

Comparative Study of Nepal's Interest Convergence with India and China at the United Nations

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Abstract

India and China are Nepal's immediate neighbors, sharing borders with the country. Nepal's relationships with India and China are undeniably its two most significant and consequential bilateral partnerships. While Nepal's engagement with New Delhi and Beijing is grounded in mutual interests, maintaining a balanced relationship with both neighbors has been a central theme of Nepal's foreign policy. However, there remains a lack of clarity regarding the specific areas of mutual interest.

One effective way to evaluate these areas is by analyzing their behavior at the United Nations (UN). Each year, hundreds of resolutions addressing a wide range of global issues are voted upon at the UN General Assembly (UNGA). Examining voting patterns can reveal areas of interest convergence (or divergence). To this end, this paper analyzes all resolutions passed by the UNGA via vote since 1972 across eight key areas: arms control, climate change, democracy, development, global law and order, globalization, human rights, and migration.

Nepal participates more actively and almost always positively in UNGA voting compared to its neighbors. Of the 3,035 UNGA resolutions analyzed in this study, Nepal and China voted identically (Yes/Yes or No/No) 72.3% of the time, while Nepal and India voted identically 74.3% of the time. Conversely, Nepal and China voted oppositely (Yes/No or No/Yes) only 3.5% of the time, and Nepal and India did so 3.7% of the time. Overall, Nepal demonstrates significant interest convergence with both India and China.

The convergence score was 0.9 or higher in areas such as climate change, democracy, development, global law and order, and migration. However, it was lowest in arms control (0.77 with China and 0.71 with India), with the most notable divergence occurring on issues related to nuclear non-proliferation.

This research highlights that Nepal shares deep interest convergence with its neighbors on most global issues. By leveraging these areas of mutual interest, Nepal stands to gain significantly in advancing both its national and global interests.

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Introduction

India and China in Nepal's Foreign Policy

Nepal's geographical positioning between two major Asian powers, India and China, plays a significant role in shaping its foreign policy. King Prithvi Narayan Shah, the unifier of Nepal, famously characterized the country's position as a "yam between two boulders." Both neighbors, particularly India to the south, have a critical influence on Nepal's strategic choices, economic development, political alliances, and security policies. Nepal shares deep historical, cultural, and linguistic ties with India, which has traditionally been its closest partner. However, as China's global influence has grown, its presence and influence in Nepal have also increased steadily over the past few decades (Poudel, 2021).

India has historically been a closer political partner to Nepal. The two countries share political values, cultural affinities, and an open border that facilitates the free movement of people, often referred to as the *roti-beti ka rishta* (relationship of bread and matrimony). Nepali leaders exiled in India played a significant role in India's struggle for independence from British rule. In turn, independent India had a profound impact on Nepal's democratization.

The 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship between India and Nepal grants national treatment to each other's citizens, excluding political rights. India has consistently viewed Nepal as falling within its sphere of influence. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, even remarked that India's frontier extended up to the Nepali Himalayas (Muni, 2016). India's engagement in Nepal is so extensive that its influence is evident in nearly all of Nepal's political transformations, including its transition to a federal republic (Adhikari, 2018). However, this deep involvement has also fueled anti-Indian sentiments among segments of Nepal's population (Thapa & Acharya, 2020).

On the other side of the Himalayas, China's interest and influence in Nepal were relatively limited. China primarily sought Nepal's cooperation in suppressing any anti-China or pro-Tibetan activities within its borders and in preventing third countries from using Nepali territory against Chinese interests (Gyawali, 2019; Sun, 2018). However, China's interest in Nepal has expanded in tandem with its rising global stature. This shift has been particularly noticeable since the early 2010s. The 2008 global financial crisis propelled China to the center of global politics. Additionally, President Xi Jinping's announcement of the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative in 2013 further increased China's engagement worldwide, including in Nepal.

Nepal's two neighbors, China and India, have contrasting and often competing interests in the South Asian region, particularly in security and strategic affairs (Subedi, 2005). However, they also share multiple areas of common interest in global affairs. Both Beijing and New Delhi have worked to represent the interests of the Global South and developing countries, such as Nepal, in international forums. Moreover, all three countries have actively participated in global multilateral institutions, including the United Nations.

Nepal's Foreign Policy, 2077-the country's first written foreign policy document-identifies key areas of national interest, including multilateral engagement, nuclear non-proliferation, counterterrorism, human rights promotion, climate change mitigation, safe migration, and a rules-based global order (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). In these areas, Nepal's interests significantly overlap with those of its neighbors.

