

## **Nepali Communist Parties in Elections: Participation and Representation**

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### **Abstract**

The communist parties are not gaining popularity throughout the countries of the world, as they are shrinking. The revolutionary communist forces are in a defensive position, and the reformist communists have failed to achieve good results in the elections. Communist parties are struggling just for their existence in the developed countries. They are not in a decisive position, even in developing countries as well. Nevertheless, communists of Nepal are obtaining popularity through the elections. Although the communists of Nepal are split into many factions, they have been able to win the significant number of seats of electoral offices. This article tries to analyze the position of communist parties in the general elections of Nepal. It examines seven general elections of Nepal held from 1959 to 2017. Facts, which were published by the Elections Commission of Nepal at different times, were the basic sources of information for this article. Similarly, governmental and scholarly publications were also used in the article.

*Keywords:* communists, revolutionary, reformist, elections, electoral office

### **Introduction**

#### **Background**

Tentatively, communists of the world are divided into two categories; one believes in reformation, and another emphasizes on revolution. As D'Amato (2000) stated that reformists believe in peaceful and gradual transformation. They utilize the election as a means to achieve socialism. However, the revolutionary faction of communists only believes in the outlined theory of Marx and Engels, and then elaborated by Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin. They do not trust in the election; rather, they want to overthrow the old structures of the state by the revolution of the working class to replace the system by the new power of workers.

Vladimir I. Lenin established the communist government in the line of democratic centralism and aimed at achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Soviet Union in 1918 that was theorized by Karl Marx (Augustyn, 2018). During the time of the Soviet Union, there were communist countries in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa. Political revolts occurred in the Eastern European countries, including the Soviet Socialist Republic that resulted in the collapse

of the communist regimes. The political change in those countries caused to establish democratic governments. According to Rosenberg (2020), five countries in the world are still under the communist regime. They are; China (from 1949), Cuba (from 1965), Laos (from 1975), North Korea (from 1945), and Vietnam (from 1976).

Nearly seven decades after, the one-party communist rule had ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union on 25 December 1991 (Augustyn, 2018). The first election of parliament, State Duma, was held in 1993 after the collapse of communism in Russia. In the election communist party secured only 12.40% vote and obtained 32 out of 225 seats through proportional representation electoral system and won 16 out of 215 seats in the firsts-past-the-post race (Moser, 1995). The Communist Party could not have the desired result in the election; it could hardly reach in the third place in the State Duma.

The results of their immediate elections after the collapse of communism in the East European countries were of mixed types. Simon (1997) analyzed the results of the first two elections, from 1990 to 1994, in seven post-communist countries of eastern Europe. The post-communist party obtained better election results in Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania; however, their results were not good in Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, and Slovakia after the collapse of the communist regime.

The communist party of the USA was established in 1919. Lewis (2014) observed that in the decades of 1930s and 1940s, the communist party was once a significant force in American politics with a strong network across the country. Although it had less than 100,000 members, its effect was wider. Now, the party has shrined to less than 3,000 members. It has not a decisive role in American electoral activities. It is in a defensive position and struggling for existence with its small, but die-hard members.

In the United Kingdom, where Karl Marx explored the theory of communism, and Marx Memorial Library is still over there in London, where Marx used to read and write, the communist party was established in 1920. As stated by Chaffin (2018), it has not influenced the British politics; it merely raises some political issues and forms some slogans. The Communist Party never had good results in British general elections; the communist party of UK did not even file any candidates in the general election of 2017, for the first time since its formation.

Communist parties of India had a significant influence in Indian politics, especially in Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura. The elections of *Lok Sabha* (lower house of parliament) held in 2019 were a big decline for the communist parties in India. Reviewing the elections, Central Committee of Communist Party of India (Marxists) (2019) has agreed "The CPI(M) and the Left have suffered a severe setback in these elections particularly in their strongholds of Kerala, West Bengal, and Tripura" (p. 1). According to the review, out of the 20 Lok Sabha seats, the communist party got only one seat in Kerala. No communist candidate could win in West

Bengal and Tripura. Communist parties got two seats from Tamilnadu state because of alliance with DMK. According to the National Informatics Centre (2020), at present, the strength of the Lok Sabha is 545; there are only three members of CPI(M). It shows the miserable position of communists in the biggest democracy of the world.

