

Young People, Politics and Elections

Reflection on their perceptions and expectations

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Nepal Institute for Policy Research (NIPoRe)



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February 2024

Contents

List of Figures and Tables	I
Executive Summary	II
Introduction	1
Political Awareness and Activity	4
Perception of Youth on Politics	9
Youth's Expectations	15
Conclusion and Recommendations	17
References	18

List of Figures

Figure 1: Youth Population in Comparison to Population Growth Rate 1991- 2021	1
Figure 2: Active-Aware Matrix	4
Figure 3: Voting Percentage of Young People across Provinces	5
Figure 4: Provincial Breakdown on Impact of Political Campaign/ Rally/ Public/ Direct Interaction for Voting	6
Figure 5: Level of Political Activeness Among Young People	7
Figure 6: Gender and Ethnicity Breakdown of Nepal's Direction of Politics	8
Figure 7: Province-wise Breakdown of Young People's Views on Political Parties and Leaders Represent Expectations of Public	9
Figure 8: Province-wise Breakdown of Youth Perceptions of New and Fresh Candidates	10
Figure 9: Gender and Ethnicity Breakdown of Young People's Views on Voting for New and Fresh Candidates	11
Figure 10: Gender and Ethnicity Breakdown on Young People's Views on Representation of Women and Marginalized People During Election	11
Figure 11: Province-wise Breakdown on Young People's Views on Importance of Campaign Finance	13
Figure 12: Voting Pattern of Nepali Young People	16

List of Tables

Table 1: Demographic Summary of Survey Participants	2
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Executive Summary

Nepal's young voters account for more than half of the country's total eligible voters (The Kathmandu Post, 2017). Contemporary young voters are more educated and have greater access to information related to elections and policymaking compared to those in the past. To consolidate Nepal's democracy against the backdrop of increasing youth political awareness and their participation in the elections, it is important for political actors to understand their voices and aspirations. To understand how young Nepali voters feel about the country's election mechanism, political parties and politicians, therefore, is crucial. This research project, which was carried out when the country was going towards the 2022 federal elections, aims at assessing the perspectives of Nepali youths about politics, the political parties, and the federal elections. With a nationally representative stratified random sample size of 1,080 youths, the study has been undertaken to help key election and policy stakeholders in the country to better understand young people's impressions of and expectations from the elections, political parties, and the political leaders.

Some of the major findings from this research study include:

1. Infrastructures, economic prosperity, education, health and good governance are the top five preferred areas (in order of importance) that Nepal's young voters want the country's political parties to work on now and in the future.
2. Politically active youth population does not necessarily translate into active voting. In terms of political activeness and active voting, the participation shares vary across the provinces. For example, youths from Madhesh have the highest level of political activeness among the seven provinces, while in terms of active-voting, they rank third after Karnali and Gandaki.
3. Youths from socially and economically disadvantaged provinces (Karnali and Madhesh) tend to remain more politically active compared to those from provinces with better social and economic conditions.
4. Geographical hindrances such as remoteness and rough topography are not decisive while it is about the participation of young people in politics.
5. Of the total respondents who did not vote during the recently concluded local elections (28 per cent of the sample size), 60 per cent of them could not vote due to the lack of voter cards.
6. Almost two-thirds of the respondents stated that Nepal's current political developments are not moving in the right direction. 83 per cent of the respondents believe that the political parties/leaders are concerned about their own petty interests. Three in four young people said they would vote for a new and young candidate even if candidate might not win the elections.

Introduction

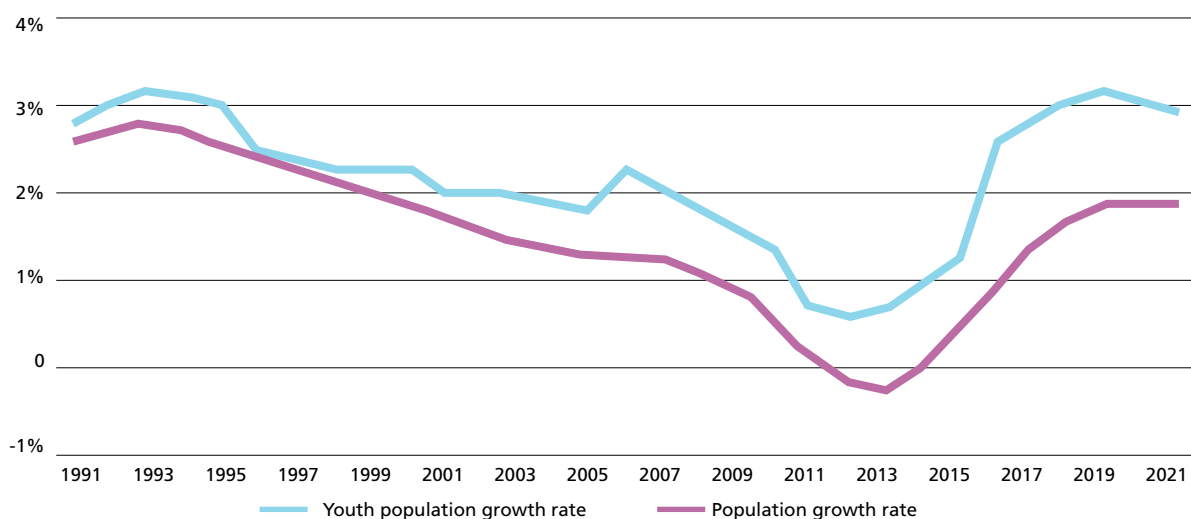
The local and federal elections of 2017 were the first elections for all three levels (federal, provincial and local) conducted in Nepal after the country was declared a federal republic state. The elections saw a large voter turnout, given the excitement and hope that the citizens shared. The voter turnout for the local elections was 74.16 per cent, and the voter turnout for the first and second phases of the provincial and federal elections were 65 and 69.58 per cent respectively (The Kathmandu Post, 2017). However, in the local elections held in 2022, only a 64 per cent preliminary voter turnout was recorded (Khabarhub, 2022).

Young people accounted for 40.3 per cent of Nepal's population according to the 2011 census. The youth population of Nepal in 2021 is estimated to reach almost 12 million¹ out of a total population of 29 million (United Nations Population Fund, 2018). The following graph shows the growth rate of the youth population as compared to the overall population:

The awareness, behaviour, and perception of youth about politics could be distinct from the rest of the population. Young people have contributed to and been at the forefront of various socio-political transitions in the country, whether it was the struggle against the Rana regime in the 1950s or the pro-democracy movement in 2006. However, their representation in formal politics has not been very encouraging. As the age group that makes up more than half of the voter population, it is important to understand the expectations of youth.

In Nepal, the population of young voters² accounts for more than half of the eligible voter population. In 2017, for example, 8,071,369 voters in Nepal were between 18 to 40 years old (Shrestha, 2017). This was 52 per cent of the total registered voters for the federal and provincial elections of 2017. Moreover, young people today have greater access to information than their earlier generations. Hence, it is likely that the priorities, agendas, and expectations of the younger population differ from the general population.

Figure 1: Youth population growth rate in comparison to population growth rate 1991–2021



Source: World Bank, 2022

¹ Age-wise population data as per the Nepal Census 2021 was not available at the time of writing.