In this context, this article aims to assess the degree of convergence (or divergence) between Nepal's interests and those of its two neighbors in the key areas outlined in Nepal's Foreign Policy, 2077. The research focuses on eight issue areas: arms control, climate change, democracy, development, global law and order, globalization, human rights, and migration. The analysis evaluates the extent of convergence in these areas based on the voting records of Nepal, India, and China in United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions since 1972. This longitudinal study examines voting patterns across four distinct periods: 1972–1979, 1980–1991, 1992–2008, and 2000–2023.

The article first highlights the significance of the UN in Nepal's foreign policy and justifies the selection of the UNGA as the primary forum for analyzing Nepal's interest alignment with its neighbors. It then explains the research methodology, followed by a comparative analysis of Nepal-India and Nepal-China interest convergence.

National Interest, Multilateral Institutions, the UN, and Nepal

The concept of national interest is central to state behavior in international relations. Pioneering international relations scholar Hans Morgenthau (1948) defines national interest as a state's prioritized objectives in the global arena, encompassing security, economic welfare, and ideological goals. However, there is considerable debate regarding what constitutes national interest.

Realists often equate national interest with power acquisition and security concerns (Waltz, 1979; Walt, 1987). In contrast, liberals emphasize economic growth, stability, and global participation, often facilitated through international institutions (Keohane, 1984). Constructivist scholars like Wendt (1992) argue that national interests evolve through social interactions and the way states perceive their role in global affairs. Similarly, Finnemore (1996) contends that international norms and societal expectations shape state interests.

The domestic political landscape also plays a crucial role in defining national interest. Putnam (1988) highlights how domestic politics interact with international decision-making, while Moravcsik (1997) emphasizes that economic and societal preferences, particularly in democracies, influence national interest through the lobbying efforts of interest groups and political coalitions.

States articulate their national interests through foreign policy strategies (Kissinger, 1994), diplomatic channels such as embassies, consulates, and direct dialogues (Holste, 1995), as well as multilateral diplomatic platforms. Institutions like the United Nations provide states with a forum to advocate for their interests while navigating international pressures and expectations (Keohane & Nye, 1977). Such institutions foster cooperation by enabling states to pursue shared objectives and form coalitions based on common interests (Keohane, *ibid.*).

The United Nations, with 193 member states, serves as a crucial platform for international diplomacy. Despite its limitations, it remains central to the foreign policies of many member states, particularly smaller powers. The UN facilitates diplomatic engagement, promotes international norms, and enables collaborative solutions to global challenges. Member states can articulate their positions on international issues through the General Assembly (UNGA) and the Security Council (UNSC), thereby increasing their visibility and influence on the global stage (Abbott & Snidal, 1998). For smaller states, which often struggle to assert their interests in global affairs, such institutions are particularly valuable as they help level the playing field (Thorhallsson, 2012). Additionally, states use multilateral institutions like the UN to promote their values and norms through international cooperation (Keohane & Nye, *ibid.*).

Institutions such as the UN also shape domestic policies by establishing guidelines through treaties, declarations, and conventions that encourage—or, in some cases, require—states to comply with international standards (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). For many countries, adherence to these norms is a means of securing legitimacy and enhancing their global reputation. By aligning their policies with UN standards, states demonstrate a commitment to global values and signal to the international community that they are responsible actors (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004).

The centrality of the UN in Nepal's foreign policy is clearly evident. Nepal's foreign policy, as outlined in Article 51 of the Constitution of Nepal (2015), states:

To conduct an independent foreign policy based on the Charter of the United Nations, non-alignment, the principles of Panchsheel, international law, and norms of world peace, taking into consideration the overall interest of the nation, while remaining active in safeguarding Nepal's sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, and national interest. (Source: Constitution of Nepal, 2015, Article 51, emphasis added by the author).

The UN has played a crucial role in addressing Nepal's domestic development needs and global concerns. The United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) was instrumental in maintaining peace during Nepal's transition from civil war to democratic politics. Additionally, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework, adopted by the UN, has been particularly significant for Nepal. By aligning its national policies with the SDGs, Nepal has attracted international support and aid in critical developmental areas (UNDP, 2018). Participation in multilateral development frameworks, particularly within the UN, has allowed Nepal to advocate for the rights and interests of least-developed countries (LDCs) and landlocked least-developed countries (LLDCs).

