

Social Security of Senior Citizens: Analysis of Manifesto of Local Election 2022 of Political Parties in Nepal

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Abstract

The manifesto is a guidebook that informs voters about a political party's commitments. It helps voters to make a rational voting decision. It is a party's commitment towards the electorate about their vision, plans and governance policies. Although read by only a small fraction of population, manifestos form a major launching point for any election. The study is a comparative analysis of the local election 2022 manifestos of different political parties about the social security of the elderly population. This article attempts to look at how political parties committed towards resolving the issues related to senior citizens in respect to healthcare, financial security, transportation, old age homes, and elder abuse. It tries to answer how far the policy for the elderly becomes of interest for the government, and whether the political parties are luring people's vote or for other purposes. Further, the study tries to demonstrate why senior citizens are brought into election campaigns and whether they realize the benefits as committed in the Party's manifestos. The study found that political parties made their manifesto attractive to win the heart of the elderly. They had made big promises without revising the past manifestos and their effectiveness. Although elderly people were happy with the current government social security programs, majority of them did not recognize any tangible benefits from the commitments made in the election manifestos.

Keywords: Social Security, Senior Citizens, Election Manifesto, Political Parties, Local Government

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1. Introduction

Social security is the system established by the Government of Nepal for the protection of citizens who are elderly, indigent, incapacitated, helpless, single women, persons with disabilities, destitute children, citizens who cannot take care of themselves, and the members of the tribe on the verge of extinction and the act stressed that only eligible citizens receive social security allowances which can be both contributory and non-contributory schemes to ensure protection against various risks (Social Security Act, 2018).

It is the protection that a society provides to individuals and households to ensure access to health care and to guarantee income security, particularly in case of old age, unemployment, sickness, invalidity, work injury, maternity or loss of breadwinner (ILO, 2010). International Labor Organization recognizes social security as the basic human rights which are essential for combating poverty, inequality and for leading a dignified life. The standard which ILO developed not only provides a legal foundation for rights to social security but at the same time, it guarantees the minimum standard of protection to human beings.

Investments in the social security have increased steadily over the years, reflecting the government's commitment to enhancing social protection. The government has allocated NPR 100 billion for the purpose of social security in the fiscal year 2021/22 which have increased significantly to NPR 130.01 billion in the year 2022/23 (Budget Speech, 2021/22 & 2022/23) showing their great emphasis on expanding social welfare programs. In the fiscal year 2024/25, the government has allocated NPR 116 billion for social security (Budget Speech, 2024/25) which further demonstrates its continuing focus on supporting and protecting the vulnerable population through various schemes and allowances. The article mainly focuses on non-contributory social protection. The main questions of the article are; Why has social security policy become the interest of political parties? Why are senior citizens brought into election campaigns? Do the senior citizens realize the benefit as committed in the manifestos?

Political Parties of Nepal and their Manifestos

The politics of Nepal functions within the framework of a parliamentary republic with a multi-party democratic system. The major political parties recognized by the federal parliament includes Nepali Congress, Communist party of Nepal (UML), Communist party of Nepal (Maoist Center), Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Socialist), People's Socialist Party Nepal, Rastriya Prajatantra Party, Loktantrik Samajbadi Party, Nepal Socialist Party, e-t-c.

Since the restoration of democracy, 1990s, Nepal has carried out four local elections. After the second local election in 1997, local positions remained vacant for nearly two decades, leaving many local issues unaddressed. The third (2017) and the fourth (2022) local elections were held under a new federal set-up. At these times, people became more aware of their duties, rights and responsibilities towards the state, and began assessing party's manifestoes more critically before casting a ballot.

Generally, political parties prepare attractive manifestos to gain support from the voters, however, frequently fail to deliver their promises after being elected. The trust survey conducted by the Central Department of Public Administration, Tribhuvan University in collaboration with International University partners found over one-third of the population have little confidence in the political parties of Nepal and a mere six percent of the Nepalese citizens do trust the political parties which means that the majority of the population do not trust the political parties (Jamil, Dhaka,¹ & Poudel, 2017), and this might be due to the mismatch between the promises before election and its delivery after the election.

