# Expected Electoral Innovations:

# An Utterly Pressing 'Democratization & Enfranchising' Emergency in Political Landscape of Nepal

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*Abstract*

*Election is one of the key and cardinal events in the democracy, and it embodies huge ground of importance in multiple aspects. Conducting elections periodically in free, fair and fast manner is an inevitable and inexorable obligation of each nation. There is no room and reason to refute this onus. Ergo, timely changes and modifications in the election practices and provisions become an utmost and pressing emergency for all the nations in order to address the recent trends and mitigate the emerging electoral challenges. Nepal no longer is in zone of exception with this dire need of the universal similarity. This paper charts out two major issues a) inherent beauty of election, and b) couple of cardinal electoral innovations and major modifications that Nepal, as soon as possible, has to daringly commence to additionally democratize upcoming election activities in pursuit of commendable trust, prompt response, higher validity, larger attraction, supplementary resourcefulness, added enthusiasm, upheld optimism, and mass social audits from the public.*

*Keywords:* Election, Voting, Innovation, Intellect and Youth

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**Study Methods**: As an archival research work, this study thoroughly relies on doctrinal method. Delphi-method, which has been- off late- an instrumental characteristic of the qualitative research, amounts a huge portion of this study. Most of arguments are inferred with paradigm of interpretation. About 57 literatures of respective fields are reviewed and cited to back and boost the gravity of the study. Literatures which are relatively recent, published in reputed sources and authored by known figures in respective scholarship to the extent possible are prioritized while screening for the reviews or used for in-text citation.

## Discussion and Analysis

## Introduction

With completion of the first cycle of full and formal federal democratic practices, Nepal accomplished another grand political festival by successfully and peacefully concluding the Elections at all three levels- federal, state and local bodies- for successive representatives, last year. The local bodies' election was scheduled on 13th May, 2022 and succeeded smoothly. It passed some telling and intelligible messages that had encouraged many other epiphenomenon for Federal and Provincial elections, handled on 20th November, 2022. Owing to the occasion i.e. elections, various ingenuous comments were being made on both fronts: in for and against the motion, respectively. The series is on 'show' still and seems to persist for sometimes more. Some experts tend to evidently castigate election whereas others endeavor to stupendously eulogize the election fever. However, besides those ingenious but contradicting attempts, electoral practices embody and rightfully manifest some unique values. And, at the same time, it seems reasonably expecting some needful and profound innovations too in order to uphold the situation of added democratization and enfranchisement.

## Unique Values

Election, among any other human conducts or practices, best manifests that the sovereignty really rests on people as the constitution has enshrined. The mass has perceived very same provision as one of notable salient features. Believing on similar beauty, Wojtasik (2013) regards that elections appear as the first form of soliciting political consensus among citizens. Edgell et al. (2018) find elections shedding substantial importance in the process of democratization. It

ensures people, who vote and partake electoral process, that they are indeed important, solely significant, visibly superlative, never possible to be seconded, and makes them further feel that their deliberate decision counts. Assessing the importance of election in Venezuela, Frantz and Geddes (2013) carefully remark that elections are ways to uphold the importance & unfold the real power of people. The same situation is the highest form of human right as recognized in and protected by almost constitutions across the globe as Dahl (2015) lays focus.

Election, which is an inarguable and indisputable acceptance across the world, is also the prime and powerful lifeline of democracy as Horowitz (2016) infers owing to the situation that all issues i.e. class, economy, identity and politics primarily tend to be designed and defined based on the electoral process and its outcome. Those monumentally uphold the existence of democratic practices in the country. Being enmeshed and lived on similar observation, Dovi (2016) eulogizes as that election allows people enjoy four fold representations at a time i.e. formal, symbolic, descriptive and substantive representations respectively. Countries showing resistance in adopting culture of the multi-party elections-based on adult franchise- still face an endless averment of being knowingly undemocratic. Huang (2017) views that election helped Vietnam to overcome similar sorts of crisis in course of wooing admissible international recognition. Making an identical assessment, Lijphart (2008) also considers election as most major and magnificent manifestation and marker in the global political landscape. Passing a complete consonance with similar logic, Quinlan & Schwartz (2017) have agreed that election had caused a substantive transformation in Northern Ireland.

