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Semi-Loyal Actors and Nepal's Democratic Breakdown of 2002

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Abstract

Nepal held three free and fair parliamentary elections, conducted several rounds of peaceful power transfer, and observed partly free civil and political rights after it returned to democracy in 1990. Despite the notable democratic exercises, King Gyanendra terminated Nepal's second electoral democracy in 2002. What led to the democratic breakdown? This article finds that kings in Nepal acted as semi-loyal actors from 1990 to 2002 and then argues that the inability of weak political parties as loyal actors to put semi-loyal actors under check through political pressure motivated King Gyanendra to terminate democracy. Loyal actors became weak due to disunity, unmanaged party factionalism, governmental instability, ethnic exclusion from state structures and corruption.

Keywords: Nepal, Democracy, Democratic Breakdown, Political Actors, Ethnic Exclusion

1. Introduction

Nepal embarked on the second democratic journey in 1990. Nepal first transitioned to democracy on 18 February 1951 by dismantling the family autocracy of the Ranas, which was founded on 18 May 1846 by Jang Bahadur Rana, a junior courtier at the Royal Palace. However, King Mahendra ended Nepal's first democratic journey on 15 February 1960 with the charges that the government undermined the interests of the country, engaged in corruption, paralyzed public administration, disrupted ethnic harmony, and encouraged anti-social elements (Shah, 1967). He then installed the absolute royal regime called Partyless Panchayat, which not only concentrated "power in the monarchy" (Gray, 2015, 204), but also outlawed political parties, and brutally suppressed opposition voices (Kantha, 2010; Parajulee, 2000; Shah, 1990). A movement, also known as the People's Movement I, launched by the Nepali Congress Party (NC) and the United Left Front of five communist parties ended the royal regime and restored democracy to Nepal on 8 April 1990 (Becker, 2015; Bhusal, 1990; Parajulee, 2000).

Democracy broke down in Nepal in 2002 for a second time. Nepal promulgated a constitution in a year after the restoration of democracy in 1990. Constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy were the central characteristics of the constitution (Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1990). Three relatively free and fair elections were held in 1991, 1994 and 1999. Peaceful transfer of power took place several times, which exceeded what Huntington (1991) argues that two peaceful government turnovers may set a democratic system on the path of consolidation. Civil and political rights remained partly free throughout the period (Freedom House, 2024).

This status of civil and political rights is considered normal in a transitional democracy. The indicators clearly demonstrate that Nepal practiced a minimal, electoral, procedural, or formal democracy in its second democratic experiment. However, Nepal's second democratic experiment stopped when King Gyanendra unconstitutionally dismissed the elected government and assumed executive power on 2 October 2002 by charging the government with being incompetent to hold parliamentary elections on time (Shah, 2005). What led to the breakdown of democracy in Nepal in 2002? Specifically, what motivated the King to dismantle democracy in Nepal in 2002? This article seeks to answer these questions by using the political actor model of democratization.

The structural model posits that the chances of a democratic breakdown increase in a society which is poor and lacks political tolerance. Democracy is likely to collapse in a poor society due to the small size of middle-class people (Boix & Stokes, 2003; Lipset, 1959; Przeworski et al., 2000). Middle-class people, who receive "at least secondary education" and rank neither low nor high in a society "in terms of income" (Fukuyama, 2012, p. 54), believe in "secular reformist gradualism" so that they elect "moderate and democratic parties" to preserve democracy (Lipset, 1959, p. 83). Therefore, a democratic breakdown is likely in a poor society due to the higher likelihood of the victory of extreme and authoritarian political parties. The political culture aspect of the structural model of democratization argues that democracy is more likely to break down in a society in which the mass publics do not tolerate opposing views (Almond & Verba, 1963; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Seligson, 2000). Political intolerance generates social unrest and paves the grounds for a democratic breakdown.