² According to Nepal's National Youth Policy 2015, the people aged 16-40 years are young people, while the youths that can vote are 18-40-year-olds. See https://www.moys.gov.np/sites/default/files/nitiheru/National%20Youth%20Policy%202072_2.pdf

Table 1: Demographic summary of survey participants

	Province	N	%	Total
Province	Province 1	195	18.1	1080
	Madhesh	204	18.9	
	Bagmati	212	19.6	
	Gandaki	69	6.4	
	Lumbini	215	19.9	
	Karnali	72	6.7	
	Sudurpaschim	113	10.5	
Residence	Rural municipality	270	25.0	1080
	Urban municipalities	706	65.4	
	Sub/Metropolitan city	104	9.6	
Age group	18–24 years	283	26.2	1080
	25–30 years	302	28.0	
	31–35 years	260	24.1	
	36–40 years	235	21.8	
Gender	Female	519	48.1	1080
	Male	561	51.9	

According to the data from other countries, one in four youths in the countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported not being interested in politics. Among these countries, youths in the Republic of Chile, the Czech Republic, and Hungary showed a high level of lack of interest in politics (OECD, 2019). In contrast, the United States of America saw an increase in youth voter turnout for the 2020 general election, showing an 11 per cent increase from the 2016 election (McAndrew and Smyton, 2021). In the context that the age-wise breakdown for voter turnout for elections in Nepal is not available, this research helps us gauge the sentiment young people hold about the Nepali political landscape. This study captures how young people in Nepal view the Nepali political scenario and explore their perceptions regarding the federal elections.³ The study reflects on the expectations of young people from politicians and political parties, and aims to help political actors engage with youths more in their political processes. In particular, the objectives of this research study are:

- To map the overall understanding of Nepali youths about politics

- To identify the key factors influencing the active involvement of Nepali youths in politics
- To identify the key issues that the Nepali youths want the existing political parties and the candidates to address
- To identify the factors contributing to the voting patterns of Nepali youths

Research approach and methodology

The study uses a mixed methods approach. It combines surveys and focus group discussions (FGDs). Surveys were used to explore the attitudes and expectations of the respondents and is combined with the FGDs to explain and triangulate the data. As the research aims to find national attitude and expectations of youths regarding politics it uses a nationally representative sample.

For the study, the youth population (16–40) is 12 million (United Nations Populations Fund, 2018). At a 95 per cent confidence interval and a three per cent margin of error, the sample size required is 1068. The study uses a strategic random sampling, ensuring representation

³ The investigation was undertaken between September and November 2022. The telephone survey was conducted from 9 to 19 October 2022. Likewise, the FGD1 and FGD2 were done on 23 September and 14 October 2022 concurrently.

based on gender, provinces and age groups within the population universe. The demographic constitution of the respondents is as follows:

- The sample ensures youth participation from 74 districts (out of 77) and 319 local units (out of 753). The survey drew upon the national database of Sharecast Initiative Nepal and conducted a telephone survey in partnership with Sharecast Initiative Nepal. The telephone survey was conducted from 9 October to 19 October 2022.
- To complement the quantitative data analysis from the survey, two FGDs were conducted. The first FGD was conducted in Janakpur (Rural/Urban) on 23 September 2022. The second FGD was conducted in Kathmandu (Urban) on 14 October 2022. The FGD in Janakpur included participants from marginalised communities, whereas the one in Kathmandu represented economically privileged participants.
- The survey provided quantitative answers to youth's perceptions and attitudes, whereas the FGD provided qualitative answers and explained the reasons behind the findings in the survey. The triangulation of data from the two methods ensures the reliability of the data and results. However, the study had some methodological limitations which are listed as follows:
 - The survey was conducted at a 95 per cent confidence interval with a three per cent margin of error. While the overall result represents the findings at the above level, the findings at the sub-strata level do not necessarily reflect youth perception from the community.
 - The survey was done over the phone and prevented researchers from observing the respondents' environments and physical cues.
 - Around two million Nepalis live abroad, primarily for work and education. They predominantly belong to the target group of this research and represent one-fifth of the youth population. Yet, the study did not include them because it was conducted only with respondents living in Nepal.
 - The youth population is generally between 16–40 years old. However, this research included only those between 18–40 years to account for voting eligibility.

Political Awareness and Activity

This section covers the findings about political awareness amongst young people in Nepal and includes analysis of their news consumption and political interactions. It is followed by findings about political activeness which is further divided into voting, political participation, and social activism.

Political Awareness

The political awareness of young people depends on the level of their access to information and their understanding of the political context of the country. Their political participation and behaviour are influenced by social, political, and economic understanding of events and policies at national and local levels. Political awareness among youths comes from their consumption of political news and interaction with people around them. This is reflected in their participation in the political process.

Figure 2: Active-Aware Matrix

Source: NIPoRe Telephone Survey, 2022

	Active	Inactive
Aware	16.08%	29.94%
Unaware	3.74%	50.25%

Youth participants in the study were asked to self-identify and report their political awareness. As per their own analysis, as shown in Figure 2, almost half of the youths self-identified as politically aware. However, a large discrepancy in political awareness is seen when responses are analysed in terms of the respondents' gender and region. For instance, 61 per cent of male respondents identified themselves as politically aware in comparison to 28 per cent of females. Likewise, the rate of youths identifying as self-aware in Karnali Province was more than twice the rate of those in Bagmati and Lumbini provinces.

The survey results point out that females are still limited within households and have significantly less membership in party or non-political social groups where they can interact (see section on Political Participation for details). Their social and political participation still isn't encouraged adequately. They have limited access

to the daily political updates in the news and other political platforms where contemporary politics and social issues debated. The fact that Nepali society is still grounded in patriarchal notions contributes to further restrict women's access to politics and political contexts. In FGD 1, participants highlighted that young women had to face various challenges to be involved in the political and community activities even though they had interest and capacity to contribute. Restricting the particular group of people from their access to politics for long can have grave repercussions. One of the participants precisely said,

"The day females realize that their political rights are being violated, that day women will become rebellious."

This study demonstrates that less than half of the youths (four out of ten respondents) followed political news regularly (at least weekly). Two times more males read or listened to the news regularly than females. More youths read the news regularly as they age. Facebook, online news portals, and television rounded off the top three news sources. Additionally, eight in ten youths of the 18–24 age group followed news via Facebook. Among the youths, especially in Kathmandu Valley, the Facebook page called the Routine of Nepal Banda seemed to be the primary source. However, the traditional media (TV, Radio, and FM) still have a strong presence. TV was more prevalent in Gandaki Province, and radio/FM in Karnali Province.

Most respondents discussed politics with their family and friends, though one-third did not discuss it with anyone. Female respondents discussed it more with family than friends (41–27 per cent), whereas males discussed it more with friends (54–28 per cent). What can be inferred from these findings is that the medium through which youths of Nepal receive political news spans from social media to traditional media. Traditional sources still prevail in the regions where youths do not have access to social media due to limited internet facility. Moreover, females still are not as updated with the news as males due to the lack of encouragement and the constraints of household work⁴. Because many females are still limited within households⁵, their closest

⁴ Based on the discussions during the FGD.

⁵ Based on the discussions during the FGD.

access to the discussion is their family. However, males tend to have access to other social groups, which allow them to have discussions beyond their families. The FGDs pointed out that while young men still have some ways to boost their political awareness, still, there aren't enough avenues in Nepal where young people can collectively discuss political happenings.

Political Activeness

Political activity can come in various forms, including participation and activism. It is determined by whether they cast a vote, have affiliation with a political party, participate in political activities, or have membership in a non-political club or association.