Issue-specific policy platforms within the UN system have also enabled Nepal to advance its global interests. These forums provide Nepal with opportunities to maintain neutrality and non-alignment while advocating for the principles of sovereignty, independence, and non-interference (Acharya, 2017). For instance, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has offered Nepal a vital platform to voice concerns about climate vulnerability and to collaborate with like-minded nations (Bhandari, 2018).

Nepal also contributes to global peace efforts through UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO). With more than 6,000 personnel currently serving worldwide, Nepal is one of the largest contributors to

UN peacekeeping missions (Nepal Army, 2024). This active participation has earned Nepal international recognition and respect.

As one of the principal organs of the UN, the General Assembly (UNGA) provides a platform where all member states can express their national interests on an equal footing under the one-country-one-vote system. Although UNGA resolutions are non-binding, they reflect global aspirations and help shape international norms and state behavior. Member states cast their votes based on their national priorities unless the resolution is adopted unanimously.

Methodology

This study examines the comparative interest convergence between Nepal and its neighbors, China and India, using their voting records in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

UNGA resolutions are adopted in two ways: unanimously and through majority voting. In the first case, all 193 UN member states approve the resolution, making convergence 100% for all states. Since such resolutions offer no comparative insight, they are excluded from this analysis.

For resolutions adopted via majority voting, member states have four voting options: **Yes (Y)**, **No (N)**, **Abstain (A)**, and **Not Voted/Absent (N.V.)**. If a majority of votes cast favor the resolution, it is adopted.

To quantify convergence between Nepal and India/China, the following scoring system is applied:

- **Same (1):** If both Nepal and India/China vote identically in favor (**Y-Y**) or against (**N-N**), a convergence score (S) of **1** is assigned.
- **Opposite (0):** If Nepal and India/China vote oppositely (**Y-N** or **N-Y**), a score of **0** is assigned.
- **Partial (1/3):** If one country votes in favor or against while the other abstains, **S = 1/3**, as abstention may indicate neutrality, indirect support, or opposition.
- **Same but Partial (1/2):** If both countries abstain (**A-A**), convergence in voting behavior is noted, though the intent may differ, warranting an **S = 1/2** score.

To further analyze voting behavior, two additional measures are calculated:

- **Active Participation Rate:** The proportion of resolutions a country actively voted on (Yes/No) out of the total number of resolutions, expressed as a percentage. A higher rate indicates clearer policy positions.
- **Positive Participation Rate:** The proportion of 'Yes' votes relative to the total number of resolutions, reflecting a country's inclination toward affirmative decisions.

Convergence Score (C)

The Convergence Score (C) represents the average Score (S) across all analyzed UNGA resolutions within the It quantifies the degree of voting alignment between Nepal India/China.

$$\frac{\sum_{1}^N S_{ij}}{N}$$

Similarity study period. and

Mathematically, the Convergence Score is calculated as:

$$C = \frac{\sum S_i}{N} = \frac{\sum S_i}{N}$$

Where-

- S_i = Similarity Score for each resolution (as defined in the scoring system).
- N = Total number of resolutions analyzed.

Interest Convergence (C) Calculation

The Interest Convergence Score (C) measures the degree of alignment between Nepal's voting behavior and that of India or China in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

$$C = \frac{\sum S_{ij}}{N} = \frac{\sum S_{ij}}{N}$$

Where-

- i, j = Country pair (Nepal-India or Nepal-China)
- S_{ij} = Similarity Score between countries i and j
- N = Total number of analyzed resolutions

This methodology aligns with similar approaches used by the United States Department of State, which calculates an annual 'voting coincidence' score to report to the U.S. Congress. The U.S. uses this measure to analyze voting patterns in the UNGA and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). For instance, in 2022, the U.S. had the highest voting coincidence (91%) with Israel, followed by Canada and the United Kingdom, while China, Iran, North Korea, and Russia ranked among the lowest (U.S. Department of State, 2023).

Scope of Analysis

This research examines all votes cast by Nepal, China, and India at the UNGA from 1972 to 2023. Only resolutions that were brought to a vote and where Nepal actively participated (i.e., not absent or not voting) are included. The analyzed resolutions cover the following policy areas:

- Arms control
- Climate change

- Democracy
- Development
- Global law and order
- Globalization
- Human rights
- Migration

The voting records are sourced from the UN Resolution Database in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, part of the United Nations General Assembly Documentation (United Nations, 2024).