The other model of democratization is actor-centric. The political actor model argues that the prospects of democratization lie more with political actors rather than structural conditions (Capoccia, 2005; Diamond et al., 1999; Levitsky & Ziblatt 2018; Linz & Stepan, 1978; Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán, 2013; Schmitter, 2017). More precisely, strength, actions, strategies and choices of political actors such as political parties and leaders determine democratic longevity even in a society that lacks sufficient middle-class people and political tolerance. The success story in dozens of cases from neither rich nor politically tolerant society, including India, Botswana, Mongolia, and Benin is a testimony to the relevance of the actor model to explain democratization. Democratic backsliding, which is the erosion of democratic qualities (Burmeo, 2016; Carothers & Hartnett, 2024; Diamond, 2015; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Walden & Lust, 2018), is occurring in democracies even in developed societies following the election of authoritarian leaders by taking advantage of the inability of political parties to gatekeep them (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). This is another testimony to the continued usefulness of the political actor model in explaining the fate of democracy.

This article uses the political actor model to explain why democracy broke down in Nepal in 2002. In doing so, it follows Linz and Stepan (1978), and classifies political actors as loyal, semi-loyal and disloyal. Linz and Stepan (1978) also argue that semi-loyal actors play the decisive role in the process of a democratic breakdown. The findings suggest that kings in Nepal acted as semi-loyal actors from 1990 to 2002 and that the inability of weak loyal actors to put them under check through political pressure led to Nepal's democratic collapse in 2002.

The rest of the article is organized as follows. The next section classifies Nepali political actors as loyal, semi-loyal and disloyal. The following section explains the argument used in this article. The penultimate section investigates what made Nepali loyal actors weak so that they were unable to put semi-system actors under control through political pressure. The final section concludes by synthesizing the findings.

2. Classification of Political Actors

Linz and Stepan (1978) classify political actors as loyal, disloyal, and semi-loyal.¹ Loyal actors are ideologically committed to democracy so that they never oppose it. Loyal actors attempt to gain a majority of votes either in parliament or in the elections to form a government rather than resorting to any form of violence. Disloyal actors, on the other hand, are deeply committed to non-democratic ideologies, and use violence to change the democratic system. They sometimes participate in democratic elections with an aim of dismantling democracy from within the democratic institutions. Semi-system actors are opportunistic because they agree to abide by the existing

¹ Linz and Stepan use the word "opposition" but using "actors" does not change the meaning fundamentally; it rather covers all loyal actors either in the opposition or in the government.

democratic system despite a non-democratic system being their true ideology. Other main characteristics of semi-loyal actors include “justification of non-legitimate actions, political violence, assassination, conspiracies, failed military coups and unsuccessful revolutionary attempts” (Linz & Stephan, 1978, p. 32).

The Nepali Congress Party (NC) was one of the main loyal actors from 1990 to 2002 for its commitment to democracy. After the breakdown of democracy in 1960, it fought for democracy and led the movement for the restoration of democracy in 1990 (Brown, 1996; Hachhethu, 2002; Joshi & Rose, 1966; Parajulee, 2000; Whelpton, 2005). The party not only formed the government when it gained a majority seats in the House of Representatives, it also honored peaceful transfer of power when it lost the majority. It did not use violence to overthrow the elected government because of its commitment to peaceful transfer of power. While the NC reaffirmed its commitment to democracy through its national conventions of 1992, 1997, and 2002 (Nepali Congress, 1992/2006; 1997/2006; 2002/2006), it again led the democratic movement after the breakdown of democracy in 2002 (Baral, 2023).

The Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist and Leninist (CPN-UML) was another loyal actor from 1990 to 2002. The party was established in 1990 through a merger of the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist and Leninist) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist). The CPN-UML not only participated in the democratic process of the 1990s, but it also accepted democracy ideologically from its fourth convention held in 1993 and reiterated its commitment to democracy in the national conventions held in 1998 and 2003 (Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist and Leninist, 1993, 1998, 2002). The CPN-UML accepted electoral outcomes as well. It formed the government when it became the largest party in 1994 or partnered with other parties to form coalition governments. The CPN-UML also accepted peaceful transfer of power. The party played an exceptional role in the democratic movement of 1990 (Whelpton, 2005), and its role in the movement of 2006 was also praiseworthy (KC, 2008). The CPN-UML, thus, was a system party after 1990 despite being communist.