The data show that the current political scenario around the globe is not favourable for the communist parties in the present context. However, there are three countries, Nepal, Guyana, and Moldova that have communist governments at the current set up by competitive multiparty elections (Rosenberg, 2020). Parliament of Nepal has about the two-third majority of communist members after the election of 2017 (Election Commission, 2074 BS). The election results held in Nepal shows that communists are still popular in Nepal though their popularity is declining in the global context.

The Marxist literature entered into Nepal around the year 1930 (Gurung, 1977). Among them, Ralf Fox's *Communism* and Gorky's *Mother* became very popular. Dasharath Chand and Ganga Lal, two of the popular martyrs of Nepal, also used to read those books before their arresting. In April 1949, Pushpa Lal translated the communist manifesto into Nepali language and published it along with a long introduction. It became another popular reading material for revolutionary Nepalese people. Finally, in the leadership of Pushpa Lal, Nepal Communist Party was established on 15 September 1949 (RSN, 2009).

The then government banned the Nepal Communist Party on 25 January 1952 (Nepal Rajpatra, 2009 BS). Elections of the Kathmandu municipality were held on 1 September 1953, the first election since 1951's political change. The attention of the entire country was focused on the election because that would be as a political barometer for all of Nepal (Joshi & Rose, 1966/2004). The banned Nepal Communist Party won six seats out of 18 ward councilors, equals to the country's oldest party, the Praja Parishad (Thapa, 2013). Likewise, the Nepali Congress won only three seats. M. P. Koirala's party, the Rashtriya Praja Parishad, managed two seats and the Gorkha Parishad had to satisfy with only one seat. It was a massive surprise as well as a symbol of the popularity of communists in the Kathmandu valley.

The first general election of Nepal was held in 1959. The communist party bagged four seats out of 109 seats of the House of Representatives (Devkota, 2058 BS). It was only 3.67% seat. The communist party did not get a better result in the election. The second direct election of Rashtriya Panchayat held on 12 May 1986. Although the election was organized on the 'party-less' principle, eight candidates from various leftist groups won the election as independent candidates (Baral, 1986).

After the political change of 1990, six general elections were held to elect national representatives. Among them, four elections were held for House of Representatives (HoR) and

two for Constituent Assembly (CA). Although the communists were split into various factions, they have influenced the elections decisively.

### **Research Problem**

The elections result of Nepal shows the growing popularity of communists in Nepal. This popularity of communist in Nepal defies the worldwide trend of anti-communism. In the primary phase of democracy, communists had not stronghold in the then politics of the country. They made progress gradually. They had better performance in the elections held after the political change in 1990. Although communists were split into many factions, even some of them were against the election, they have been able to obtain substantial results in the elections. However, votes received by the communists in nationwide, seats won in the elections by them, and their candidacy in electoral politics have not been analyzed and presented systematically yet. This article tries to bridge this research gap by answering the following research questions:

- What were the positions of the communist parties in the context of nationwide votes, candidacy, and winners in the general elections of Nepal?
- What were the positions of the individual communist party in the elections of Nepal?

### **Research Objective**

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

- To analyze the obtained votes, status of candidates, and winners of the communist parties in general elections of Nepal.
- To examine the position of the individual communist party in the elections.