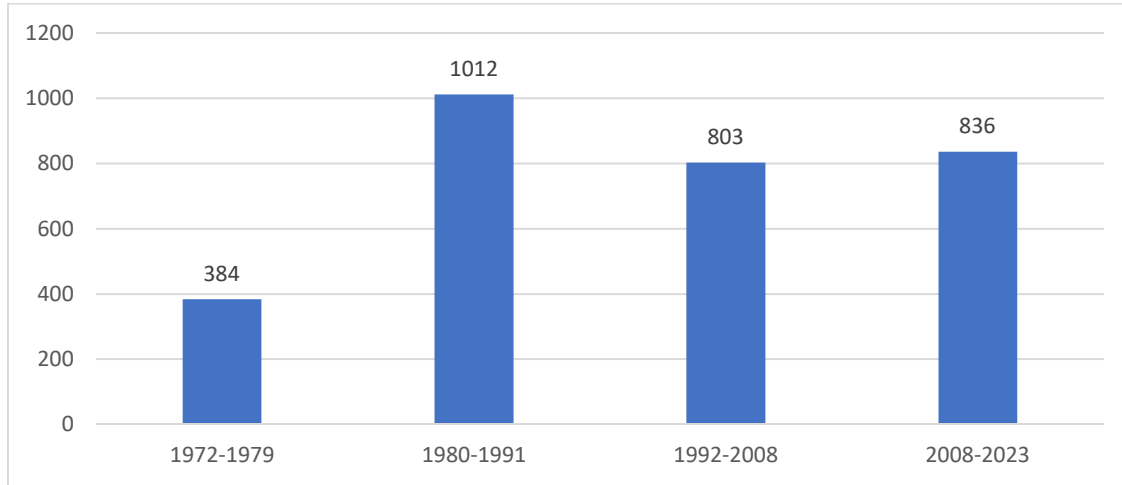
To assess interest convergence in UNGA voting, this study categorizes the analysis into four distinct periods: 1972–1979, 1980–1991, 1992–2008, and 2009–2023. Each of these periods corresponds to significant historical and geopolitical events that have shaped Nepal’s interactions with China and India in global affairs. The first period, from 1972 to 1979, is significant due to the recognition of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as the sole legitimate representative of China at the United Nations. On October 25, 1971, the UNGA passed Resolution 2758 (XXVI), which also secured China’s permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). This period was further shaped by the U.S.-China rapprochement, which culminated in 1979 when the United States formally recognized the PRC as the sole legal government of China, significantly altering South Asian geopolitics.

The second period, from 1980 to 1991, coincides with the final phase of the Cold War, which ended in 1991 with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This ushered in a new global order that also had implications for South Asia. In Nepal, this period was marked by its transition to democracy, bringing significant changes to both its domestic and foreign policy dynamics. The third period, spanning from 1992 to 2008, represents the post-Cold War era characterized by rapid globalization, economic liberalization, and significant shifts in international relations. The global financial crisis of 2008 further accelerated China’s rise as a global power, contributing to the perceived relative decline of Western dominance. This period was also transformative for India-U.S. relations, as the U.S. Congress approved the U.S.-India civil nuclear deal in 2008, strengthening bilateral ties. For Nepal, this period marked a historic transition as the country formally abolished its monarchy and became a federal democratic republic following the end of the Maoist insurgency in 2006.

The final period, from 2009 to 2023, reflects China’s growing influence on the world stage, the deepening strategic partnership between India and the United States, and Nepal’s evolving foreign policy within these shifting power structures. Within these four periods, this study examines voting patterns to assess the extent of Nepal’s interest convergence with China and India on various global issues. The dataset consists of 3,035 UNGA resolutions passed by a vote between 1972 and 2023. These resolutions cover eight key issue areas: arms control, climate change, democracy, development, global law and order, globalization, human rights, and migration. On average, 58.4 resolutions were passed per year within the study period. The distribution of these resolutions across the four analytical periods is presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

Total number of UNGA resolutions adopted through voting, 1973-2023



Source: UNGA resolutions, calculations by the author.