The other loyal actor after 1990 was the National Democratic Party of Nepal (NDPN). The party was formed by the leaders from the outgoing authoritarian regime. Despite the leaders' prior involvement with the outgoing authoritarian regime, the party continuously demonstrated its commitment to democracy through its national conventions (National Democratic Party of Nepal, 1993, 1998). The party accepted electoral outcomes and peaceful transfer of power. Neither did it use violence to get to power. Although two leaders from the NDPN headed the government formed by King Gyanendra after he took executive power in 2002, there is no evidence that the party and its major leaders were involved in activities against democracy between 1990 and 2002.

The Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-Maoist) was the disloyal actor in Nepal after 1990, as it consistently attempted to do away with democracy until the termination of its insurgency in 2006. The party took part in the parliament in 1991 not to enrich democracy but to expose its 'reactionary characteristics' to the people through the parliament (Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist, 1990). In other words, the CPN-Maoist played “the democratic game with the objective to destroy democracy itself” (Capoccia, 2005, p. 13). At the same time, it secretly prepared an armed insurgency to replace democracy with communism (Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist, 1996). The CPN-Maoist formally started the armed insurgency against democracy in 1996. When King Gyanendra ended democracy in 2002, the party welcomed it and asked the people to support its People's War to establish communism in Nepal, arguing that neither monarchy nor democracy solved the problems of Nepalis (Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist, 2003).

King Birendra was one of the semi-system actors between 1990 and 2002. Although the King tried his best to share executive power with the cabinet during the constitution-making process (Adhikari, 2018), he finally consented to be the head of the state without such power. The role of the king was in line with a parliamentary democracy as in the United Kingdom. However, several instances reveal that he acted as a semi-loyal actor in the 1990s. First, he threatened to take executive power at a meeting on 9 June 1991 with Man Mohan Adhikari, the opposition leader in the House of Representatives (Dangol, 1999). Second, he nominated ten members to the National Assembly after 1991 without the recommendation of the government.² It was against the spirit of the

² The National Assembly was the Upper House of the parliament of Nepal. According to the constitution of Nepal, the king was to nominate

constitution and the norms of a parliamentary system. Third, he did not cooperate with the government to mobilize the army against the Maoist insurgency (Adhikari, 2015; KC, 2024; Riaz & Basu, 2007, 2010). He, in fact, wanted to use the Maoist insurgency as an opportunity to end democracy. However, he could not complete the mission, as he was killed by his own son Crown Prince Dipendra on 1 June 2001.³

King Gyanendra had promised to be the constitutional monarch as provisioned by Nepal's 1990 constitution when he ascended the throne, following the massacre of 1 June 2002 at the Royal Palace.⁴ But his commitment to the democratic system with the constitutional monarchy was opportunistic given his conspiracy against democracy. Following in the footsteps of King Birendra, Gyanendra also wanted to use the Maoist insurgency to end democracy. Therefore, he denied deploying the Nepal Army to rescue 72 police personnel taken hostage by the Maoist guerrillas at Holeri of Rolpa district on 12 July 2001 (Kumar, 2006, 2010). His ambivalent and opportunist commitment to democracy transpired even more clearly when he assumed executive power on 2 October 2002, by terminating the elected government. In this way, King Gyanendra was another semi-loyal actor in Nepal's second democratic experiment.

3. The Argument

Disloyal actors certainly have a role in determining the fate of democracy; however, this article focuses on what Linz and Stepan (1978) claim that semi-system actors act decisively in the process of a democratic breakdown and become the immediate beneficiary of the regime change through assuming executive power. This article further argues that semi-system can do so only when anti-system actors are able to check them through political pressure. System actors assume a key role for the survival of democracy, as they not only have to design appropriate institutions to support the operation of democracy and make a minimum accord among themselves to save democracy amidst the competition for people's vote, but also democratize the undemocratic forces, and prevent undemocratic forces from winning over the loyalty of neutral people (Linz & Stepan, 1978; O'Donnell, 1992). In addition, loyal actors are obliged to work with semi-loyal actors, as they often assume high positions in the state such as the kings, military leadership and even elected officials. Yet, semi-loyal actors are not able to end democracy so long as loyal actors are strong enough to put them under control through political pressure.