### **Methods and Materials**

Nepal has conducted ten general elections so far, i.e. from the first election held in 1959 up to the last one held in 2017. The first election held in 1959 was conducted for the 109 members of the HoR. The second general election was a referendum held in 1980 to collect the opinions in regarding citizen's choice either the establishment of multiparty democracy or continuity of the Panchayat system with reformations in the country. The third and fourth general elections were held in 1981 and 1986 respectively to choose 112 members of Rashtriya Panchayat, the national parliament. Fifth, sixth, and seventh general elections were held in 1991, 1994, and 1999 respectively to elect the 205 members of HoR. Two elections were held in 2008 and 2013 for composing the CA. They were the eighth and ninth general elections of Nepal. The latest general election was held in 2017 to elect the members of HoR.

The second general election was the referendum; that was conducted to give a choice to the people on whether to continue the Panchayati system with reformation or the multi-party-

system. Similarly, third and fourth general elections were held in the principle of the party-less system. Thus, the remaining seven general elections of Nepal have been analyzed in this article. Data of these elections have 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.

Various factions of the communist parties were participated separately in the elections. Some communist parties have been merged with each other that changed their forms and titles of the party. For example, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) converted into the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), and again it was transformed into the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre). Although there have been slight structural changes, the chairperson and prominent leaders were the same. Thus, this article treated 'Maoist' for the party. Similarly, some abbreviated forms are used to address the parties like UML for Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist and Leninist), ML for Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist and Leninist), NMKP for Nepal Majadur Kisan Party, SJN for Samyukta Janamorcha-Nepal, RJ for Rashtriya Janamorch, JM for Jana Morcha, and CPN(D) for Communist Party of Nepal (Democratic).

## Results and Discussion

### Communist and other Political Parties

At the beginning of multiparty democracy, there was only one communist party in Nepal. The single communist party participated in the first general election of Nepal held in 1959. There were altogether nine political parties that contested in the election at that time. Later, the communist party split into many factions, and they contested in elections with each other as well as with other non-communist parties. Table-1 shows that when the first general election held in 1991 since the political change in 1990, seven communist parties fielded their candidates separately. Other 13 non-communist parties were in the election race. Again, seven communist parties contested in the general election, 1994 among 24 political parties. In 1999, 39 parties were in the election fray, whereas eight were communists.

**Table 1**

*Representation of Communist Party in General Elections of Nepal*

Election Year	1959	1991	1994	1999	2008	2013	2017			
Electoral System	FPTP	FPTP	FPTP	FPTP	FPTP	PR	FPTP	PR	FPTP	PR
Total Parties	9	20	24	39	54	54	120	122	55	49/5
Communist Parties	1	7	7	8	12	12	11	11	7	6/2

*Note.* Data Extracted from the Appendix.

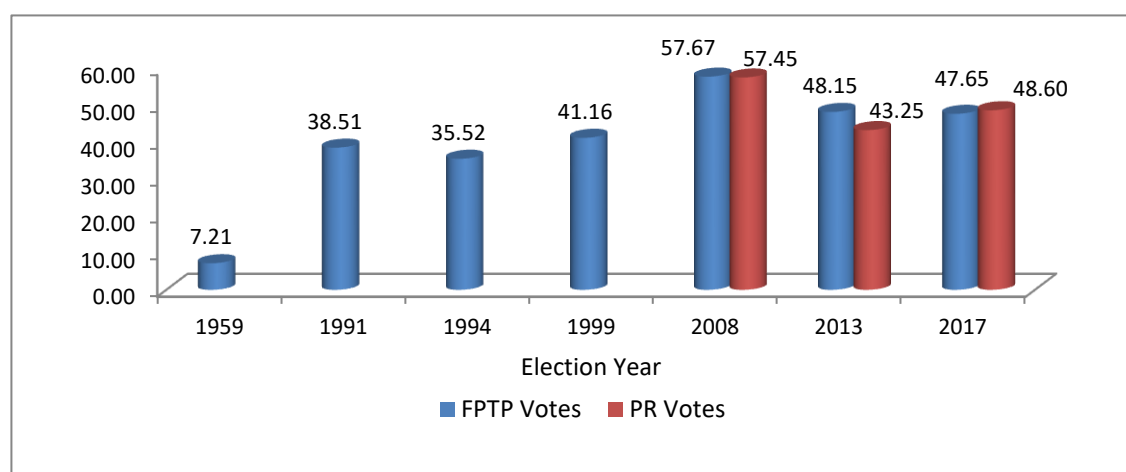
According to table-1, the first CA election was held in 2008 in the history of Nepal. Altogether 54 parties, including 12 communist parties involved in the election in both FPTP and PR electoral system. In the next CA election (2013), 120 parties fielded their candidates in FPTP race. There were candidates from 11 communist parties. Similarly, 122 parties submitted a close list of their candidates for the PR electoral system, whereas 11 were the communist party. In the latest general election of HoR (2017), 55 parties took part in the FPTP race, including seven communist parties and 49 parties were in the PR electoral system with six communist parties. Only five parties including two communist parties crossed the threshold of three percent of nationwide votes in the election.

