2013 respectively. Except for the one constituency, NC put up its candidates in all of the remaining constituencies through the country in two HoR elections held in 1959 and 1991 respectively. In the latest election of HoR, 2017, NC did not file its candidates at 11 constituencies.

Table 2

Candidates of Nepali Congress in National Elections of Nepal

Election Year	1959	1991	1994	1999	2008	2013	2017
Total Candidates	786	1345	1442	2238	3946	6126	1944
Candidates in Number	108	204	205	205	240	240	154
Total Number of Constituency	109	205	205	205	240	240	165
Candidates in Percentage	13.74	15.17	14.22	9.16	6.08	3.92	7.92

Note. Data Extracted from the Appendix.

Elected Candidates of NC

As presented in table-3, 74 candidates of NC could win the HoR election held in 1959 out of 109 HoR seats. It was more than two-thirds of total HoR seats. It won majority constituencies in HoR election held in 1991 and 1999 respectively. It could win only 83 seats consequently it relegated to the second position in HoR after the election held in 1994 although having the highest national votes. The first CA election (2008) was unfavorable for a traditional political party like NC. Nepalese people voted overwhelmingly for the radical communist party, Maoist. As a result, NC got only 15.42% seats through the FPTP race and 21.79% seats through the PR race. However, NC reached the first position in the next CA election, 2013 with more winner candidates than other political parties. As mentioned above, because of the coalition between two larger communist parties of Nepal NC could win only 23 seats out of 165 FPTP seats of HoR in 2017's election, nevertheless, it got the highest popular votes. Similarly, NC got less votes in the PR electoral system, too.

Table 3

Elected Candidates of Nepali Congress in National Elections of Nepal

Election Year	Electoral System	Total Seats	Elected Candidates	
			Number	Percentage
1959	FPTP	109	74	67.89
1991	FPTP	205	110	53.66
1994	FPTP	205	83	40.49
1999	FPTP	205	111	54.15
2008	FPTP	240	37	15.42
	PR	335	73	21.79
2013	FPTP	240	105	43.75
	PR	335	91	27.16
2017	FPTP	165	23	13.94
	PR	110	40	36.36

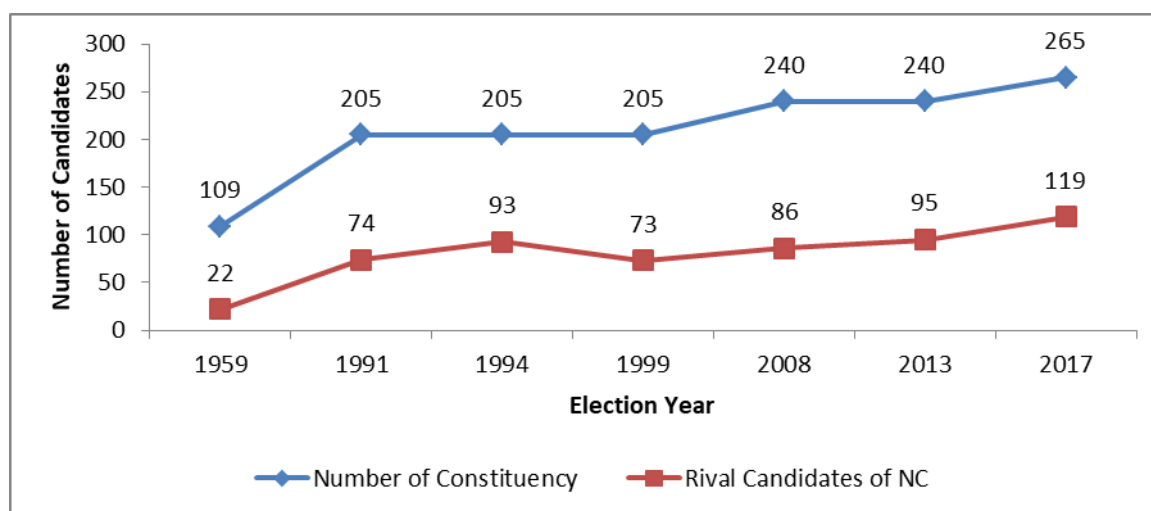
Note. Data Extracted from the Appendix.