The renowned classical philosopher and one of reputed founding figures in formulation of knowledge, especially in Western part of the World, Aristotle defined 'Demo' as people and 'Cracy' as power. Conceding with the message, Kiani & Sartipi (2016) write "elections have a crucial role in building the state, power transmission, ensuring peace and political stability, fundamental human rights, public participation and the legal state" (p. 20) to elaborate the importance of election in deeper level. Further, they perceive election as 'excellent platform to achieve popular sovereignty" (p. 32). The absolute reflection of that superlative power vested in the people is also expressed rightfully through the elections. Only election is the much valid, well accepted, legitimized and peaceful means to transfer power, shift the power-centre and handover regimes.

Bjornlund (2015) rightfully judges it as 'it broadens the scope of the free will of people to create and change regime' (p. 2); and for the similar assumption, Clark (2015) deems election as the most transparent procedure of selection. Therefore, it is legal, admissible and commendable move for the political parties as well to receive the approval from the people then uphold any of their decisions through periodic and democratic election. 'Election is the mechanism for the formation of a political system, officials and political institutions' as Khosravi (2014, p.196) remarks; and Sadeghi (2015) also makes almost an identical view. Elections heavily warrant parties to refill each aspirant with competitive efforts to speed up development activities in all levels and layers for convenience of the people.

Despite reserving colossal values, Nepal's existing election praxis urgently needs to infallibly embrace many innovations to address the wider interests and ensure the higher responsibility to people. Those innovations shall definitely cause significant boost in level of democratization and enfranchisement being experienced till today.

### Expected Innovations

An admissible application of up-to-the-minute electoral mechanism to disinfect people, to empower people with fragile health for franchise and to save the voters from potential danger and health risks is the most initial and fundamental expectation. Brown et al. (2022) have noted that people with poor or unsound health are less likely to be present for voting. And this shall cost a large impact on electoral turnout as Lahtinen et al. (2017) also find the similar result in various studies. In a recent study, Buril et al. (2022) also have realized the much stressing and pressing need of digitizing electoral practices owing to public health emergencies created due to COVID -19 outbreak and overlapping timing of elections across the globe. Conducting and administering election along with voting had been seriously impacted in many countries due to health risk. A report titled Global Impact of COVID-19 on Elections (2020) makes akin inference. There may be occurrence of similar or other pitfalls of pandemics on the days ahead that might disallow people gather in group or make an assembly for either of activities. The group of franchisers with vulnerable health always opts to be out of the ring for other causes too. Given these all potential challenges at any time in future, Banbury (2020) also has made strong recommendation to adopt electronic voting. Apropos to excessive dependence on

digital domain, the present-day generation is being addressed 'e-tribe'. Couples of off-late researches suggest that 'virtual world and work from home' possibly can be a valid priority, globally, in several areas, as an aftermath of pandemic. Plibersek's recent book *Upton: A Better Normal after COVID* (2020) and a report from McKinsey Global Institute titled *The Future of Work after COVID* (2020) conclude accordingly. Zakaria (2020) strongly suggests to adopt then to naturalize digital or virtual working to the extent possible in each of activities; and, election shall not distance out itself from it. Such efforts in Nepal too certainly herald many positive upshots and outcomes.