### Nationwide Votes Share

As figure-1 demonstrates, candidates of Nepal Communist Party collected 7.21% votes from throughout the country in HoR election, 1959. Communists did better in 1991 that was for HoR election. They got 38.51% of nationwide votes. The national vote per cent, was slightly lower, in 1994 than 1991. They received 35.52% voter turnout in the election. Communists continued their progress up in 1999; they earned 41.16% of national ballots. Sustaining the progress, communist won the majority vote of the electors of the country in CA election, 2008. They secured 57.67% votes through FPTP and 57.45% votes through the PR electoral system. It was the highest vote percentage of the communists in the electoral history of Nepal.

**Figure 1**

*National Votes Shared by Communist Parties (in Percent)*



*Note.* Data Extracted from the Appendix.

The figure-1 shows the declining situation of the communists in the CA election, 2013; however, it was 48.15% in FPTP and 43.25% in PR electoral system. They improved their

position slightly in 2017's HoR election in comparison to 2013. They bagged 47.65% votes from FPTP and 48.60% votes from the PR electoral system.

### **Candidacy of Communists**

Table-2 shows that there were 47 communist candidates in 1959 out of 786 candidates, which is 5.98% of total candidates. In 1991, communist parties fielded 416 candidates; 30.93% of 1345 total candidates. There were 399 communist candidates in 1994, and it was 27.67% of the total candidates. It was downturned than in 1991. At 1999, the number of communist candidates reached to 576, despite that the per cent of communist candidates declined to 25.74%. It occurred because the figure of total candidates was more in 1999's election. The highest bit of communist candidates had recorded in the CA election, 2008. There were 1,281 communist affiliated candidates in the election. The Maoist party that was engaged in its 'people's war', came into the mainstream of politics and participated in the election. Thus, the number of communists was increased. The per cent of the communist candidate was also at the highest point. In the next election of CA (2013), communist candidates dropped both in number and per cent. There were 823 communist candidates, which was 13.43% of the total of 6,126 candidates.

**Table 2**

#### *Communist Candidates in General Elections of Nepal*

Election Year	1959	1991	1994	1999	2008	2013	2017
Total Candidates	786	1345	1442	2238	3946	6126	1944
Communist Candidates	47	417	399	576	1281	823	386
Per cent	5.98	31.00	27.67	25.74	32.46	13.43	19.86

*Note.* Data Extracted from the Appendix.

The number of candidates was reduced in HoR election held in 2017 than that of the previous general elections. There were only 386 candidates of the communist parties out of total candidates 1,944. Three factors were responsible for reducing the number of candidates in the election. The first is the coalition of UML and Maoist, two most prominent communist parties of Nepal, in the eve of election. They allocated one candidate in one constituency behalf of these two communist parties. Second is the new provision of electoral threshold, which discouraged for a haphazard candidacy like past elections. And the last is the constituencies were reduced 165 from 240 in the FPTP seats.