In parliamentary democracies, it is mandatory for different political parties to publish manifestoes or programs setting out their policy priorities following the election which represents a policy package a party puts to voters at election time (Suiter & Farrell, 2011). The release of the manifesto serves as an important resource for voters to make informed decisions. Various political parties released manifestos tailored to local context; however, these remain unimplemented after elections, serving only as an attraction to voters than to guide governance especially in developing countries like Nepal. A good manifesto should be successful in identifying the problems faced by the citizens and suggesting possible measures to resolve them.

Social security has been featured in different political parties' manifestoes. The major political party, Nepali Congress, prepared its manifesto with a slogan of "Strong Local Government, Developed Village, Developed City" (Nepali Congress Sankalpa, 2022). The party promises to provide senior citizens allowance for people aged sixty-five and above along with free health insurance to senior citizens above sixty five years, management to get involved in free insurance program in coordination with the ward office, regular health check up, consultation and medicine in their household (Nepali Congress Sankalpa, 2022).

The Unified Marxist Leninist (UML) is committed towards the well-being of elderly persons through financial support, improved access to healthcare, and social inclusion including timely allowances and elderly-friendly services under the slogan "Base of Socialism, Good Governance and Prosperity, the Government of UML

in Every Municipality” (UML Manifesto, 2022). Similarly, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), a Hindu Nationalist Party focused on home-based services, monthly health check-ups and free religious tours for promoting dignity, care, and cultural respect to the elderly persons (RPP Manifesto, 2022).

Nepal Communist Party, Unified Socialist is committed to provide free health care services, elderly clubs in all municipalities, household monitoring, tour programs, and skill-based engagement for healthy and respected aging under the slogan of “Citizen-centric local government, basis for development and prosperity”(CPN Unified Socialist Manifesto, 2022). Similarly, the People’s Socialist Party (PSP-Nepal) promised to provide free healthcare services for people above sixty five years of age, special care homes, and elderly meeting centers in every ward to ensure their care and social participation under the slogan - “Identity, Federalism, Good Governance and Integrity, Basis for Local Government’s Prosperity” (PSP-Nepal, Manifesto,2022).

Roles and Responsibilities of Local Government in Nepal

Local governments are the foundations of democratic governance. They are the governments of the people often referred to as door-step governments. A local government is a form of public administration that, in most of the contexts, exists as the lowest tier of administration within a given state (UK, 2014). Democracy is a form of decentralized governance. The roles and responsibilities of present-day local governments have been increasing steadily with growing expectation of the people for efficient, effective and streamlined services. The central government is often distant from the local communities and cannot identify their needs and aspirations. Therefore, the concept of local governments was introduced to address local issues more effectively. Public welfare services can be better delivered at the local level. Since representatives are elected by local people, they should be responsible and accountable to them. Citizens can hold their representatives and public officials accountable for any wrong doings which helps to establish good governance at the local level.

Nepal has a three-tiered governance structure (Federal, Provincial and Local). There are seven hundred and fifty-three local governments in Nepal including six metropolitan cities, eleven sub-metropolitan cities, two hundred and seventy-six municipalities, and four hundred and sixty rural municipalities. In addition there are seventy-seven district coordination committees. Authorities such as mayors, deputy mayors, chairpersons, vice-chairpersons, members of municipalities and rural municipalities are elected by the first-past-the-post system. The tenure of the

local representatives elected in the 2017 local election has expired, and new members were elected in 2022.

