Political Parties' Commitments to Indigenous Nationalities in Nepal: An Analysis of the 2082 B.S. (2026) House of Representatives Election Manifestos

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Abstract

This study investigates how political parties addressed the core identity and political demands of Nepal's Indigenous Nationalities in their election manifestos following the House of Representatives election on Falgun 21, 2082 B.S. (5 March 2026). The 2026 election triggered a major political realignment, with the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) securing a landslide victory (182 of 275 seats) and significantly diminishing the influence of traditional democratic and communist parties. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of substantive representation (Pitkin, 1967), the politics of ideas and politics of presence (Phillips, 1995), and multicultural recognition theory (Kymlicka, 1995; Taylor, 1994), this qualitative research conducts a secondary source analysis of election manifestos and party statutes across eight key parliamentary and National Assembly parties.

The findings reveal a critical regression in both ideological commitment and physical representation. While nearly all parties formally endorse federalism (except Rastriya Janamorcha), the dominant RSP lacks clarity on provincial structures and omits any mention of Indigenous Nationalities issues. Simultaneously, traditional parties that once championed Indigenous agendas-such as the former Maoists (now Nepali Communist Party) and CPN-UML-have grown increasingly conservative, while the Nepali Congress remains confined to general reform, leaving only smaller parties like the Janata Samajbadi Party to raise limited demands. Consequently, Indigenous representation in the House of Representatives has steadily declined from 36% in the 2064 (2008) Constituent Assembly to 24% in 2082-an overall 12% drop, including a sharp 7% decrease since 2079 (2022). Ultimately, this study underscores an urgent need for parliamentary committees, inter-party dialogues, and civil society organizations to safeguard inclusive democracy and translate Indigenous identity rights into binding legislation.

Keywords: Indigenous Nationalities, Inclusive Democracy, Substantive Representation, Politics of Presence, Election Manifestos, Federalism.

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