### **Elected Communist Candidates**

As present in table-3, only four communist candidates could win in 1959 out of 109 HoR seats. It was 3.67% of total HoR seats. When a party gets the better result in the elections,

then other parties will sweep out. Nepali Congress alone won 74 seats (67.89%) in the election. Because of the stronghold of Congress, communist proved weak at the election. Communists improved its position in 1991. They won 82 (40%) seats out of 205 HoR seats. Among the seven contestant communist parties, only four could win the seats. CPN (UML) got 69, SJN obtained 9, and NMKP and CPN(D) each won two seats.

**Table 3**

*Elected Communist Candidates in General Elections of Nepal*

Election Year	1959	1991	1994	1999	2008	2013	2017			
Electoral System	FPTP	FPTP	FPTP	FPTP	FPTP	PR	FPTP	PR	FPTP	PR
Total Seats	109	205	205	205	240	335	240	335	165	110
Elected	4	82	92	78	158	195	118	152	118	58
Per cent	3.67	40.00	44.88	38.05	65.83	58.21	49.17	45.37	71.52	52.73

*Note.* Data Extracted from the Appendix.

The election of HoR held in 1994 was an excellent opportunity for the communists. Taking advantage of internal conformation among central leaders of Nepali Congress (Poudyal, 1995), communist won 92 seats of HoR. UML alone got 88 seats and became the largest party of the HoR. Council of ministers involved with communists was formed for the first time in the history of Nepal in the premiership of Man Mohan Adhikari after the election. Another communist party, NMKP, could elect its four candidates in the election.

Communists relegated to second place in the HoR after the election held in 1999. Altogether four communist parties could win the election with their 78 candidates out of 205 constituencies. UML got 71 seats, RJ got five seats, and SJN and NMKP each got one seat. Before the election of 1999, a faction was split from UML and formed CPN (ML). The newly formed ML contested the election as a rival of UML. It affected result of the election. Similarly, CPN (Maoist) launched its 'people's war' in 1996. A significant number of communists involved in the struggle and they opposed and boycotted the election. Thus, the result of the election was not good for communist in 1999.

When the Maoist came into the peace process and returned to electoral politics, communists obtained a charismatic result in CA election held in 2008. The communists won 158 seats out of 240 FPTP seats. It was more than two-thirds majority seats of CA through the FPTP election. Similarly, the communists won 195 seats out of 335 PR seats. It was majority seats. However, the position among the communist party was drastically changed by the election. The newcomer communist party Maoist alone won 120 seats, whereas the incumbent communist party UML got only 33 seats in FPTP race. Except for these two parties, the other three communist parties also could elect their candidates through the FPTP electoral system.



JMN and NMKP each won in two constituencies and RJ won a single one. Altogether eight communist parties reached to CA through the PR electoral system. These were - Maoist (100 seats), UML (70 seats), ML (8 seats), JN (5 seats), CPN (Samyukta) (5 seats), RJ (3 seats), NMKP (2 seats), and CPN (Ekikrit) (2 seats) (Election Commission, 2065 BS).

Communists could not hold the public support that they got in 2008. The result of the next CA election in 2013 was neutral towards the communist parties. They gained 118 seats in the FPTP race and 152 seats in the PR system. The election reversed the position of communist parties. Within the communist party, UML reached in its traditional place of number one with 91 seats, and Maoist relegated in the second position with 26 seats of FPTP race. Mohan Baidya 'Kiran' and other veteran and influential leader left the Maoist party, and they boycotted the election of 2013. It was the leading cause because Maoist did not do better in the election. Only three communist parties got into CA, and another one is NMKP that won only one seat. Altogether six communist parties won the PR election of CA, 2013. UML won 84 seats, Maoist won 54 seats, and ML won 5 seats through PR system. Similarly, RJ, CPN (Samyukta), and NMKP each won three seats of CA through PR race (Election Commission, 2070b BS). UML held first place among communist parties through PR system, too.