There are several roles and responsibilities of local governments prescribed by the Constitution of Nepal (2015) in its Schedule 8. Among the various functions, the management of elderly population, persons with disabilities, and the incapacitated falls under the jurisdiction of local governments. The Constitution of Nepal, 2015, also mentions the concurrent powers of the federation, state, and local levels which includes social security. This means that social security of the elderly persons is not only the responsibility of the local government but also of the state and federal governments. Based on the Constitution of Nepal, 2015, the Local Government Operation Act (2017) has been issued, which highlights the detailed functions to be carried out by local governments for elderly persons under the heading “Management of Senior Citizens, Persons with Disabilities and the Incapacitated”. These functions include implementation, operation, and management of social security programs based on federal and provincial laws; management and operation of senior citizens’ clubs, day-care centers, and visiting centers; operation and management of elderly centers, disabled centers, and incapacitated centers in coordination with federal and provincial governments; updating data about the elderly; management and distribution of identity and social security cards (LGOA, 2017).

The executive power of the local government shall be vested in the municipal executive or the village executive. Among the various powers of the local executive, the management of senior citizens, persons with disabilities, and the incapacitated falls under their jurisdiction (The Constitution of Nepal, 2015). The chief of the municipality or village municipality calls a meeting to set out plans, policies, and programs and to allow the preparation of the budget to be presented at the meeting.

2. Methodology

The study is based on the comparative analysis of various political parties' manifestos about social security of the elderly population. All the manifestoes have been collected from the websites. The other resources such as the books, articles, reports, documents published nationally or internationally have also been collected for the purpose of the study. Besides, the elderly people residing in the Kathmandu valley were interviewed. There are many political parties who issued manifestos but only five political party's manifestoes are analyzed here which were considered major. The five political parties whose manifestos were studied includes- Nepali Congress, Nepal Communist Party (UML), Nepal Communist Party (Unified Socialist), Rastriya Prajatantra Party, and, Peoples Socialist Party. The manifestoes were

analyzed based on different aspects related to elderly persons such as healthcare, financial security, transportation, old age homes, elderly abuse, etc.

3. Findings and Discussion

The manifestoes of Nepali Congress, CPN-UML, Rastriya Prajatantra Party, CPN-Unified Socialist and People's Socialist Party were analyzed on the basis of five aspects such as healthcare facilities, financial security, old age homes, transportation facilities and prevention of elderly abuse. These aspects are presented in table 1-4.

Healthcare services

The first aspect involves healthcare services. Since health is one of the fundamental rights of the citizens enshrined in the constitution of Nepal (2015), all the political parties are committed towards providing effective health care facilities to the senior citizens either at their household or at the service centers. The major political party, Nepali Congress has promised for free health insurance to citizens above sixty-five years, regular health check-up, and expansion of health insurance and availability of the medicines at their household for those who are incapable of reaching at the health care centers. Similarly, the opposition party, CPN-UML is committed towards providing free health services to the senior citizens in their households and introduces a more modern approach with a proposal of digital health cards. On the other hand, Unified Socialists mentions integration with traditional health systems. Moreover, it has stated to provide free health treatment for all diseases except complicated ones such as heart, kidney, lungs, liver related diseases and diseases requiring surgery.

The Hindu Nationalist Party of Nepal, Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) has shown concern towards the senior citizens health and promised to provide free and compulsory health insurance to all and the management of basic health check up every once in a month for senior citizens. Moreover, it has also made a commitment to provide a monthly health treatment allowance for those citizens suffering from cancer, kidney diseases and spinal injury. Furthermore, it has a commitment to provide mobile health camps in the rural areas. Similarly, the People's Socialist Party like other parties is committed towards providing free health facilities to the senior citizens above sixty-five years of age at the municipal level. However, detailed implementation strategies such as allocation of the budgets, staffing for healthcare services has largely been ignored in most of the manifestoes.