The extent of the best possible 'digital or virtual integration' ought to be prioritized in electoral procedure as well. Electronic voting or advance voting assists Nepal kick start a quantum leap of change. The slogan of 'Digital Nepal', which is one of broad concepts of Nepal Government, as Giri (2018) claims, earns an evident meaning. Application of ICT (information, communication and technology) seems to chart a visibly valuable graph. Though it has been doubted and suspiciously treated in Nepal, Electronic voting- since a quite long time span- is a common custom globally. The system was first introduced in the United States in 1960 AD, followed by India in 1998, the Philippines in 2010, Namibia and Mongolia in 2014, respectively. Furthermore, Estonia has already developed then enjoyed an enriched practice of online voting. Electronic voting apparently saves time and significantly makes expenses down as well as lowers the need of human resource for electoral deals. Basit (2017) finds it amazingly computable and significant in terms of election. Furtherance, Pual & Ray (2013) too had drawn similar inference whereas McCormack (2016) argues electronic voting and digitizing election as a landmark event and noticeable departure on quest of rebooting democratization. Less crowded elections, easier calculation and environment friendly 'green election efforts', inter alia, are the other competitive advantages. Tendency of invalid votes also gets remarkably reduced, followed with procedural simplification alike Almutairi et al (2021) also find the use of Artificial Intelligence in such manner could credit a lot of positive advantages for crowd management in various social events like election and so on. Suharsono & Kuspriyanto (2019) had presumed projectable pandemic and had urged for use of electronic voting. Besides these inferences from various scholars, an early voting scheme ensures highly voter-friendly exercise and resolves the difficulty of time constraints. Therefore, Sadiku et al (2017) praise it

as dynamic voting. Such an initiation would simultaneously instill justice to the approximately three million Nepali diaspora voters, residing abroad in Non-resident Nepali status. More than million voters currently reside outside the nation for short term seasonal migration and many other purposes. Despite being in home itself, many citizens find it unmanageable to manage cost and time to travel residency area where they are enlisted as registered voter. As an outcome, the average vote torn out is only about 65 percent. There was substantive soaring growth in election in Belgium because of practices of electronic voting and internet voting as Dandoy (2014) has noticed. All the political parties considering the election as major political phenomenon and the Election Commission, as the regulatory institution, should unbridle all the possible determinations and sweats in these areas. These attempts will ensure higher enfranchisement and give surge on vote torn out thus assist democratization at newer level.

As one of the landmark verdicts from joint bench of the then justices Hon. Kalyan Shrestha and Prakash Wasti, in 2070 BS, the esteemed Supreme Court granted the right to reject, which is one of much sought after popular political debates (as per the news report of onlinekhabar.com) on the ballot paper. However, on contrary of the expected output, Mandal et al. (2017) has noticed this provision not making any significant change and positive contribution, as having very negligible support in different countries which have already introduced the system of no voting. Negating the step shall even evoke the case of contempt of court as well. Thus, adopting this system checks the popularity graph of candidates, honors civic credibility on the political system, and will see an innovation in elections as Vachana & Roy (2017) argue. Thus, introducing right to reject shall unfold double fold benefits of exhibiting compliance to Court's verdict and allowing people to reject the undesirable candidates.

Besides others, presenting younger generation candidates in the election competition is another of the most sought-after innovation stalls. Stressing on the political need in Ghana, Biney & Amoateng (2019) also prescribe the dire necessity of youth engagement in politics. Assessing the output of youths' engagement, Henn & Foard (2014) have noted significant social changes in UK because of youths' active participation and ardent intervention. In the short past, Obama was elected on the President of the United States at 46, Roosevelt at 42, Kennedy at 43, Clinton at 46, in their first accession to the power. David