Two big communist parties of Nepal, UML and Maoist, made a coalition and went jointly into the election of HoR held in 2017. It produced a synergic effect, and they won 116 places out of 165 FPTP constituencies (Election Commission, 2074 BS). Top of it, Rashtriya Janamorcha and Nepal Majadur Kisan Party each won one constituency. Thus, altogether 118 communist candidates won the election; that was 71.52% of FPTP seats. Communist won 58 (52.73%) seats through PR electoral system out of 110 seats of HoR (Election Commission, 2074 BS).

According to Clause 52 of the Act Relating to Political Party (2073 BS), those parties who cross the three per cent of nationwide votes will be treated as a national party. Parties that failed to traverse the threshold will be omitted from the PR list. According to this legal provision, only five parties could cross the threshold (Election Commission, 2074 BS, p. 269). Among them, two were communist parties, UML and Maoist. They got 41 and 17 seats respectively. There are 64% communist members in HoR elected through the FTPT and PR electoral system.

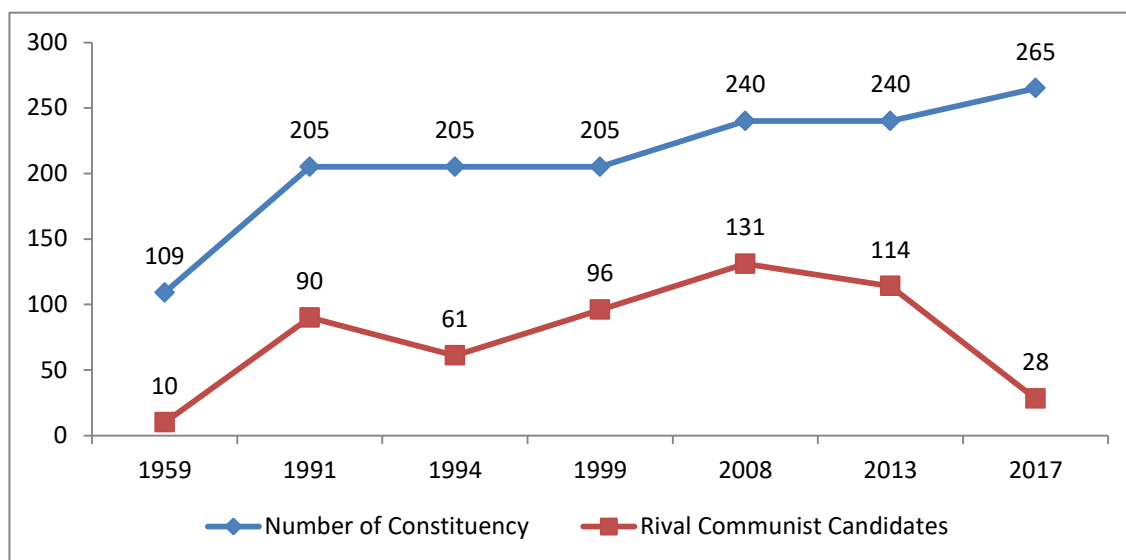
### **Nearest Rival Communist Candidates**

In the FPTP electoral system, it is considered that 'winner takes all'. The candidate getting the first position will enter into electoral office and candidate of the second position returns to normal life. Although to get the status of nearest rival has no legal value; nevertheless, it does matter politically. They became the public figure with their identity in the locality and they may be the winner in the coming elections.

According to figure-2, there were ten nearest rival communist candidates in 1959. Altogether 90 candidates of the communist party were nearest rivals in 1991. Similarly, 61 communist candidates challenged their winner candidates as the nearest rival in 1994. In HoR election of 1999, 96 communist candidates were nearest rivals. It reached at 131 in CA election, 2008.

**Figure 2**

*Nearest Rival Communist Candidates in General Elections of Nepal*



*Note.* Data Extracted from the Appendix.

There were some such constituencies where winner and nearest rival both were communist in the election. One hundred and fourteen communist candidates obtained the position of the nearest rival in the CA election of 2013. In HoR election of 2017, there were only 28 nearest rival candidates. UML and Maoist had jointly fielded their candidates in constituencies. As discussed above, many of their candidates could win the election. Thus, the nearest rival communist candidate seemed smaller in the election.