The comparative analysis of different political parties' manifestos on healthcare services showed that they have placed special attention to address the issues related to elderly health. It cannot be ignored that health is the fundamental right of the people and an essential infrastructure for development. However, promising in the manifesto does not ensure its effectiveness unless it is translated into reality. First, the program has to be reflected in the government's annual policies and programs which serve as a basis for planning the budget for the next fiscal year. The annual policy and program 2022/23 has already been presented at a joint meeting of both the houses (The House of Representatives and The National Assembly). It has to be first approved by both the houses before presenting the budget for the next fiscal year. The government budget for the fiscal year 2022/23 was committed for the development of an effective health system for coping with any kind of pandemic. It has ensured the fundamental right of citizens to obtain basic free health service and has guaranteed distribution of ninety-eight types of medicines free of cost targeting mostly to poor elderly citizens. However, the implementation of this initiative has been highly criticized for its lack of fairness in distribution (Shrestha et.al, 2021). Moreover, the elderlies are unaware about the insurance program of the government as they are still paying money for getting the health services and other medical facilities (Interview, 2024). The government was committed to establish additional twenty senior citizens wards at the central and provincial level for providing specialized medical services to the senior citizens (Budget Speech, 2022). Further, all the citizens including senior citizens suffering from kidney related disease, cancer and spinal injury will get monthly five thousand rupees as medical treatment allowance for which the government has allocated 1.5 billion rupees. Moreover, the government committed that arrangement to be made for convenient health services to senior citizens by provisioning geriatric wards in all hospitals. Telemedicine services to be operated in at least one federal hospital and at least two other hospitals of each province (Government of Nepal, 2024). Here, a specialized medical service mentioned in the government speech seems ambiguous. What does a specialized medical service mean? It should be clear to implementers as well as to the target beneficiaries otherwise conflict may arise in the process of implementation. Matland (1995) argued that there could be ambiguity of goals and ambiguity of means in the policy and the likelihood conflict between decision makers and Implementers in the implementation process or the degree of ambiguity inherent in a policy directly affects the implementation process in significant ways- influences the ability of superiors to monitor activities, the likelihood that the policy is uniformly understood across many implementation sites, the probability that local contextual factors play a significant role, and the degree to which relevant actors vary sharply across implementation sites.

It is a great support and a good initiative of the government for those who cannot afford the healthcare services also ensuring citizen's right to live. Studies have shown that some proportion of the elderly do not utilize health services because of high out-of-pocket health expenditure and lack of regular screening of health and only few persons are trained in elderly health care and few hospitals are elderly friendly (Acharya et al., 2019). Moreover, the report published by Nepal Health Research Council identified difficulties faced by the chronic kidney disease patients while seeking the services as they have to look for private centers at their own expense when the machines at the service providing hospitals were under maintenance or were not working (Karki et al., 2017). Furthermore, it involves both medical costs as well as non-medical costs such as diagnosis, lab tests, transportation costs etc. which add extra burden to the patients and the provided amount by the government as treatment allowance seems insufficient. Providing subsidies on food and lodging and discounts in transportation might be helpful. Provision of discount in public vehicles through privileged cards has been effectively implemented. Difficulties have also been observed in keeping accurate data of cancer patients as the people use multiple locations for diagnosis and treatment. The country has entered into federalism, but there is a lack of population-based cancer registry coordination bodies at the provincial and local level (Nepal Health Research Council, 2018). This makes it difficult to identify who really needs the services and who have received the service. Moreover, some of the elderly people who are living in old age homes are deprived of identity which limits them to enjoy the benefits such as old age allowance, and others provided by the state (Interview, 2024).

The number of geriatric doctors for more than twenty-nine lakh population of the elderly is only nine (Ageing Nepal, 2023). In the absence of geriatric specialist, senior citizens face difficulties in their treatment. Establishing senior citizen's wards in the hospital does not necessarily ensure that they get better treatment unless there is availability of a higher proportion of qualified geriatric doctors and nurses. Not only the government, but also the unawareness of the citizens has posed the elderly population in a problem. The different political parties were committed to provide healthcare services to the elderly households but their commitment remained only on paper as based on the view of participants - none of the doctors, nurses or medicines were available at their household and no regular health checkup (Interview, 2024). This shows a mismatch between commitment and delivery. Although health care-facilities have been prioritized in different political parties' manifestoes, translating their promises into reality seems infeasible without proper mechanisms to address these issues.