Nearest Rival Candidates of NC

'Winner takes all' is the basic principle of the FPTP electoral system. The candidate who obtained the highest votes of the concerning constituency would be declared the winner. Those who got the second number of votes, he/she should return to normal life. However, the nearest rival would get political value. They will remain as popular figures and may win the coming elections.

Figure 2

Nearest Rival NC's Candidates in General Elections of Nepal



Note. Data Extracted from the Appendix.

According to figure-2, there were 22 nearest rival candidates of NC in 1959. Altogether 74 candidates of NC were nearest rivals in 1991. Similarly, 93 candidates of NC were the nearest rival in 1994. In the HoR election of 1999, 73 NC's candidates reached the status of nearest rivals. Altogether 86 candidates of NC were the nearest rival in the CA election, 2008. The number of the nearest rival of NC's candidates increased in the CA election of 2013. In the HoR election of 2017, there were 119 nearest rival candidates from NC.

Findings

Some noteworthy points have come out after analyzing facts of the past six national elections and the position of NC in these elections. These are as follows:

- NC has appeared decisively in every election of Nepal. It won more than two-thirds of majority seats in the first national election in Nepal that held in 1959. It has played a major role to hold the referendum in 1980; however, the ideology of multiparty democracy favored by NC could not get majority votes. It holds the first position in most of the elections. In some elections, it relegated to the second position as well.
- NC represents the democratic wing among Nepalese political parties. It rivals with the communists of Nepal. When communists became stronger, it got a comparatively weak result and vice versa.

Conclusion

Nepali Congress (NC) is the oldest political party among the existing political parties of Nepal now. It strongly influences the political environment of Nepal from the beginning of democracy. It had involved in every election of Nepal that was conducted democratically. In terms of nationwide votes, NC obtained the first position in almost all of the elections. It relegated to the second position, too, in some elections. It proves that NC is not only the oldest but also the most popular party of Nepal.

NC fielded its candidates at all constituencies of the country in most of the elections of Nepal. It got the majority seats of the national parliament and formed the council of ministers several times. If it did not get the majority seats, it became major opposition in the parliament. Many of the candidates of NC reached to nearest rival in the elections. It proves that NC is a major political party in the country.

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Appendix

Places of Nepali Congress in General Elections of Nepal

EY	ES	Number /Percent	Valid Votes		Total Seats	Candidates		WCNC	NRCNC	NPP
			Total	VONC		Total	CNC			
1959	FPTP	Number	1791301	666898	109	786	108	74	22	9
		Percent		37.23			13.74	67.89	20.18	
1991	FPTP	Number	6969061	2752452	205	1345	204	110	74	20
		Percent		39.5			15.17	53.66	36.1	
1994	FPTP	Number	7384277	2545287	205	1442	205	83	93	24
		Percent		34.47			14.22	40.49	45.37	
1999	FPTP	Number	8649664	3214786	205	2238	205	111	73	39
		Percent		37.17			9.16	54.15	35.61	
2008	FPTP	Number	10306120	2348890	240	3946	240	37	86	54
		Percent		22.79			6.08	15.42	35.83	
	PR	Number	10739078	2269883	335			73		
		Percent		21.14				21.79		
2013	FPTP	Number	9044908	2694983	240	6126	240	105	95	120
		Percent		29.8			3.92	43.75	39.58	
	PR	Number	9463862	2418370	335			91		
		Percent		25.55				27.16		
2017	FPTP	Number	10045436	3590793	165	1944	154	23	119	55
		Percent		35.75			7.92	13.94	72.12	
	PR	Number	9503618	3111643	110			40		49
		Percent		32.74	48.6			36.36		

Note. Data extracted from Devkota, 2058 BS; Election Commission, 1992; 2051 BS; 2056 BS; 2065 BS; 2070a BS; 2070b BS; 2074 BS.

EY = Election Year, ES = Electoral System, VONC = Vote Obtained by Nepali Congress; CNC = Candidates of Nepali Congress; WCNC = Winner Candidates of Nepali Congress; NRCNC = Nearest Rival Candidates of Nepali Congress; NPP = Number of Political Party; FPTP = First-past-the-post; PR = Proportional Representation