Voting

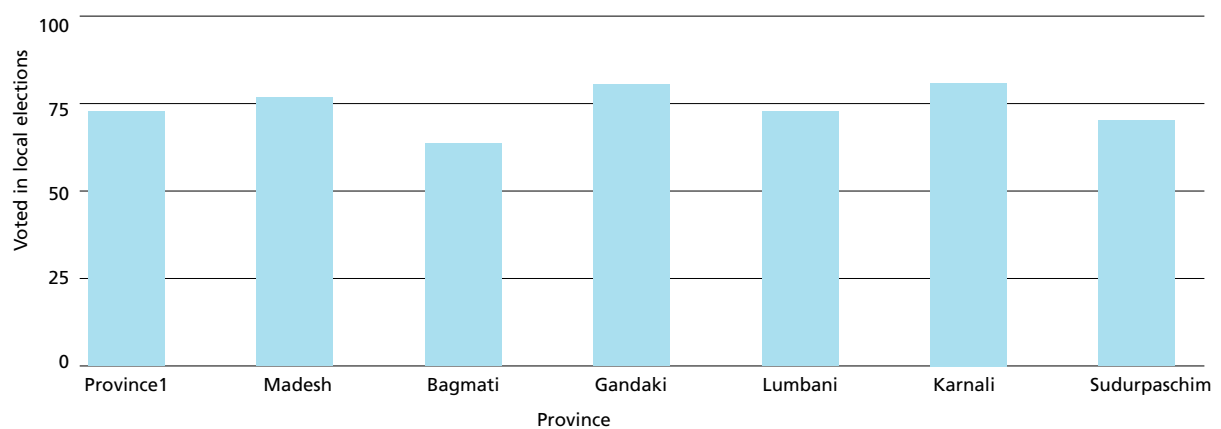
Our survey results showed that 72 per cent of youths voted in the local elections held in May 2022. This is in line with overall voter participation (64 per cent). As per our survey, the voting rate of youths was the highest in Karnali and the lowest in Bagmati Province (as shown in Figure 3). Voting rate also increased with age. More than half of 18–24-year-olds did not vote in the last local election, but nine in ten from the 26–40 years of age did. Similarly, males voted in a larger proportion (76 per cent) than females (67 per cent) in the 2022 local elections.

The fact that only about a fifth of the young people self-identified themselves as active in politics whereas

seven out of 10 voted in the elections suggests that Nepali youths take their voting responsibility seriously though they may not necessarily be active in politics. Their realisation of voting as a responsibility increases as they age. The most concerning issue here is the low voter rate of females. As per the National Census 2021, the gender ratio of Nepal is 95 men per 100 women. Also, a large proportion of male youths live abroad for work. Thus, the political future of Nepal largely rests on females, but their low participation in voting leaves behind their opinion and expectations. One of the participants in the FGD pointed out how youth migrant workers who contribute to the economy of the country do not have a say in the political process of the country as they do not get a chance to cast their votes from abroad.

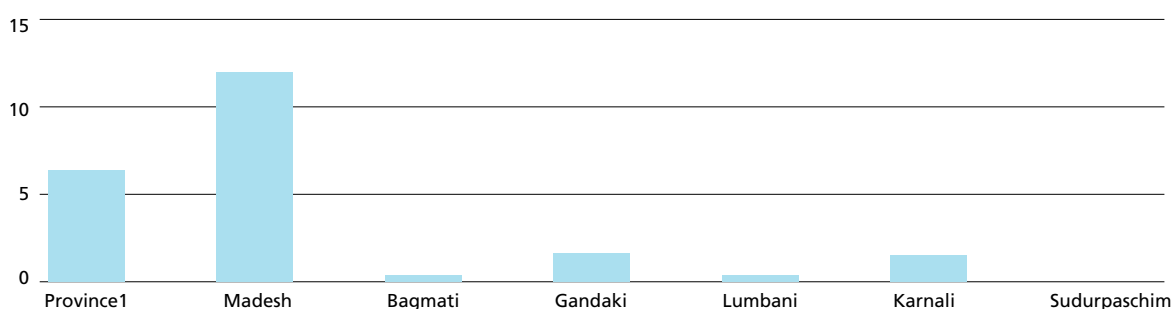
This study demonstrates that the young people in Nepal voted for candidates based on their track record and leadership qualities. Almost two-thirds of youths voted for candidates based on their attributes. Youths in FGD mentioned that they looked at the candidates' contribution to Nepal's political change, their political track record, their behaviour and oratory skills. The influence of family and friends was also a strong factor affecting the vote of one in ten youths. Similarly, candidates' campaigns, rallies, and interactions with the public were significant, especially in Madhesh Province, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Voting Per cent of Young People across Provinces



Source: NIPoRe Telephone Survey, 2022

Figure 4: Provincial breakdown on impact of political campaign/ rally/ public/ direct interaction for voting



Source: NIPoRe Telephone Survey, 2022

Though the social media penetration is high, a candidate's social media post was not a factor for young voters in deciding whom to vote for (NIPoRe Telephone Survey, 2022). It indicates that social media can be a source of awareness, but voters prefer more direct interaction with candidates than via social media. Such in-person interactions and activities seem to be high in Madhesh. This is also the province where the highest percentage of youths have self-identified as active. Hence, we can conclude that active youths play a vital role during elections and related activities and will follow political updates closely. Influence from friends and family ranks as the second reason that determines the vote of youths in Nepal.

The lack of voter registration was the primary reason among those who did not vote.⁶ Participants in FGD highlighted that youths lacked enthusiasm in the mainstream political parties which in large has also demotivated them from having any political engagement. 15 per cent of youths said they were not in their hometown, where they were registered to vote. The voter registration problem declined with age, but it is still concerning that a large number of Nepali youths have not registered to vote or have voter ID.

Political Participation

One of the main ways for people to be politically active is through a direct affiliation with the political parties. However, only 13 per cent of the respondents were current political party members, whereas 86 per cent of youths were not even interested to be a political party member. Among the politically active youths, two-thirds

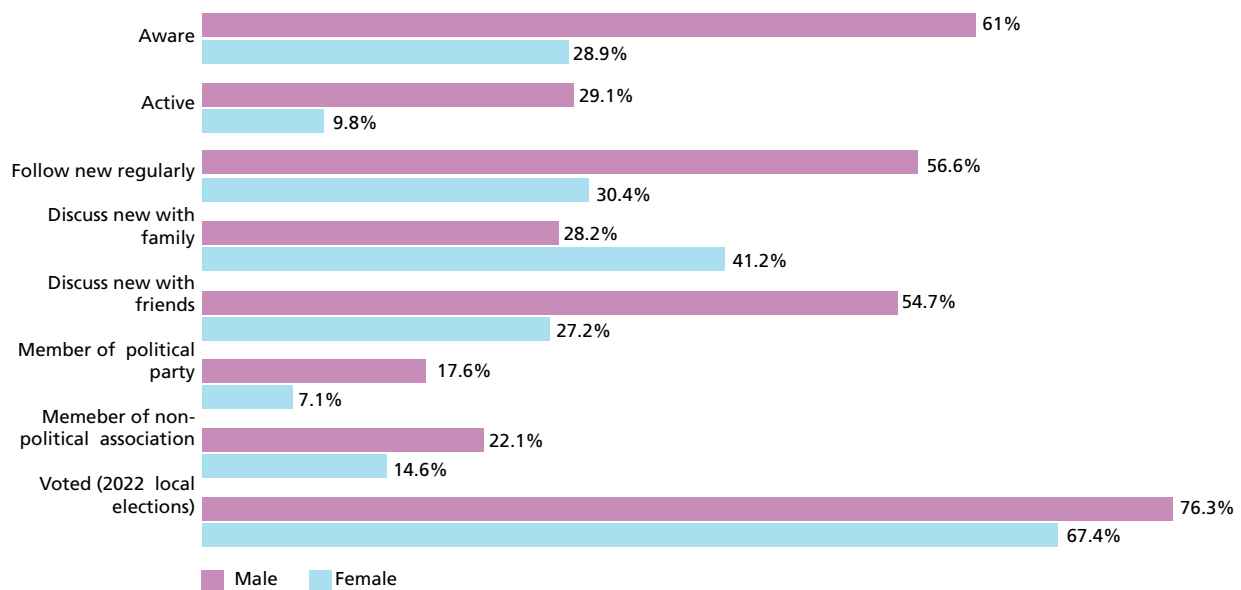
participated in a door-to-door campaign for political parties, while one-third also followed political debates and read election manifestos. Males are politically more engaged than females. Seventeen per cent of males are political party members, compared to seven per cent of females (as shown in Figure 5).