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| Party | Commitments on healthcare services |
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| Nepali Congress | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of health insurance coverage for elderly persons above 65 years • Commitment to provide health services free and regularly at their households • Distribution of identity cards for elderly persons to get prioritized services |
| CPN-UML | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free health service at elderly household • Digital health card • Geriatric care in local hospitals |
| CPN-Socialist | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free health care services to all diseases except complicated one such as heart, kidney, lungs, liver and diseases requiring surgery • Elderly care health desks |
| Rastriya Prajatantra Party | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free and compulsory health insurance to all • Basic health check-up every once in a month • Monthly health treatment allowance for cancer, kidney and spinal injury • Mobile health camps in the countryside |
| People's Socialist Party | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free health facilities for elderly above sixty-five at Municipal level • Health care via mobile clinics |

Table 1: Commitment of Political Parties about Health Care for the Elderly
Financial services

The next consideration is about the financial security of the senior citizens in the political party's manifestoes. Financial security provides a basis for healthy ageing. As the population aged sixty-five and above is expected to increase in all regions of the world, the global figure of 9.3 percent in 2020 is projected to reach nearly 16.0 percent in the year 2050 (UNDESA/PD, 2020). The elderly population in Nepal is growing steadily at the rate of 3.77 percent which is three times higher than the annual population growth rate (1.35 percent) during 2001 to 2011 which was only 1.96 percent in the year 1961 (CBS, 2014).

The comparative analysis of five different political parties' manifestos for local election 2022 on the financial security demonstrates that all parties support for the continuation and efficiency of old age allowance system via digital or bank-based payments. Nepali Congress promises to provide old age allowance for senior citizens

above sixty-five years of age and also health treatment allowance. Similarly, CPN-UML, has promises to provide old age allowances at the household of weaker senior citizens. In the manifesto of CPN-UML for local election 2017, the party has made a commitment to increase the social security allowance for senior citizens to Rs 5000 per month. However, at present, senior citizens are receiving only Rs 4000 per month as the social security allowance. A populist type of approach has been observed in their manifesto - making big promises without assurance of implementation and no revision of the promises that they had made in the last election.

CPN, Socialist party, promises to provide additional support to the marginalized elderly persons. Similarly, Rastriya Prajatantra Party promises to link allowance with inflation and advocates for timely payments of allowances while People's Socialist Party suggests about the grass roots micro pensions concepts. Old age allowance should be provided to the elderly in order to cover their daily expenditures and ease their life. This has been realized by the government of Nepal in the previous year and increased all types of social security allowance by thirty three percent and the monthly allowance for elderly persons has been increased to four thousand rupees as government has allocated Rs 116 billion for the purpose of social security allowance (Budget Speech, 2024/25). Increasing the social security allowance is the responsibility of the government and this is the right of the citizens. For those who are deprived of family care, the old age allowance has helped them to lead a comfortable life at old age (Interview, 2024). Nearly ninety percent of the elderly population benefited from the social security allowance who spent more on medical treatment followed by food, clothing and household activities (MoWCSC, 2021). Based on focused group discussion conducted by the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens, findings revealed that there are no procedural complexities in obtaining social security allowances in both places having banking or no banking facility. The interview with a few groups of the elderly also suggests that they get an allowance easily without unnecessary hassles and they were satisfied with it as the government has prioritized the elderly in the national plans and policies (Interview, 2024). Besides rupees four thousand, the respective wards of Kathmandu Metropolitan City and Lalitpur Metropolitan City are providing additional twelve thousand rupees and ten thousand rupees annually as festival allowance (Interview, 2024). They were happy with the social security allowance program but at the same time they opined that the amount is insufficient as it is just covering the health expenditure; so, they expect the government to increase the allowance (Interview, 2024).