The concept of "political pressure" is borrowed from Stepan et al. (2014), who investigate why monarchies and parliamentary democracies co-exist in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Japan. Monarchies in these countries have now converted to parliamentary monarchies and do not pose threats to democracy. However, the conversion has been possible only after political pressure put on them by "societies and parliaments" for a long time (Stepan et al., 2014 p. 38). Thus, the study concludes that monarchies do not embrace democracy voluntarily, but only through political pressure. Stepan and his coauthors deserve praises for the conceptualization of political pressure, as it clearly demonstrates that the inability of society and parliaments motivates semi-loyal actors to eliminate a democratic system. However, the authors fail to see the role of political parties in checking semi-system actors. The operation of a democratic system now is unthinkable without political parties. In fact, well-functioning political parties are the key vehicle of democratization (Maurice, 1954; Schattschneider, 1964) and strong democratic political parties are able to keep semi-loyal actors under check through political pressure and ensure the longevity of a democratic system. This article demonstrates that political parties as loyal actors have the central role to play in putting semi-system actors under check.

ten members to it. Since the king had no executive power, the nomination had to be made on the recommendation of the government. King Birendra nominated ten members to the National Assembly only in 1991 on the recommendation of the government.

³ The Investigation Commission with two members, Chief Justice (Kedar Nath Upadhaya), and Speaker (Tara Nath Rana Bhat) concluded that Crown Prince Birendra killed King Birendra and others. For details, see <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/jun/14/nepal>.

⁴ Dipendra shot himself after killing King Birendra and other members of the royal family. As he was still conscious, he was made new king following the 1990 constitution. Gyanendra was made king only after the death of Dipendra.

4. Political Pressure of Loyal Actors upon Semi-loyal Actors and Nepal's Democratic Breakdown of 2002

Semi-loyal actors can terminate democracy only when weak loyal actors are unable to put them under political pressure. Disunity, unmanaged party factionalism, governmental instability, ethnic exclusion and corruption are likely to make loyal actors weak.

4.1. Disunity of Loyal Actors

The disunity of loyal actors was a central feature of Nepali politics between 1990 and 2002. As the main loyal actors in the period, the NC and the CPN-UML were responsible for such disunity. While the CPN-UML became hostile to the governments of the NC, the governments of the NC failed to gain the confidence of the CPN-UML. As a result, Nepali politics became polarized.

The CPN-UML, which remained the main opposition party in the parliament most of the time between 1990 and 2002, adopted the strategy to oppose the government using parliamentary and non-parliamentary means. After becoming the main opposition in the general elections of 1991, the CPN-UML pledged to play a cooperative role as the main opposition (Upadhyaya, 2002; Whelpton, 2005). However, the party took to the streets to bring down the new government of the NC soon after its formation in 1991 (Upadhyaya, 2002). The CPN-UML not only supported the demands of civil servants for pay increases, but also called several general strikes across the country. In a parliamentary democracy, opposition parties are not expected to criticize a new government in the first hundred days called honeymoon, let alone call general strikes. However, the CPN-UML did not respect this unwritten parliamentary norm, proving that the main opposition party was not serious about offering constructive opposition to the government.

Street protests launched by the CPN-UML after the death of Mandan Bhandari further questioned its constructive role as the main opposition. Madhan Bhandari was the main leader of the CPN-UML and died in an accident in June 1992. The government formed a judicial commission to investigate the accident. The commission concluded that the accident was purely a human error of the driver. But the CPN-UML did not accept the finding and alleged that the accident occurred through the involvement of 'national and international enemies' who wanted to destroy the popular communist movement in Nepal (Communist Party of Nepal- Unified Marxist and Leninist, 1999). The party then took to the streets for months calling for one strike after another. Its leader, Khadga Prasad Oli, even claimed that he had proof of the involvement of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala in the accident and promised to prosecute him when the CPN-UML formed the government in the future (Chamlagai, 2005). It was a false claim, as the governments consisting of the CPN-UML could not prosecute him.

Democracy is a learning process, and political actors should gain maturity over time. The hostile opposition the CPN-UML adopted toward the government between 1991 and 1994 was widely attributed to its lack of experience in the parliamentary practices. As the CPN-UML had participated in the government several times after 1994, it was expected to play a constructive role when it again became the main opposition in 1999. The party neither organized strikes nor stalled the parliament during the government of the NC led by Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, demonstrating that it was adapted to parliamentary democracy. But when Girija Prasad Koirala became Prime Minister, it disrupted the government for 57 days, asking for the resignation of the Prime Minister alleging that he was involved in corruption while leasing aircrafts (Thapa, 2002). It also organized several general strikes. It is common in democracies for opposition parties to ask the elected officials to resign; however, they cannot dictate their departures through excessive parliamentary disruptions and street protests. Such non-parliamentary acts hinder the functioning of parliament and weaken democracy.