The distribution of resolutions by each category in each period is presented in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2

Number of non-consensus UNGA resolutions by issue area, 1972-2023

	Arms Control	Climate Change	Democracy	Development	Global Law and Order	Globalization	Human Rights	Migration
1972-1979	107	6	52	29	71	25	74	20
1980-1991	349	17	74	47	211	60	183	71
1992-2008	279	2	59	4	161	33	195	70
2009-2023	354	5	22	52	126	42	208	27
Total	1089	30	207	132	569	160	660	188

Source: UNGA resolutions, calculations by the author.

Limitations of the Research

First, the research excludes all resolutions passed by consensus. On average, around three-fourths of the resolutions at the UNGA are passed with consensus. Including those resolutions would not add significant analytical value when comparing the convergence on specific issues between two sets of countries, as all countries supported those resolutions. However, it would mean that the convergence (across all areas and resolutions) is technically higher than the convergence score estimated in this research. For instance, a proportionately larger number of the UNGA resolutions on climate change passed unanimously, meaning the number of resolutions voted on is low. An analysis of resolutions often passed by consensus compared to those brought for a vote at the UNGA would provide meaningful insights, but that is not the focus of this article.

Second, this article is a quantitative study on the convergence of interests. It does not aim to study the reasons behind the convergence (or divergence) of interests, which are critical areas for further study. The limited goal of this research paper is to compare the convergence between Nepal-India and Nepal-China.

Third, the research assumes that each state's voting at the UNGA expresses its priorities. Voeten suggests that voting behavior at the UNGA often mirrors a state's broader diplomatic agenda (Voeten, 2004). Hurd (2002) further argues that states' actual behavior in the global arena might be motivated more by national interests than by commitment to the international norms they voted to affirm. Nevertheless, research has shown other reasons why states vote in specific ways at the UNGA. Alvarez (2001) is more cautious and argues that UNGA voting may not always reflect the state's behavior in the international system. According to Böhmelt and Jönsson, a state's voting behavior reflects its broader geopolitical positioning rather than a genuine commitment to international norms (Böhmelt & Jönsson, 2013). This article does not distinguish whether the convergence reflects a principled agreement on the issues at stake in the UNGA, earnest support with the intention to implement those resolutions, or merely the tactical positioning of each country.

Nepal, China, and India's Participation in the UNGA

The UN is critical to all three states' multilateral engagement. Nepal's rationale for participation is explained in an earlier section. Being the only Asian and developing permanent member of the UNSC has elevated China's global status, allowing it to use the platform to develop a common agenda with like-minded nations, such as within the G-77. India's expressed interest in becoming a permanent member of the UNSC shows that it values the UN platform. For all three countries, the UN provides an important avenue to engage with other states, showcase their global leadership credentials, and attempt to shape global policy and norms according to their interests.

The following table summarizes the participation levels of China, India, and Nepal at the UNGA from 1972 to 2023.

Figure 3

Active and Positive Participation Rates of China, India, and Nepal at the UNGA Voting

		China	India	Nepal
1972-1979	Total resolutions	384	384	384
	Active participation rate	74%	91%	90%
	Positive participation rate	66%	89%	90%
1980-1991	Total resolutions	1012	1012	1012
	Active participation rate	81%	86%	91%
	Positive participation rate	80%	84%	91%
1992-2008	Total resolutions	803	803	803
	Active participation rate	87%	82%	90%
	Positive participation rate	83%	74%	90%
2009-2023	Total resolutions	836	836	836
	Active participation rate	84%	78%	90%
	Positive participation rate	71%	70%	88%

Source: UNGA resolutions, calculations by the author. The percentage has been rounded off to the nearest whole number.

The figure above shows that Nepal has voted actively in 9 out of 10 UNGA resolutions. In 1 of the 10 resolutions, Nepal either abstained or did not vote. Its participation has remained consistent across the four time frames. Nepal has almost always voted in favor, as reflected in its high positive participation rate. During the four periods analyzed in this article, Nepal voted against resolutions only 1, 2, 4, and 14 times in each corresponding phase. This indicates that when Nepal voted actively, it almost always voted in favor of the resolution.

Meanwhile, China was more reticent in the early phase, voting actively in only about 3 out of 4 resolutions. Since the 1980s, China has been relatively more active, with active voting in more than 4 out of 5 resolutions in the following phases. Initially, China only favored 2 out of 3 resolutions in the first phase, which indicated its low positive participation rate. China became more positive as it integrated its economy with the global economy after the 1979 "reform and opening up." This trend continued until 2008. A more confident China, post-2008 global financial crisis, has become more selective in its support of resolutions, as its aversion to the West-promoted "universal values" has grown.