Cameron assumed office of the Prime Minister in the United Kingdom at 43 and Tony Blair at 43. Augustus FitzRoy at 33 in 1768, Frederic North at 37 in 1770, William Pitt at 24 in 1783, and Lord Liverpool at 42 in 1812 were others well renowned members of the club. Sanna Marin (38) Finland, Jacinda Arden (42) New Zealand, Carlos Alvarado (42) Costa Rica, Gabriel Boric (36) Chile, Nayib Bukele (41) El Salvador, Emmanuel Macron (44) France and Rishi Sunak (43) Great Britain are current examples in the row of this exemplary series. The leadership of those young politicians, who are evidently equipped with hypersonic energy, progressive vision, innovative thinking, irreproachable vitality, and undoubted ability to flourish, collectively showers nation bountifully. Highly creative contribution for the overall transformation and speedy progress of country becomes possible. Public can be gratified with their devotion and dedication to develop the country. Weiß (2020) feels youths' participation as significant departure on political progress and advancement of country whereas Coe et al (2016) consider "youth politics as multiple processes" (p. 6), and Rainsford (2017) writes, "it seems as if the problem of youth political participation is less a matter of whether they participate, and more a matter of where they participate" (p. 2) to further highlight the values of presenting and electing youth candidates in election.

Positioning self as quite unequivocal to other authors, James's book *The Prime Minister and the Cabinet* (2020) pronounces that the youth-led politics is not only propitiously dynamic but also princely positive, propulsive and productive. It utterly unfolds an unrivaled capacity in public service and earns sizeable civic upkeep. To add on gravity of the issue and intensify the need of youths in politics, Ekpe et al (2016) remark that youths could result in self-sustained community development and could possibly reduce many vices. Unfortunately, the retiring generation has had consecutive control over politics in Nepal. Indicating such a sordid situation, Devkota (2019) calls it severe crisis in leadership, and one of the reasons of failure of nation in line with Acemoglu & Robinson (2012) jointly argue to mention the possible reasons for failure of any nation. Therefore, the youth, now sans any delay, should have the courage to lead the populace through elections with a proposal for positive change plus willpower and rehearsal to solve the teething troubles on the people. Reinforcing the similar propositions, Lim & Lee (2016) regard the young leadership as transformative and Pharion (2014) rates that as transformational. Hence-so-forth,

all the political parties have to expressively present the young generation candidates in the elections. Adults and older political frontrunners should assimilate to act as an uprightly respectable patronage. In that case, the ballot will generate another new spark. It can even regain the almost dormant and defunct public trust into a full-speed velocity. Highly touted issues mark a meaningful genesis.

The exercise of political meritocracy is next pressing urgency now. Justifying it, Bell & Chenyang (2013) regard almost and absolute absence of meritocracy in politics as prime challenge in East Asian World; and Klein (2018) believes that it has bountifully cost on the weight and gravity of democracy. Desired development hustle necessitates a set of evident experts with the adequacy of technical knowledge in various fields. Parties need to attract and invite cream cum proficient minds to join politics and attempt for charismatic leadership. Thus, there will be a leadership which can deliver to the level of public expectation. Recalling the trend that is being well accepted across the globe, Wooldridge (2021) states that modern and developed world can be only made with positivist intervention through meritocracy. It even takes limelight of ballooning swing votes. The moral basis will be always highly productive and visibly result bearing as Ziliotti (2017) feels. Such practices are adduced to be highly advantageous for qualitative change in politics along with public lives, overseas. Many countries, mostly including China, Thailand, Japan, Singapore, Korea, Hong Kong and Vietnam, have welcomed an intense political involvement of many sound professionals and experts i.e. professors, lawyers, scientists, experts in various fields, scholars, professionals and researchers to integrate their expertise and efficacy. As there is no majority of experts among politicians these days, the quest of nation building in Nepal has fairly become mere a desire without any distinct devotion and dedication. A group of no special and in-depth expertise and enthusiasm seldom sails anything substantive for the rapid transformation of the nation. The one or two lethargic events in piecemeal basis from inapt, inept and inert politicians can cause no significant changes and overhaul the system, which is a desperate need of Nepal. Thus, all parties should unconditionally invite and welcome experts and exercise meritocracy as political maneuver.