### Findings

Some significant points have come out after analyzing facts of general elections and the position of communists in these elections. These are as follows:

- Communist parties of Nepal decisively influence the elections that held after the political change in 1990. The Communist Party became the largest party in parliament for the first time after the general election of 1994. Similarly, communists achieved the first position in CA after the election of 2008. In the latest election held in 2017, communists won two-

thirds majority seats of HoR. Communists have been positioned in major opposition in HoR 1991, HoR 1999, and CA 2013.

- Communists of Nepal have split into many factions and they contested each other in elections as a rival. In many constituencies winner and nearest rival, both were communists. Because of the completion within the communists, they lost the many constituencies; the rival communist candidates let down to second and third places, and consequently, other non-communist candidate got a chance to win.
- Except for these reformist communists, there were/are also a revolutionary faction of communists in Nepal, who do not take part in elections; they announce themselves as orthodox communists. Mohan Bikram Singha, Mohan Baidya, Netra Bikram Chanda and their factions still believe in revolution instead of elections, and 'so-called' democratic process. Maoist itself had launched 'people's war' from 1996 to 2006. Thus, there was a saying in Nepal- communists regime in Sadak (protests in the road), Sadan (members of parliament), and jungle (in armed revolt) (Khadka, 2007, para 1).
- As per the zero-sum-game theory, the victory of the communists has depended on the weakness of the non-communist party, especially Nepali Congress and vice-versa.

### **Conclusion**

While viewing the global scenario, the communist parties in Nepal seem to be in a comfortable position even now. The communist parties of Nepal have been able to obtain better results in general elections held at different times except for the general election of 1959. About the two-third majority members of the current national parliament of Nepal are of communist affiliated parties. They have entered into parliament with popular votes of Nepalese citizens. People from economically and socially marginalized communities, working-class, peasant, and job-seeking youths have been found to have cast their votes to the communist parties because they believe that communist parties are determined to address their requirements and expectations. When the total votes and the seats that the entire major and the fringe communist parties are figured out, it covers a great majority of the people in the country. This trend may not prevail in future if the communist parties fail to fulfill the aspiration of the people and go beyond their election manifestos.

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### Appendix

#### *Places of Communist Parties in General Elections of Nepal*

EY	ES	Number /Percent	Valid Votes		Total Seats	Candidates		WCC	NRCC	Party	
			Total	VOC		Total	CC			Total	CP
1959	FPTP	Number	1791301	129142	109	786	47	4	10	9	1
		Per cent		7.21			5.98	3.67	9.17		
1991	FPTP	Number	6969061	2683726	205	1345	416	82	90	20	8
		Per cent		38.51			30.93	40	43.9		
1994	FPTP	Number	7384277	2623215	205	1442	399	92	61	24	7
		Per cent		35.52			27.67	44.88	29.76		
1999	FPTP	Number	8649664	3560510	205	2238	576	78	96	39	8
		Per cent		41.16			25.74	38.05	46.83		
2008	FPTP	Number	10306120	5943026	240	3946	1281	158	131	54	12
		Per cent		57.67			32.46	65.83	54.58		
	PR	Number	10739078	6170003	335			195			
		Per cent		57.45				58.21			
2013	FPTP	Number	9044908	4355472	240	6126	823	118	114	120	11
		Per cent		48.15			13.43	49.17	47.5		
	PR	Number	9463862	4093560	335			152			
		Per cent		43.25				45.37			
2017	FPTP	Number	10045436	4787020	165	1944	386	118	28	55	7
		Per cent		47.65			19.86	71.52	16.97		
	PR	Number	9503618	4618889	110			58		49	6
		Per cent			48.6				52.73		

*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, VOC = Vote Obtained by Communists; CC = Communist Candidates; WCC = Winner Communist Candidates; NRCC = Nearest Rival Communist Candidates; CP = Communist Party; FPTP = First-past-the-post; PR = Proportional Representation