

Nepal elections: Defeat for Maoists, victory for united left

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Despite all the ideological weaknesses, the Left remains a mass force that is not seen in any other country of the region. The masses seem to have tried the Maoists and have now shifted to the UML.

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I was present as an International Observer to the November 19 general elections in Nepal, invited by the National Election Observation Committee (NEOC). Polling was unexpectedly peaceful. Interestingly enough only 226 out of the 601 Constituent Assembly seats are directly elected. That is, the majority of seats are elected through a proportional voting system.

More than 70 percent of Nepal's eligible voters participated in the November 19 vote despite an election boycott and transportation strike by a coalition of 33 parties, led by the CPN-Maoist. It is clear that the boycott strategy failed.

Just eight days after the election---when I am writing these lines--- we can begin to view the shape of the new assembly. What is shocking is that right-wing forces have been able to advance despite the fact that three main communist parties CPN (UML), UCPN Maoist and CPN-Maoist still remain a major force in Nepal and enjoy the sympathy of the majority.

Background to the elections

The Maoists fought an insurgency against government troops from 1996 to 2006, joined a peace process and participated in elections in 2008 that they dominated. Many of their fighters joined the national army. But while in power they were unable to offer a compelling alternative. Thus poverty was not reduced and there was no major reform agenda during the power period of the Maoists and UML. This gave an opening for the decaying right-wing Nepali Congress to re-emerge.

As a result, the neoliberal agenda and privatization was maintained. They accepted and cooperated with the Indian ruling classes and did not challenge in an effective manner the hegemony of Indian ruling elite, instead tried their best to win them to their side.

The CPN-Maoists decided to boycott the election because it was being held under an unconstitutional head of the state, the chief justice of Supreme Court, while the United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), did contest the election, but secured only 26 directly elected seats. I discovered the CPN-Maoist was called by activists as "dashiest," and the UCPN Maoists as "cashist," that is, it is believed to be a party with a lot of cash.

The election result

The Nepal Congress, the country's oldest political party and one that favors close ties with India, won 105 of the 240 directly elected seats. The Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) came in second with 91 seats.

Three hundred and thirty-five of the 601 Constituent Assembly seats will be determined by proportional votes. A total of 10,709 candidates from 122 political parties are contesting for those seats. That is, all the votes from the 240 constituencies are accumulated and seats allocated in proportion to the votes secured by the respective political party. The total number of valid votes is divided by 335 to set a threshold for allocating party seats. According to the Election Commission, a party must secure around 25,000 votes to get one seat under the PR system.

By 25th November, the UML had bagged 608,484 of the 2.21 million votes, according to the official website of the Election Commission (EC). Their share of the PR votes as of that evening was 27.48 percent. The Nepali Congress trailed closely behind the UML with 581,186 votes (26.25 percent) and the UCPN (Maoist) had 367,132 (16.58 percent). Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal (RPPN) came in fourth with 175,277 votes (7.91 percent), while the Rastriya Prajatantra Party secured 66,026 (2.98 percent) of the votes.

One new party Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal (RPPN) is calling for restoration of royalty and has taken a significant portion of right-wing vote away from the Nepali Congress. Of the 10 constituencies in Kathmandu district, the RPPN was leading in six with 106,830 votes. The Nepal Congress followed the RPPN in the capital with 104,779 votes, while the UML had bagged 89,028 and the Maoists grabbed 58,220 votes.

Just a day after the elections the Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal known as Prachanda declared the elections as a "conspiracy" against them and announced boycott of the polling count. He only went to press after it was clear the Maoists are losing badly in the elections. They were the single largest group in 2008 parliament and failed to retain their support among the extremely poor masses of Nepal.

The 2008 parliament was elected for a two-year term in order to draft the constitution after the country was declared the Peoples Republic of Nepal. Despite all efforts of the three main parties, the parliament failed to write the constitution on time. In fact, the parliament extended itself on a yearly basis twice but they were deadlocked over whether to adopt a parliamentary or presidential system of government, and whether ethnicity or geography should be used to divide the country into states.

According to one commentator, Professor Kapil Shershta, who I met in Katmandou , "the last parliament did everything else apart from the task they were elected for, the writing of the constitution."

On the other hand, the former attorney general of Nepal, said, "the process of constitution making has gone considerably well during the last five years but a constitution is not just a set of few principles written by an expert, it is a process of constitution-making with people's aspirations. Political parties have not failed in writing the constitution but have done well in reaching consensus in THE most difficult objective conditions." He was speaking at the pre-poll observation consultation meeting I attended two days before the elections in Kathmandu.

Despite Maoist boycott of poll counting, Nepal's election commission has ruled out a revote or recount. "We are not in a position to review the vote after all parties were provided chances to review the entire process," said the chief election commissioner, Neel Kantha Uprety. Lok Raj Baral,

executive chairman of the Nepal Center for Contemporary Studies, said the Maoists' dismal performance shocked everyone. But he predicted that they would participate in the Constituent Assembly's constitution-writing process.

The 2013 elections have not produced a single political party capable of forming the government on its own. The ideal would have been a loose alliance of the two main communist parties, the UML and the UCPN Maoists. They have a majority in the parliament if in an alliance. However, the 2013 elections have created new difficulties and complexities for the political parties' task of writing the constitution. UML leader Madsen Nepal projected completing this task within a year and after winning two seats has emerged a powerful respected leader. However, is this possible?

In this election the masses punished those who they felt could not do the job properly. They have shown some expectations for the right-wing forces. However, they have not decisively rejected the communists. The UML is now a poll of attraction for the majority of the Nepali masses.

Yet the UML would have to break their reliance on the Indian ruling class, reject a stagist theory of revolution and above all break with a neoliberal agenda and imperialist forces. They seem to have the confidence of the masses but can they move forward in terms of socialist consciousness?

The Nepal election is an eye opener for all the Left forces. Despite all the ideological weaknesses, the Left remains a mass force that is not seen in any other country of the region. The masses seem to have tried the Maoists and have now shifted to the UML. The Left in Nepal remains a poll of attraction. It is the Left of Nepal that has to move towards more socialism than less socialism.

Farooq Tariq

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<http://www.viewpointonline.net/site/component/content/article/38-bottomnews/3507-nepal-elections-defeat-for-maoists-victory-for-united-left.html>

* Farooq Tariq is General Secretary of Awami Workers Party Pakistan. Email: farooqtariq@hotmail.com