Party

Financial services

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| Nepali Congress | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to provide old age allowance above sixty-five years of age in a timely and transparent manner • Commitment to establish a unified database of beneficiaries to avoid duplication |
| CPN-UML | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life cycle social security since childhood to old age • Transparent digital allowance system • local level social security desk |
| CPN-Socialist | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital transfer of elderly allowances • Provide additional support to marginalized elderly persons |
| Rastriya Prajatantra Party | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribution of allowances in a timely manner |
| People's Socialist Party | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribution of allowances via banks |

Table 2: Commitment of Political Parties towards Financial Security for the Elderly

The finance minister delivered a budget speech for the fiscal year 2022/23 and announced that the age of the senior citizens receiving social security allowance under social security program is reduced to sixty-eight years from seventy years (Budget Speech, 2022). Since then, the elderly people are getting allowance at the age of sixty-eight. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the number of senior citizens above sixty-eight years was 18,27,000 in the year 2021. About thirty six percent of the social security amounts have been spent in old age allowance which accounts for 66 billion rupees. According to the Department of National ID and Civil Registration, the senior citizens receiving an allowance of Rs 4000 monthly who have completed seventy years are 12,70,000 and citizens from Kanali region receiving Rs 2660 per month are more than 21,15,000 (DONIDCR, 2021). The life expectancy of Nepalese has increased to more than seventy years but the age limit of senior citizens receiving old age allowance has been reduced to sixty-eight years from seventy which is technically not feasible in the long run as it adds financial pressure on the part of the government.

Old age home, meeting centers and clubs

The older people always want to live with their family members but it is not possible in some instances, some may not have a family, those having a family may have problems like the family members have to go to work and do not have sufficient

time for maintenance and care of elderly parents. However, the Senior Citizens Act 2006 mentioned that the rights of the elderly should be ensured and has also compelled the family members to take care and maintain the elder parents based on the economic status and social prestige of the members. (Senior Citizens Act, 2006). The family may not be socio-economically strong enough to bear the cost of care at the expense of their children and career, and, even if they are socio-economically strong may have some personal values and priorities (Acharya, 2008). In such a situation old age home, visiting or meeting centers for elders and clubs become the only support system for senior citizens.

Old age homes, clubs and visiting centers may be required for the elderly persons to share their feelings to move away from loneliness caused by nucleation in the family structure. Realizing this, the establishment of the community managed old age homes appears in all the manifestos and all five parties propose elderly clubs and visiting centers at the ward or municipal level, linking cultural or recreational program to promote active and dignified aging. Nepali Congress and CPN- UML commit for the establishment of elderly homes via state facilitation or public private partnerships, without robust implementation framework. Records and evidence suggest that the origin and development of old age homes of a kind started in 1938 B.S in Nepal but its actual establishment was made in 2030 B.S (Acharya, 2008). Nepal has shown interest from the side of Non-governmental organizations and private sectors only when the UN declared 1999 A.D as the international year for the elderly (ibid). Later on, the government realized the need for the maintenance and care of the senior citizens and started to allocate a budget for addressing the issues related to senior citizens. The Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens is the recognized organization involved in the formulation of plans and policies related to elderly people and for the coming fiscal year the government has allocated 116 billion rupees for this ministry (Budget Speech, 2024/25). Progress has been made in the establishment of old-age homes, daycare centers and visiting centers. Among the 753 local units, 211 have already established daycare centers and visiting/meeting centers for elderly people (MoWCSC, 2020/21).