On the contrary, India had the highest active participation rate in the 1970s, voting actively in more than 9 out of 10 resolutions. However, its activeness has declined in each period since, culminating

in just above 3 out of 4 resolutions in the 2009-2023 period. Its positive participation rate also declined from 89% in the first phase to 70% in the last phase. This decline may be a result of New Delhi's dissatisfaction with the UN's failure to reform and grant India the coveted permanent seat at the UNSC (Sidhu, 2017).

Interest Convergence between Nepal-India and Nepal-China

The overall convergence score of Nepal-China at the UNGA voting from 1972 to 2023 was 0.86, marginally eclipsing Nepal-India's score of 0.84 during the same period. This shows remarkable convergence on most policy issues. For comparison, the equivalent convergence score between Nepal and most European countries is between 0.6 and 0.7. The U.S.'s convergence score (which the State Department calculates as the coincidence score) was only 0.28 with India and 0.39 with China in 2022 (though the State Department uses a slightly different method) [US Department of State, *ibid.*].

In terms of overall active and positive participation rates, India and China are comparable, with rates on either side of 80%. Meanwhile, Nepal stands in a league of its own with a score of 90% in both measures.

Figure 5

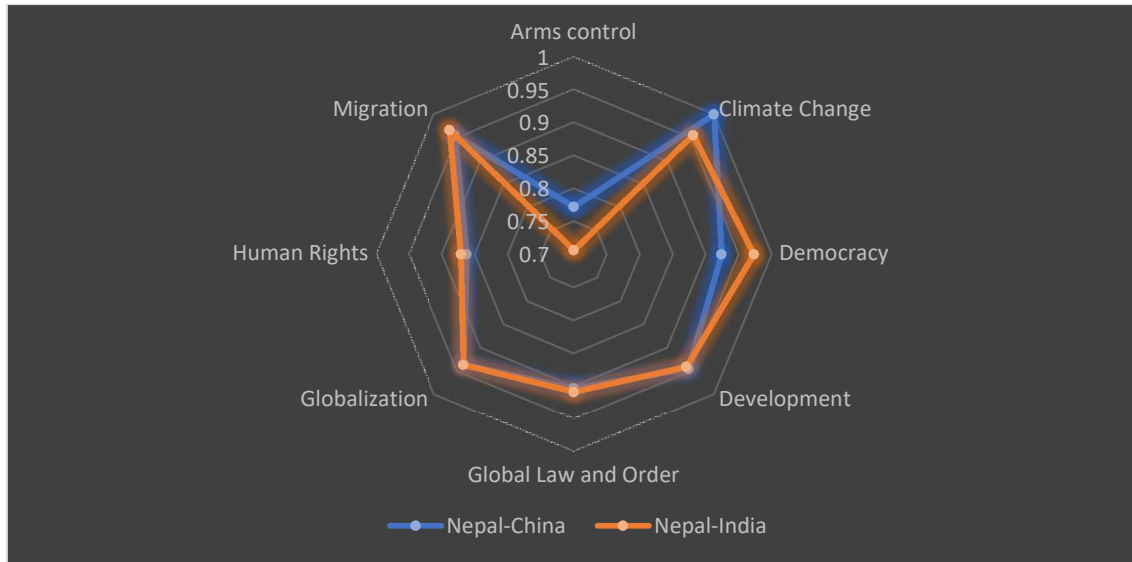
Overall Convergence Score of China and India with Nepal, 1972-2023

	China	India	Nepal
Yes	2325	2374	2723
No	178	158	21
Abs	335	483	245
Not Voted	197	20	46
Total	3035	3035	3035
Overall convergence score	0.86	0.84	n/a
Active Participation rate	82%	83%	90%
Positive participation rate	77%	78%	90%

Source: UNGA Resolutions, calculation by the author. The percentage has been rounded off to the nearest whole number.

Figure 6 below shows the Nepal-India and Nepal-China convergence scores across the eight issue areas. For the eight issue areas, the Nepal-China convergence score ranged between 0.77 (for arms control) and 1 (for climate change). The convergence score for every issue, except for human rights and arms control, was more than 0.9. With India, the convergence score ranged from 0.71 for arms control to 0.97 for migration. As with China, the convergence score for all issues except arms control and human rights exceeded 0.9.