Nepali youths seem to lack the motivation to be involved in partisan politics. Political parties and related institutions need a lot of efforts to get youths interested in politics. Their involvement is crucial in helping Nepal shape policies as per their needs and changing contexts. Additionally, the data shows that males still occupy more public spaces than females when it comes to political participation. The low participation of females in the political arena reflects that Nepali society still is guided by patriarchal values.

According to the matrix (Figure 2), 16.08 per cent of youths are both aware about and active in political activities. They are potential future leaders. On the other hand, half the youth (50.25 per cent, Figure 2) are neither interested in political matters nor participate in political activities, which is a big concern for the future of Nepali politics. According to the FGDs, many youths do not care because they want to go abroad and are unbothered by developments in Nepal and uninterested in changing them. The government and the political parties have a big challenge to move half the youth population from the being unaware and inactive to being aware and active in the Active-Aware Matrix (Figure 2).

⁶ According to the survey, 60 per cent of the young people of voting age could not vote because they were not registered in the voters' list.

Figure 5: Level of political activeness among young people



Source: NIPoRe Telephone Survey, 2022

Social Activism

Generally, Nepali youths consider themselves as socially active. However, when it comes to political activeness, youths in the FGDs stressed that they consider themselves politically active only when they are active members of a political party or actively following political developments. A quarter of Nepali youths is politically active, as per their self-assessment. This is lower than the number of youths who said they voted in the last local elections in May 2022. As discussed earlier, youths considered voting their responsibility but it is not necessarily a reflection of their political activeness. This shows that youths believe they are politically active only if they are active members of a political party, volunteer for political causes or actively follow and discuss political development.

Compared to the youths in other provinces, youths in Madhesh Province were more active. Almost every two out of five youths identified themselves as politically active in Madhesh. Similarly, ethnic communities other than BCN (Bahun, Chetri, and Newari) were politically more active. Only 14 per cent of BCN youths were active, while it is almost double for other caste/ethnic groups. Also, 0.9 per cent of BCN youths said that the caste/ethnic identity of the candidate mattered while casting their vote, while it was 4.3 per cent of youths from other castes/ethnic groups.

The study suggests that Madhesh, the region considered to have been ignored by the State for long, looks to have woken up, with the young people

taking politics seriously and raising the issues faced by Madhesh assertively. Likewise, this study demonstrates that youths from disadvantaged groups are generally more politically active than advantaged ones. Their experiences of being pushed to the margins and having low representation in the policy-making space have encouraged them to be more politically active and demand space. In the Janakpur FGD, one of the female participants, for instance, shared the reason behind her decision of being active in politics by stating that females in their community have always been denied the access to political participation and lacked representation.

One in five respondents were a member of a non-political club or association. Among the members, one-third were members of the youth club and women's organizations (e.g., *Ama Samuha*). One in six females were members of such associations, but two-thirds were engaged only in women's clubs. Interestingly, no female respondent from Madhesh Province was a member of such a women's group. Adding on, half the members discussed politics being apolitical. Likewise, around a fifth of the youths were engaged in community activities. One in six youths volunteered for a political party (mainly because they are members), and six per cent volunteered for a non-political organisation. Almost half of the volunteers saw it as their effort to change society. Others volunteered because their family or friends were candidates in the election. More than

half of the youths did not volunteer because of a lack of interest in politics, but one in six youths did not know how to be involved in the community. As discovered in the FGD, lack of time, intention to migrate abroad, and apathy towards politics because of prevalent corruption were other reasons.

The non-political associations provide space for youths to discuss politics though the participation in such associations is not massive. It can be said that youth clubs are primarily male-dominated. Female youths are still limited to only women's clubs, while those in Madhesh Province don't even have access to those. This points out the need to focus on the specific province to create spaces where female youths come together and have political discussions. Further, youths are likely to remain politically active if someone they know is directly engaged in politics.

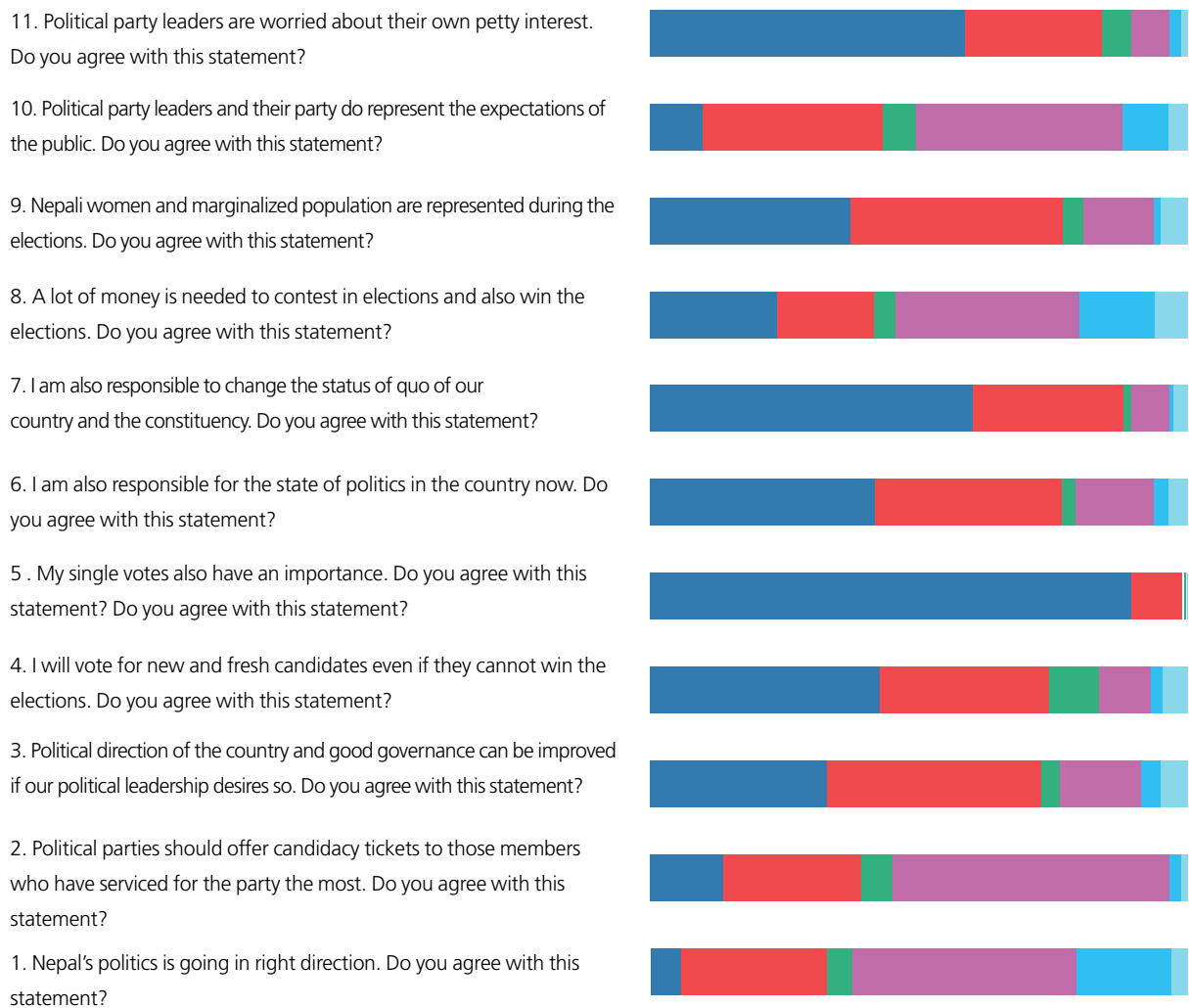
It is high time that youths are encouraged to remain active to make Nepal's democracy more vibrant and inclusive. The findings also indicate that there is a need to guide youths on how to become politically active and move beyond the understanding of politics as a dirty game. Youths in FGDs suggested that there is a need of organising discussion events on politics in places such as educational institutions where youths are present so that they could be encouraged to be politically active.