Party

Old age homes, meeting centers and clubs

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| Nepali Congress | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to establish community- managed old age homes • Allocate local budget for the maintenance and staffing of elderly homes • Commitment to set up senior citizens clubs and meeting centers at local levels • Initiatives to foster connections between generations and support cultural transmission |
| CPN-UML | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committed to establish old-age homes visiting/meeting center in each ward via Public Private Partnership. • Coordinate with NGOs • Cultural and recreational programs |
| CPN-Socialist | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to establish old-age homes supported by local governments • Establishment of ward level clubs and perform regular social activities |
| Rastriya Prajatantra Party | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish elderly homes in each districts • Promote cultural heritage for elderly persons |
| People's Socialist Party | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to establish old-age homes • Community based elderly shelters • Establish clubs for elders to promote community connections |

Table 3: Commitment of Political Parties towards Old Age Homes, Meeting Centers and Clubs for the Elderly

Transportation Facilities

It becomes very difficult for the older people to travel from one place to another either for getting allowance or medical facility or any other purposes because of scarce financial resources. Some sort of security must be provided by the state so that they could travel comfortably without financial burden. Almost all parties have made commitments regarding concessions in the transportation and elder-friendly infrastructures. Peoples Socialist Party and Rastriya Prajatantra Party promises to provide free travel to religious, touristic and panoramic sites within the country. Based on the view of some elderly, they have not traveled at free of cost to any place

within the countries, however, the fifty percent concession of elderly in transportation has been effectively implemented since a very long time (Interview, 2024).

| Party | Transportation Facilities |
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| Nepali Congress | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with public and private sectors to provide subsidies in transportation and develop elderly friendly safe walkways and public transport stops. |
| CPN-UML | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elder-friendly transport stops and concession in the transportation |
| CPN-Socialist | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free travel to religious, touristic and panoramic sites within the country • Develop paths accessible to elderly persons |
| Rastriya Prajatantra Party | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with public and private sectors to provide subsidies in transportation and develop elderly friendly safe walkways and public transport stops. |
| People's Socialist Party | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elder-friendly transport stops and concession in the transportation |

Table 4: Commitment of Political Parties about Transportation Facilities for the Elderly

Senior citizens Abuse

In Nepal, a total of 1,068 older people consisting of 691 male and 377 female were abused within a period of six years from 2012 to 2017 (Thapa, 2018). Only one in twenty four cases or 4 percent of elderly abuse has been reported globally as per UN report, 2017 which means that 25,000 elderly people were abused over the period of six years in Nepal, an average of more than 4,000 per year (Thapa, 2018). Similarly, reported cases of different kinds of elderly abuse (physical, psychological, financial, sexual and neglect) within a period of four years from 2018 to 2021 was 944 and the death rate of elderly persons after abuse was 851 (Ageing Nepal, 2022). This figure shows that elderly abuse is growing in Nepal which cannot be neglected and needs urgent attention from the part of the government. Elderly abuse occurs when people go against the deeply rooted cultural values of obedience, devotion and care towards one's parents and these may sometimes remain unreported in the name of preserving family prestige. This is a serious issue and the most underdeveloped area; all the political parties mention about awareness programs, legal support and redress mechanisms. Rastriya Prajatantra Party, though not strong on enforcement, focuses on moral and cultural educations to promote respect towards elderly persons. However, there is no clarity on coordination with police, judicial

bodies or social workers to address the cases of abuse. CPN-Socialist have promised for the management of regular monitoring from the municipal level to see whether the senior citizens are living with adequate maintenance and care from their family members or not.

4. Discussion

As manifestoes are the commitment made by the different political parties before the election about their vision, plans and policies just to attract the voters to choose a particular party but the manifestoes did not get implemented properly. Manifestoes, although read by only a small population, form a major point of departure for launching any election. Preparing the manifestoes does not necessarily ensure that it would get implemented at once because, first of all it should be recognized in the government's annual plans and programs which should be also reflected in the national budget. The government has presented the annual plans and programs 2024/25 to the joint session of both the houses (The National Assembly and The House of Representatives).