However, the convergence on issues such as arms control, human rights, and democracy varies. Though the convergence on arms control is low, it is still relatively higher for Nepal-China than Nepal-India. Unsurprisingly, Nepal has a better convergence with India on issues related to democracy and democratization. Yet, on the issue of human rights, the convergence between Nepal-China and Nepal-India is almost identical, with scores of 0.86 and 0.87, respectively.



Source: UNGA Resolutions, Calculation by the author.

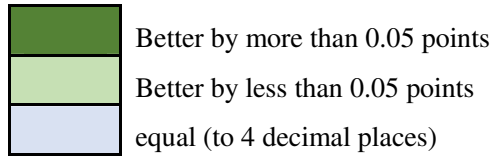
Overall, it may seem that Nepal's voting converges with India and China at about the same rate, particularly in areas such as climate change, human rights, and migration. However, notable differences are observed in other issue areas, such as arms control, development, and global law and order. Figure 7 below shows the convergence score for each period across the eight issue areas, as well as the level of difference between the Nepal-China and Nepal-India convergence scores.

	1972-79		1980-1991		1992-2008		2009-2023		Overall	
	N-C	N-I	N-C	N-I	N-C	N-I	N-C	N-I	N-C	N-I
Arms control	0.67	0.81	0.77	0.76	0.88	0.65	0.71	0.67	0.77	0.71
Climate Change	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.92	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.96
Democracy	0.96	0.96	0.95	0.97	0.87	0.98	0.89	1.00	0.92	0.97
Development	0.92	0.84	1.00	0.95	0.83	0.83	0.92	1.00	0.95	0.94
Global Law and Order	0.82	0.94	0.94	0.89	0.90	0.92	0.88	0.91	0.90	0.91
Globalization	0.91	0.94	0.93	0.94	0.94	0.94	0.96	0.93	0.94	0.94
Human Rights	0.85	0.84	0.88	0.88	0.85	0.85	0.86	0.89	0.86	0.87

Migration	0.87	0.90	0.99	0.99	0.99	0.97	0.83	0.94	0.96	0.97
overall	0.84	0.88	0.88	0.86	0.89	0.82	0.81	0.81	0.86	0.84

N-C: Nepal-China

N-I: Nepal-India



Nepal's voting aligned marginally better with China in the second period. The voting convergence with China increased slightly in the third phase, while it concurrently decreased with India in the same period, resulting in a significant gap between Nepal's convergence

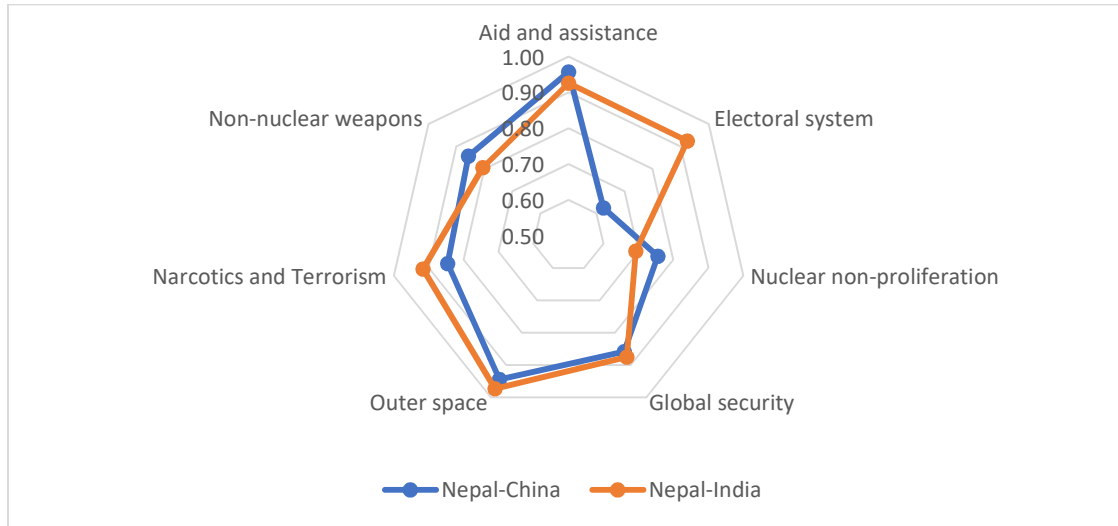
with China and India. During this time, Beijing actively and positively participated in the UNGA (and other multilateral forums) and sought to be seen as a responsible stakeholder in world affairs, without being overly assertive in global forums, as exemplified by Deng Xiaoping's "hide your capabilities, bide your time" dictum. Meanwhile, India was facing global scrutiny regarding its nuclear ambitions, leading to significant divergence in its voting on resolutions related to arms control, especially concerning nuclear weapons. This divergence between India and Nepal on arms control issues has decreased since 2008, after the Indo-US civil nuclear deal.