Youths' Perceptions of Politics

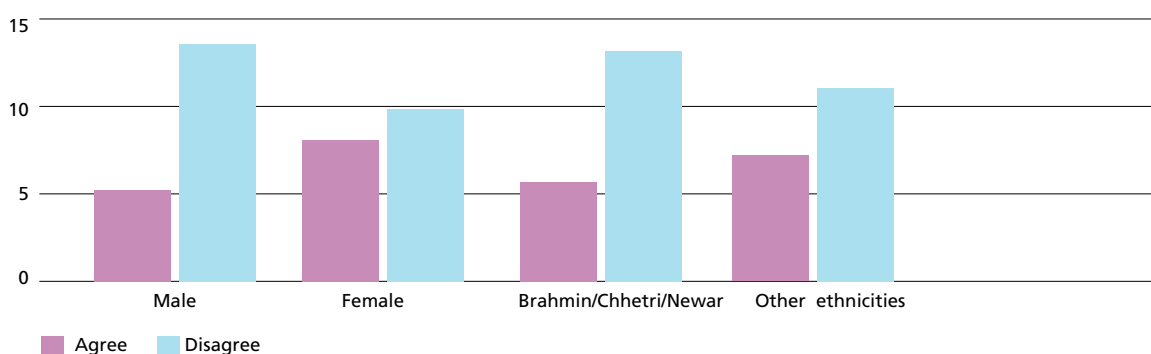
In this section, we analyze the young people's perceptions of the political situation of the country. We asked the youth participants about their perceptions of

current candidates, new candidates, and the electoral process. The table below shows the youths' perceptions of various political issues in Nepal.

Nepali youth perception of politics



■ Fully agree
 ■ Partially agree
 ■ Indifferent
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Fully disagree
 ■ Don't know

Figure 6: Gender and ethnicity breakdown of youths' perceptions of direction of Nepali politics

Source: NIPoRe Telephone Survey 2022

Perceptions about contemporary leadership

Overall, only three in ten youths believed that the country was going in the right direction, whereas twice the number thought it was going in the wrong direction. Further breakdown of the data shows that young men are more likely to have a negative view of the country's direction (67 per cent) than women (50 per cent). Young people from the BCN ethnic group were also more likely to have a negative view of the country's direction than young people from other ethnic groups (as shown in Figure 6). A possible reason for this could be the improvement women and young people from marginalized ethnic groups have seen in recent years in terms of increasing representation, right to equality and access to justice which makes them feel optimistic. The introduction of a quota system in educational and employment opportunities might have created a positive effect on young women and people from marginalised communities.

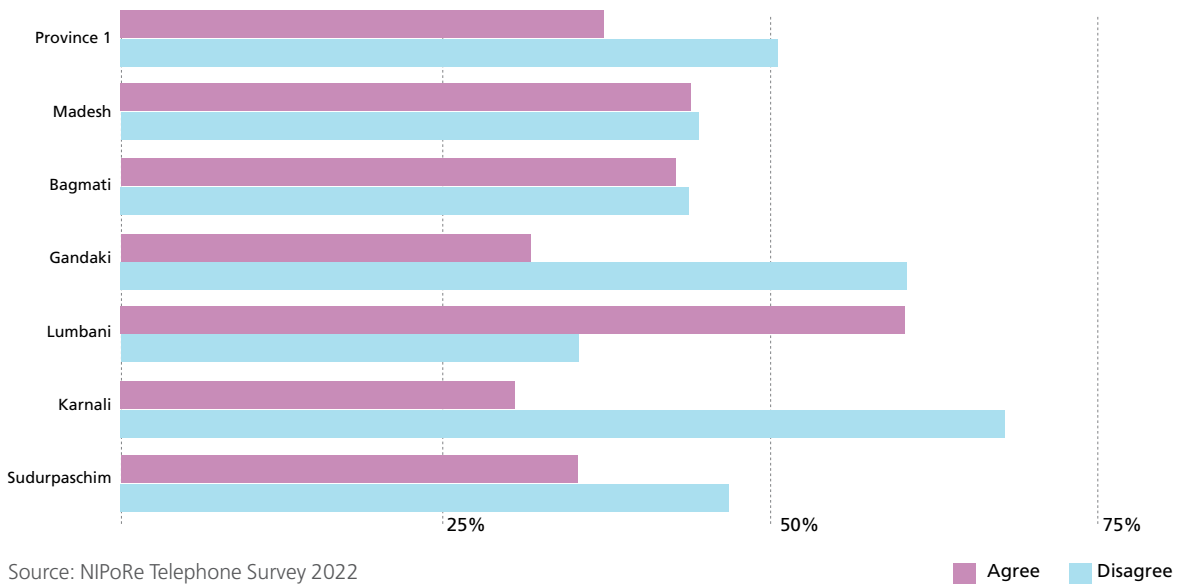
Eighty-three per cent of the respondents believed that the political parties/leaders were concerned about their own petty interests, which could be a possible reason why youths think that the country is not going in the right direction. Additionally, most respondents in Madhesh (91 per cent), Gandaki (96 per cent) and Karnali (97 per cent) were disappointed with the current political leadership. Relatively fewer people from Sudurpaschim Province (69 per cent) partially or fully agree with the statement, which suggests that the political leadership has delivered to some extent in the province.

Youths are divided over the question whether the political parties and leaders represented the grassroots' concerns. Forty-two per cent agreed that the political parties/leaders represented their concerns, whereas 46 per cent disagreed. In a similar way, youths are divided on whether the political parties should offer candidacy to cadres depending on the length of their service to the party. Further breakdown of the data shows that Karnali Province residents were frustrated the most (seven in ten youths) with the political parties and leaders (as shown in Figure 7). More than half of the youths in Gandaki Province and Province 1 also felt that their leaders did not represent their concerns. In contrast, young people from Lumbini Province were found happy with the political parties, with six in ten youths agreeing that the parties/leaders represented their concerns.