When the livelihood and healthcare of the elderly population is so much dependent upon government assistance, voting by them becomes very important. In the United States, seniors are a tempting campaign target, particularly because they are potentially swing voters not committed heavily to any party (Binstock, 2007). The other cause is that the seniors turn out to vote at a higher rate than do other members of other age groups (ibid). If a candidate wants to win, they would better pay attention to the issues of elderly population (Bunis, 2018). In Nepal, as part of the poll campaigns, political parties would favor the senior citizens by conducting various programs in their honor a few days before voting to take place. This makes the senior citizens think whether the political parties are campaigning only for election purposes to win the heart of the elder voters or really want to translate their promises or to work in their favor. After winning the election; they would ignore the issues of the elderly and this has been widely adopted by various political parties of Nepal since a very long time. If parties are really serious about the issues of the senior citizens, then they should have consulted them to make the manifesto realistic. As manifestoes are prepared without proper study and consultation, they have only become the tool for election campaigning.

Now-a-days, older voters are becoming more aware than they were in the past and can easily understand the vested interests of political parties that make them rethink and identify the better candidate to vote for. In the last election manifesto, 2017 CPN-UML was committed to increase the old age allowance to Rs 5000 but still

the seniors above seventy years are receiving Rs 4000 and seniors above sixty of Karnali regions are receiving Rs2660 as a monthly allowance which has been initiated by UML- led government since 1994 with only Rs 100. This shows a mismatch between the promises and the delivery. Given the growing necessity to implement other schemes related to social security based on manifesto, constitution, national and international commitments, the expanding payment requirement may add extra pressure to the budget- non-contributory social security schemes will not be sustainable in a few years' time (Khadka, 2017). Some of the senior populations are still deprived of the facility provided by the state because most of the senior citizens particularly from the Muslim community clearly lag in citizenship acquisition rate relative to other religious groups (Gurung & Khatiwada, 2015). Moreover, based on the views of some other elderly people residing in old age homes, lack of identity makes them deprived of some benefits provided by the state (Interview, 2024).

The government of Nepal has realized the need for an effective organization to address the necessities of the elderly people but it is very difficult to translate the decision into reality. It is concerned with few welfare programs such as providing allowance and health care facilities but the evidence showed that the allowance has not been enough to meet the health care of the senior citizens as the health institutions and care providers are privately owned or profit oriented (Shrestha et.al, 2021). Once they become profit oriented, less time and effort will be concentrated towards maintenance and care of the elderly population.

5. Conclusion

Manifesto is a guidebook for voters to know about the commitment of a particular political party which also helps voters to make a rational decision on whom to vote for. Different political parties have issued their manifestoes but, in this study, assessment of only five political parties' manifestoes has been done, three from coalition government, one from CPN-UML and one from Hindu Nationalist Party - Rastriya Prajatantra Party. Political party's manifesto is important because it displays or gives ideas about how much they care for citizens. The manifestoes have been assessed based on five factors- health care services, financial security, transportation, old age homes and elderly abuse prevention. All the political parties have prepared attractive manifestoes showing care for senior citizens but the overall responsibility goes to the winning party. The elected representatives should be responsible and accountable towards the citizens; they should translate the promises made before the election. The analysis showed that the senior citizens were

prioritized in the annual policies and programs of the government and have also been included in the national budget with the allocation of a certain amount of money for the maintenance and care of the elderly. This clearly shows that different political parties and the government are prioritizing older people so that they can lead a comfortable life. Based on the view of some elderly, few welfare programs such as the old-age allowance, concession in transportation have been found to be effectively implemented. In addition, the services provided by the old age homes were satisfactory. However, many of the elderly are unaware about the free health insurance program launched by the government. In addition, they don't know where to complain if they get abused by family members (Interview, 2024). There are many unreported cases of abuse in the name of preserving family prestige and also due to the lack of hope in the Nepalese legal system. In this situation, a strong mechanism of monitoring is essential to check whether the older people are kept with adequate maintenance and care or not from the family members. This clearly shows that the elderly population did not realize the benefits as committed in the political party's manifesto. Senior citizens were sometimes used as an instrument for election campaigns because the majority of the elderly population cast a ballot after the assessment of the manifesto as they are becoming much more aware than they were in the past.

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