Interestingly, while China and India are among the most polluting countries, Nepal is one of the most climatically vulnerable countries (International Energy Agency, 2023; IPCC, 2022). However, the global climate change narrative has largely been a struggle between the developing countries of the Global South and the rich, advanced Western nations over how to address global climate change fairly. In this context, China and India have led the Global South and are recognized as part of the developing world, despite being among the largest polluters in absolute terms. Therefore, their alignment with Nepal on climate change is not surprising. Both China and India have argued that although they plan to reduce the production of polluting carbon dioxide, they must balance environmental challenges with development needs (Chen & Yang, 2021; Ghosh, 2022). Being seen as developing countries has also meant that China and India converge significantly with Nepal on global developmental issues. Nepal and China voted more closely on development issues in earlier periods, but since 2009, India and Nepal have had perfect alignment on this issue.

A crucial and expected difference has been regarding democracy. Nepal and India share similar democratic ideals compared to Communist-ruled China. Yet, in the early phases, Nepal's convergence with China on this issue was high. Since the end of the Cold War, Nepal's alignment with China on issues related to democracy and self-governance has declined, while its alignment with India has increased, including perfect convergence since 2009. Similarly, Nepal-India's convergence on human rights surpassed Nepal-China's in the latter half of the analysis period.

Figure 8

Nepal-China and Nepal-India convergence on selected sub-issues, 1972-2023



Selected sub-topics within the eight larger themes present interesting aspects of Nepal-China and Nepal-India convergence. Predictably, Nepal and India align much more closely on issues of electoral politics, with a convergence score of a whopping 0.92, compared to only 0.63 for Nepal-China on the same topic. Similarly, Nepal-India's convergence on narcotics and terrorism, which is 0.07 points higher than Nepal-China, indicates the former sharing a common concern.

Meanwhile, on nuclear non-proliferation, China's and India's stances differ significantly from Nepal's. India was shunned by nuclear powers for a long time, so Nepal's convergence with China was relatively better. However, the score was still 0.69 for Nepal-India and 0.76 for Nepal-China. On issues related to non-nuclear weapons, the convergence was almost 0.1 points higher for both nations compared to nuclear non-proliferation.

Interestingly, Nepal, China, and India had similar voting records and outlooks on global security, with convergence scores above 0.86, despite the latter two neighbors competing on geo-strategic issues in the South Asian region. The convergence suggests that India and China are not locked in a geopolitical zero-sum game, and smaller powers, like Nepal, could leverage this convergence to maintain good relations with both New Delhi and Beijing.

Conclusion

Nepal-India and Nepal-China have high levels of interest convergence, as reflected in their high convergence scores. Based on their voting records, Nepal and its neighbors share common views on development, global security, and order based on international rules and norms. They have significant differences in areas of arms control, as Nepal has stood steadfast against the proliferation

of weapons, including nuclear weapons, while both neighboring countries are major producers, consumers, and customers of weaponry.

The similarity in political culture and systems between Nepal and India is increasingly reflected in their voting behavior, with the two countries voting more closely in the 21st century on issues related to democracy and democratization.

All three nations have almost perfect convergence on climate change. China and India are among the biggest contributors of greenhouse gases (GHGs), while Nepal's contribution to GHGs is negligible. Despite this, all three nations are highly vulnerable to climate change. The almost perfect convergence demonstrates that they agree on the dangers of climate change and the necessity of addressing it. Therefore, there is an opportunity to drive both India and China to implement policies that address climate change and lobby for support from big economies and advanced nations for climate change mitigation measures in the developing world.

The high convergence on issues identified in this article establishes that the popular narrative of India and China always competing for influence in Nepal at the cost of each other is misleading. There are significant areas of interest convergence, including further cooperation in global forums such as the UNGA. This suggests that China and India's engagement in Nepal is not a zero-sum game. The onus is now on Nepal's diplomacy to leverage this convergence to further its own national interests.

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