This wide array of perspective can probably be attributed to how the political parties address the concerns of young people. The youths in Karnali and Gandaki Provinces are the ones most dissatisfied with the current leadership because their local and provincial leaders have failed to address grassroots concerns.⁷ The voting rate of youths of these two provinces is also the highest, indicating that they are trying to change the political direction through voting. However, not all hope is lost on the current (old) generation of leaders. Seven in ten youths agree that the current leadership can improve the direction of the country and deliver good governance if the leadership desires to. Therefore, the

⁷ Based on the findings of FGD.

Figure 7: Province-wise breakdown of young people’s views on political parties and leaders



Source: NIPoRe Telephone Survey 2022

perception of the youths is that the current leadership does not lack the ability to deliver change and good governance but does lack the interest to do so.

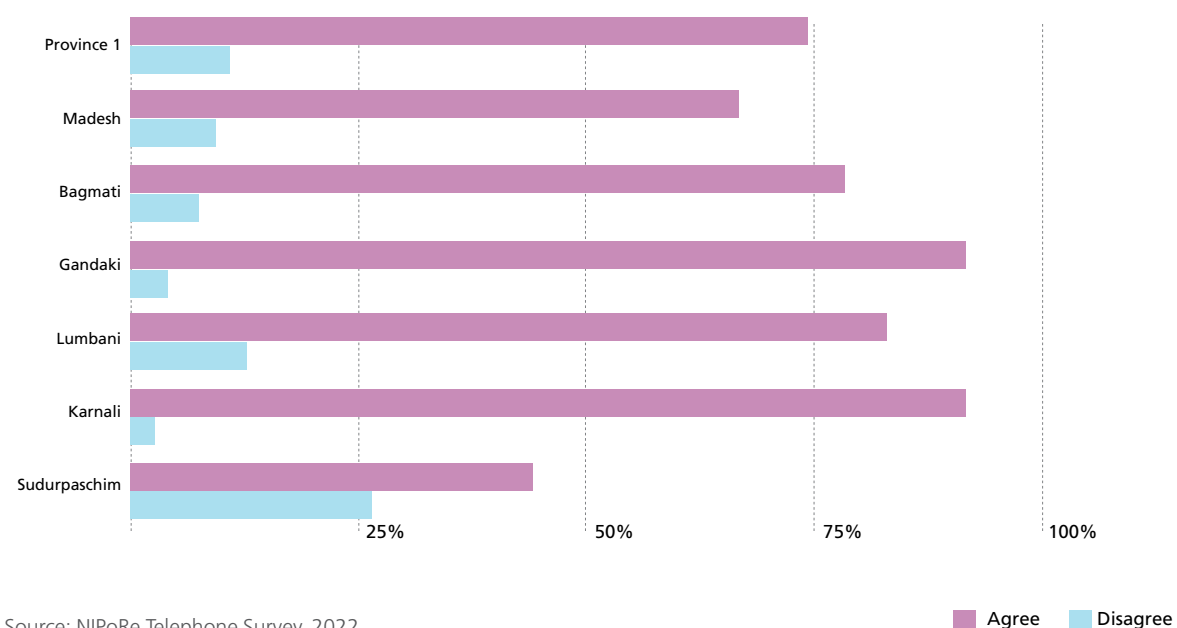
Perceptions about new candidates

Also, despite the relatively difficult scenario, youths are optimistic about the power of their votes. Virtually, every youth believes that their vote can make a difference. In this context, the voting rate of youth is likely a result of logistical difficulties (NIPoRe Telephone Survey, 2022).

Hence, if the voting process is simplified (for instance, postal voting), this could result in significantly high participation from the youth.

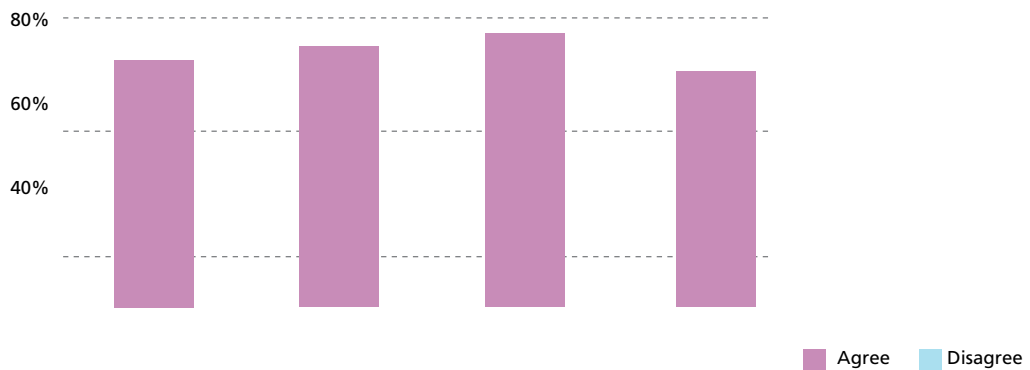
With belief in their votes, and frustration at older leaders, three in four respondents said they would vote for a new and young candidate, even if they felt that the candidate might not win the elections. The support for new candidates was even higher in provinces where frustration with the current leadership was high and where young people thought that the contemporary

Figure 8: Province-wise breakdown of youth perceptions of new and fresh candidates



Source: NIPoRe Telephone Survey, 2022

Figure 9: Gender and ethnicity breakdown of young people’s views on voting for new and fresh candidates



Source: NIPoRe Telephone Survey, 2022

leaders were concerned only about their own petty interests (as shown in Figure 8). In Gandaki and Karnali provinces, a whopping nine in ten youth voters were willing to give fresh candidates a chance. In contrast, only 44 per cent of youths from Sudurpaschim Province agreed that they would go with new candidates.

This tendency to choose new faces in candidacy shows strong apathy of youths towards established politicians and a strong desire to push change. The increased trust in new and younger candidates has been reflected in the local elections, as more youths have won seats at their local levels, especially in urban areas. The result from Sudurpaschim, however, suggests that young people in the province still trust the established political leaders, instead of going for the new ones. Also, despite more than 60 per cent of young people from Lumbini Province agreed that the current parties/

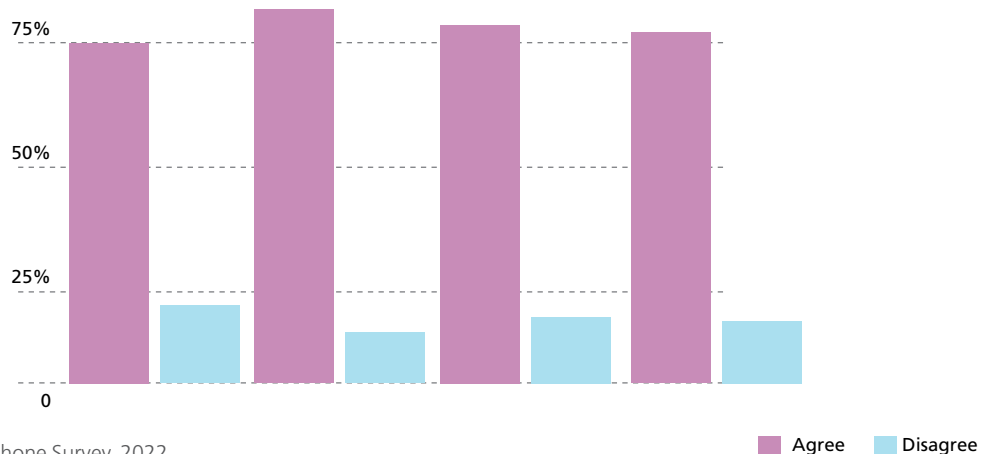
leaders represent their concerns, 80 per cent of youths would still vote for new candidates.