Conducting all three level elections at once than stipulating them in separate time span could save a lot of money. Falguera et al. (2014), note substantial rise in

cost of election, inter alia, in European countries; and Nepal is no longer an exception. About 500 million Nepalese rupees is reported to have spent in conducting two elections in 2022 AD.  It has compelled to negotiate with exponentially increasing election expenditure (Mietzner, 2015).  A state with a very small and dependent economy, and moreover in additional hardship as now, like Nepal must promptly exercise renewed efforts to be economic in course of elections. Doing it even benefits by refraining election officials from repeatedly using same  human resources, mostly outsourcing from government employees because election commission doesn't have own staff at that number. There shall be no risk of creating a conducive environment for contagion by intermittent crowding if elections are not frequently conducted. Rexha et al. (2016) coin a phrase 'crowdsourcing technique' to denote such experiments in election time. It shall not harm any to Nepal as well; it rather causes higher enfranchisement.

The parties now need to reach a new consensus on ways to refine and improve the method of direct elections given the behavioral inconsistencies and much costly practices observed in the bygone electoral spats. The increasing cost is worrisomely stressing candidates and entire process; and, managing it as an issue of paramount importance too as Prato & Wolton (2016) remark. It is obvious to cost voters' welfare and augment partisan imbalance. So is the situation that is sensed in Nepal. A situation should be endorsed where the lead candidates canvass through television debate thus the parties make minimal public off-line meetings and campaigns. At the moment when the virtual world is increasingly bigger than the material world and the word 'universe' has been replaced by the word 'metaverse', Nepal should also dare to launch some fundamental and foundational breakthroughs in electoral exercises too. Dommett & Temple (2017) and Neyazi et al. (2016) have noticed the digital campaigns assisting electoral process with multifold advantages and benefits from ensuring safety to minimizing atrocities as well. Owing to the heavy expenses in the direct election system, its suitable alternative should also be pondered. Parties and election commission officials should not remain indifferent and oblivious about such an imperative issue. Given the constant confusion about longevity of government based on hung parliament and perpetual plotting cum endless endeavors to form and deform the government among parties,  Nepal's electoral system vis a vis the method of electing federal and province executive should be subject of serious

revision. Some very clumsy and nauseating scenes of government changes and its frequency has beset and embarrassed the public.

The series of previous elections as well did not expectedly generate any new civic enthusiasm. To encapsulate the crude reality, Rajkarnikar (2019) finds all sectors- inter alia, economics, which is the prime one- at irreparable disarray because of political apathy and inaction. The nation has headed towards downward trajectory and exemplified the best sojourning of underdevelopment, decay and damage. The anticipated consequences were seldom achieved due to lack of expert, devoted, young, energetic, dedicated, visionary and qualified candidates. At present, the additional inconveniences and advanced adversities are heightened due to cumbersome electoral process as well. Shrestha (2017) and Pokharel & Rana (2013) do also raise various existing practices in electoral process which need to be explicitly expunged and Nepal should happily adopt innovative praxis to uphold the relevancy and credibility of election.

In nut shell, following innovations are felt as unequivocally much needed steps to retain the electoral beauty and initiate some innovative inductions to further popularize electoral exercises.

1. Digitation of franchise
2. Electronic voting
3. Provision of early voting
4. Right to reject on ballot
5. Presenting young generation candidates in election
6. Practice of political meritocracy
7. Single time all level election
8. Television campaigning
9. Modifying direct election practices

**Conclusion**

Based on the analyses carried here-so-forth, some changes in electoral praxis are critically must in order to uphold the significance of elections then to make its upshots to be truly centered on civic interest and welfare. A set of rational and admissible modifications, as inferred from the above said discussion and analyses, in the present-day electoral system along with election competitors should be firmly confirmed. Nothing resisting on obsession in inducting changes in electoral practices should be entertained. If any or more of these proposed innovations are delayed and/or disagreed, the periodic election will now turn nothing meaningful and instrumental than mere an intermittent mal-affair in terms of both the process and outcomes.

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