Interestingly, more young people from BCN communities in comparison to young people from non-BCN communities said that they would vote for new candidates even if they thought that they would not win the elections (as shown in Figure 9). This is probably because older political leaders from non-BCN ethnic communities have not yet been part of the government system or appointed to higher political positions, and hence, are still considered new faces.

Perceptions about electoral process

Youths overwhelmingly (78 per cent of the ones surveyed) agreed that women and marginalized communities are represented in elections. From the below graph, we can see that 80 per cent of women

Figure 10: Gender and ethnicity breakdown of young people’s views on the representation of women and marginalized people during the election



Source: NIPoRe Telephone Survey, 2022

and 75 per cent of youths from non-BCN ethnic groups agree that women and marginalized communities are represented in the elections (as shown in Figure 10).

The constitutional reforms of 2015 regarding proportional representation have made a positive impression on the minds of youth. After the implementation of the federal system, more women and marginalized communities have entered the parliament.

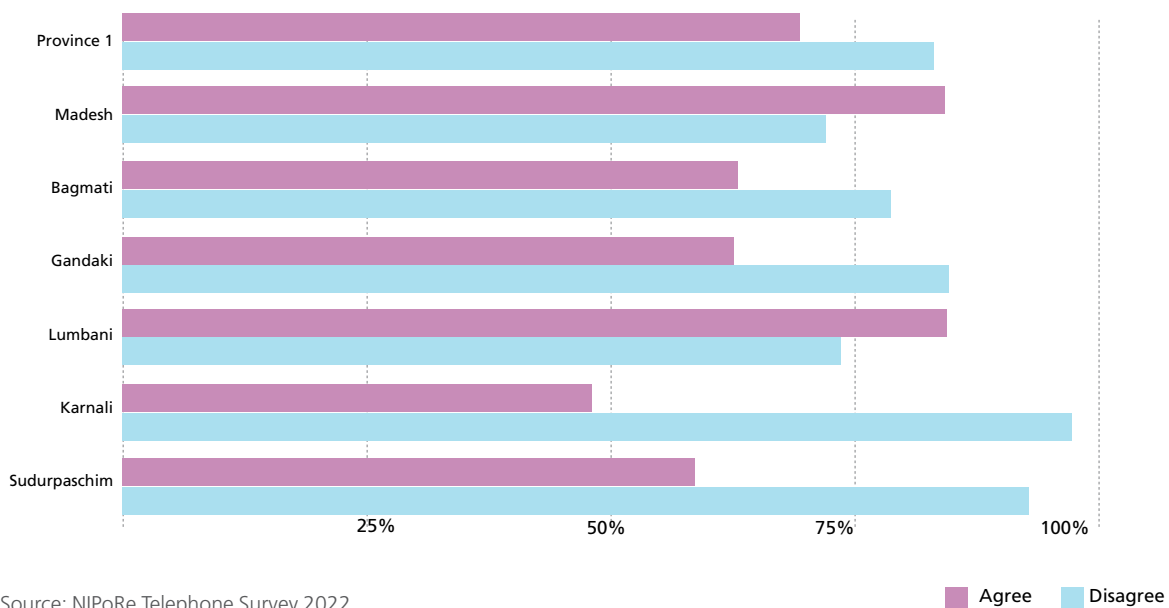
In addition, the survey shows cautious optimism around the issue of campaign finance (see Figure 11). Forty-eight per cent of young people thought that the amount spent on elections by the candidates is not the key determinant of election outcome, while 42 per cent of them thought that campaign finance plays a major role in it. However, the province-wise breakdown of the

data demonstrates that more than half of the youths in Madhesh Province and Lumbini Province believed that money played a significant role.

The FGD respondents from Madhesh Province mentioned that campaign finance was a major barrier for younger candidates and the candidates from marginalised groups. Furthermore, most respondents from Karnali and Sudurpaschim disagreed that a lot of money is needed for the candidates to contest and win the elections.

Overall, the results of the survey show that though the younger people are disillusioned with the current political landscape, they are hopeful about the positive change in the politics.

Figure 11: Province-wise breakdown of young people’s view on the importance of campaign finance



Source: NIPoRe Telephone Survey 2022

Agree Disagree

Youth's Expectations

Issues and agendas

By examining their preferred agendas and concerns, we can better grasp what young people want from their political candidates, political parties, and the government. From the survey and FGDs, five issues and agendas that young people prioritise and expect the political parties to emphasise are infrastructure development, economic prosperity and jobs, education, health, and good governance.⁸ Meanwhile, governance and corruption seem to be more prominent issues in Madhesh Province compared to other provinces (as shown in Figure 12). Moreover, men were more concerned than women about good governance (25.7 per cent vs 11 per cent). Similarly, good governance was more important for ethnic groups other than the BCN (24 per cent to 11 per cent).

Based on the priority of the agenda, there is no significant difference in the mainstream agendas/issues and those that younger generations prioritize. Youths' preferences for issues are mostly the same as those of the general public. Most young people in the survey and FGDs believed that if the country had adequate infrastructure, economic progress, proper educational institutions, and adequate health care, it would eventually experience much-needed growth.

The possible reason why youths in Madhesh Province prioritised good governance could be the high corruption rate in the province. Most participants in the FGD in Madhesh complained about parties picking candidates who could spend more on the elections because they thought this would lead to increased corruption as candidates strive to recoup their election expenses. They urged political parties and the Election Commission to conduct property inspections of candidates to discourage them from accepting illicit funds for spending on elections. Youths in Kathmandu FGD, too, stated that financially strong candidates would be preferable because they would be less beholden to special interest groups or corruption.

Similarly, young males were more concerned about good governance because they were the ones who often visited government offices, dealt with bureaucracy, and often endured the brunt of corruption and bad governance. Good governance was a lesser concern

for BCN because they already have better access to or were a part of the bureaucracy.

Adding on, candidates took precedence over the agenda in Sudurpaschim Province. One in five respondents did not care about the agenda at all there. Youths expected the government to create more job opportunities but were not clear how it could do so (FGD1, FGD2). Moreover, very few respondents thought agriculture had to be prioritised.

Also, contrary to the popular belief, youths did not prioritise any change in the current political system. When asked their thoughts on federalism, most participants in both FGDs agreed that the system has ushered in fresh perspectives with new leaders. This, they said, had also improved the way of working of the government across most fields. Only a few said federalism was expensive and suggested the government needed to find ways to deduct unnecessary expenses.

Expectations from political parties

Youth representation in politics is low. Only five per cent of the Nepali youths are represented in the 2017 federal parliament, while the global average is 13.5 per cent (Chaulagain, 2022). The reluctance of the political party leaders to pass leadership posts to the young generation is one of the primary reasons for youths' underrepresentation in mainstream politics. Given the reality on the ground, we asked respondents what political parties should do to enhance youth involvement in politics.

Almost half of those surveyed said political parties should listen to youths' concerns and represent their views. But their views were not entirely different than that of the mainstream political parties. So, when youths speak of a 'youth agenda', they are basically seeking the implementation of the agenda such as good governance. Respondents who used to be members of a political party were dissatisfied that their issues were not heard during the internal party meetings. In contrast, potential new members said they would join the party if they could have a say in crucial party decisions. Hence, respondents suggested that political parties modify their internal policies to include more voices of youths.

⁸ Based on the survey findings and FGDs.

Young people also suggested that political parties use social media strategically to reach out to young people. For example, seven out of 20 respondents said that political parties should be more active on social media, especially on Facebook. Likewise, a significant number of youths (9.7 per cent) said they voted in the last local election in 2022 because they had easy access to online election-related information and candidates' profiles on social media. On the other hand, only 2.3 per cent believed better political debates would lead to more youth engagement and added that a town hall-type debate would be more productive.

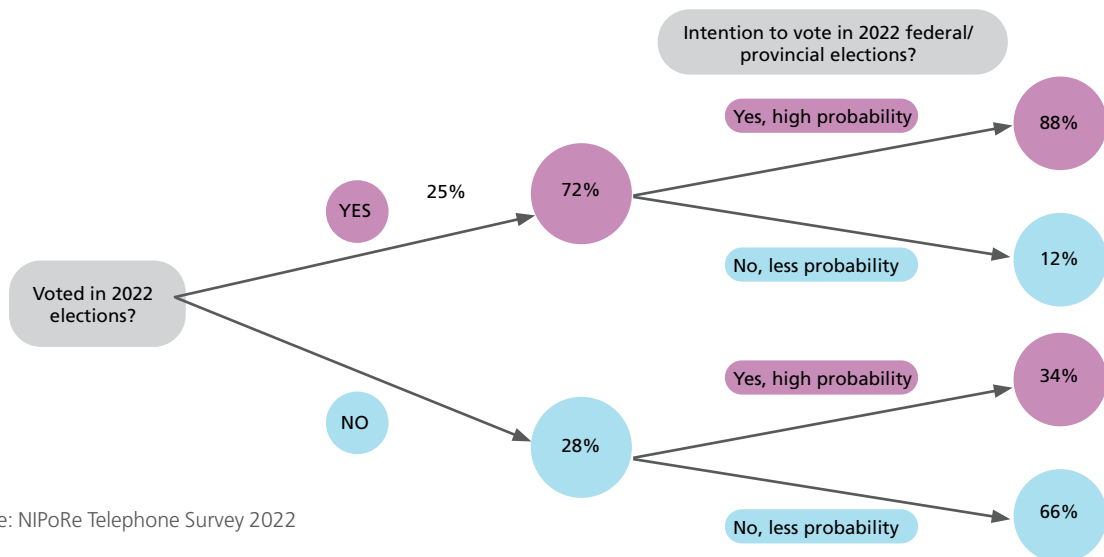
Furthermore, two-fifths of the youths polled (40.6 per cent) suggested that political parties favour candidates with skills and education over those who had contributed more to the party. Nearly as many disagreed when asked whether they agreed with political parties' offering candidacies to members who had served the party the longest. On the contrary, a sizable proportion (39.2 per cent) agreed that long-serving party members should be granted candidacy. Furthermore, nearly half of the youths surveyed wanted political parties to choose suitable candidates with solid profiles, and five out of ten youths expected political parties to choose candidates with ideological clarity. Also, youths are unlikely to vote based on the ethnicity or gender of the candidates. For example, only four per cent of youths from non-BCN ethnicities said they would consider a candidate's ethnicity while casting their votes. Hence, the demographic divide seen in how youth feel about allowing longtime party members to run for

office shows that youth are concerned. Respondents believed that being eligible for office should not be contingent on how long they served a political party. At the same time, they also expected political parties to treat their loyal members fairly. Therefore, they proposed assigning the party's senior and experienced members an advisory role. They were also of the opinion that existing top-down strategy and limited democratic practices within the political parties alienated the youths from politics.

The FGDs implied that Nepali youths hold certain expectations for their politicians: they desire individuals who are youthful, educated, proficient, and articulate. Additionally, they value ideological coherence, definitive objectives, and a resolute dedication to realizing those goals. Interestingly, while party allegiance may not be paramount, it does tend to strengthen as individuals age.

This research demonstrates that youths who voted once were more likely to vote again. Eighty-eight per cent of those who voted in the local elections are likely (or very likely) to vote in the federal and provincial elections in November 2022 (as shown in Figure 12). However, two out of three who did not vote in the previous elections were not likely to vote in the future elections. The main reasons behind their failure to vote were lack of their registration in the voters' list, their inability to travel back home to vote, and/ or lack of their interest in politics. This indicates that Nepali youths want political parties and the government to make the voter registration and voting procedures less onerous and simpler.

Figure 12: Voting pattern of youths of Nepal



Source: NIPoRe Telephone Survey 2022

Conclusion and Recommendation

With the growing share of eligible Nepali young voters, their importance has grown further in the country's national politics in recent years. Therefore, how young Nepali people feel about Nepal's current election system, political parties, political leaders, and other key political infrastructures (formal and informal) can substantially affect the country's overall politics.

This research study demonstrates that half the youths are neither interested in political matters nor participate in political activities, which is a big concern for the future of Nepal's democracy. However, although most of the younger people are not politically inclined, they take voting responsibilities seriously. Seventy-two per cent of youths said that they voted in the last local elections and the primary reasons for their voting were candidates. Young people felt frustrated with the current political leadership; 83 per cent of the respondents

overwhelmingly believed that the political parties/leaders were concerned about their own petty interests and the majority said that they would vote for a new and young candidate, even if they felt that the candidate might not win the elections. Furthermore, it illustrates the expectations of young individuals regarding their political leaders, who are anticipated to embody youthfulness, education, proficiency, and eloquence. They are also expected to possess ideological coherence, defined objectives, and an unwavering commitment to their realization. Additionally, young people prioritize five key issues and agendas that they anticipate political parties to address: infrastructure development, economic prosperity and job creation, education, healthcare, and good governance.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made.

Stakeholders	Recommendation
Election Commission (EC) of Nepal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youths are often hesitant about reporting misinformation for the fear of retribution from political parties, cadres and supporters; therefore, the EC needs to be proactive to stamp down mis/disinformation on social media. • The current voting systems leave out the political participation (voting) of almost a fifth of youths who are abroad for work. The state should explore ways for those migrant workers to have their voices represented by establishing voting centres abroad or allowing them to vote by mail.
Political Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and strongly enforce guiding criteria to select their candidates to contest the elections. Consideration should be given to the candidates' personal traits, professional capabilities and their contribution to the party. • Make their candidates more responsible and accountable while engaging them in election-related activities. This includes discouraging them from using hate speeches during promotional activities (online and offline) and properly following EC's election guidelines. • Promote more youths, women, and people from marginalised communities in leadership roles – both in terms of quantitative and qualitative form. • Use social media more effectively to reach young voters and encourage them to be more involved in and enthusiastic to politics.
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the establishment of grassroots organisations of youths which can be a major forum for raising their political awareness and promoting their political activities.

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About the Authors

Nepal Institute for Policy Research (NIPoRe) is an independent and non-partisan research institute based in Kathmandu, Nepal. It works to generate evidence-based debates among citizens and critical stakeholders of development in both the public and private sectors on contemporary policy issues from Nepal and Asia.

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Imprint

© 2024 Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Nepal Office
Lalitpur Metropolitan City, Ward 2, Sanepa
P. O. Box: 11840
Kathmandu, Nepal

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