While the CPN-UML was the hostile main opposition, most of the governments of the NC formed in the 1990s took tough attitudes toward the CPN-UML and used every opportunity to weaken it. The NC government formed after the general elections of 1991 used the movement of the civil servants to weaken the CPN-UML, as the government sacked the civil servants associated with the CPN-UML (KC, 2008). By defeating the Prime Minister of the interim government, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, and with outstanding oratorical skills, Madan Bhandari had earned the recognition of being the most charismatic leader in the country. Even the Newsweek had called him

the Karl Marx of Nepal (cited in Khadka, 1995). Shellshocked by his death, the CPN-UML asked the government to form a judicial investigation commission under the leadership of a sitting justice of the Supreme Court (Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist and Leninist, 1993). The government, however, formed a commission under a retired justice of the Supreme Court. By rejecting the demand, the government of the NC missed an opportunity to improve the sour relationship it had with the main opposition party since its formation in 1991.

As mentioned above, both Kings Birendra and Gyanendra used the Maoist insurgency to restore the power of the monarchy lost in 1990. The NC knew it well. Yet, the NC did not attempt to seek the support of the CPN-UML to forge a unity among loyal actors to defend democracy from non-loyal actors. The uneven distribution of the land was one of the main reasons behind the rapid expansion of the Maoist insurgency (Joshi & Manson, 2007). The CPN-UML asked the NC to carry out land reforms to distribute land to land poor and landless peasants. The NC was reluctant to do so because it had accommodated “landed elements in order to consolidate anti-communist forces” (Riaz & Basu, 2010, p. 56).

Disunity of loyal actors, thus, was a reality between 1990 and 2002. Both the NC and the CPN-UML were responsible for the disunity. Both Kings used the disunity to weaken democratic institutions. The disunity, in fact, was a factor that weakened loyal actors in the 1990s, and thus contributed to the breakdown of democracy in 2002.

4.2. Unmanaged Party Factionalism

Political parties without factions are not possible. In fact, factions, which are groups or cliques within political parties organized for common goals (Zariski, 1960), are capable of shaping the behavior of their parties (Borz & de Miguel, 2017; Boucek, 2012; Ceron, 2013). Managing factions is essential in the absence of which democracy is likely to delegitimize (Köllner & Basedau, 2005). The inability of political parties to manage factionalism was a factor in delaying democratic consolidation in Portugal and Greece (Magone, 1995). Democracy backslid in India (1975) and Indonesia (1957) and one of the reasons behind the backslide was the failure of the Indian National Congress Party and the Indonesian Nationalist Party to manage factionalism (Tudor & Slater, 2016). Therefore, democratic political parties become weak if they are not able to manage factionalism.

Party factionalism was another characteristic of Nepali politics in the 1990s. The NC, the major loyal actor, remained factionalized since the first general elections held after 1990 (Hachhethu, 2002; Whelpton, 2005). Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, party president and Prime Minister of the interim government, was defeated by Madan Bhandari, the General Secretary of the CPN-UML. As he was able to frame the constitution in less than a year, he was perceived to be the most popular leader in Nepal and his defeat was less expected. One of the reasons behind the defeat was Madan Bhandari who was superbly charismatic with his excellent oratory skills. The other reason was the conspiracy hatched by the faction of the NC associated with its other leader Girija Prasad Koirala. The faction not only secretly campaigned against Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, but also voted for Madan Bhandari (Chamlagai, 2022).

Despite the efforts of the NC leaders to manage the factionalism in the party by unanimously electing Girija Prasad Koirala for the post of Prime Minister, it could not last long. After becoming the Prime Minister, Girija Prasad Koirala totally ignored other leaders to increase his grip on the party by distributing patronage to his supporters. In doing so, he not only reshuffled the cabinet unilaterally, but he also removed ministers associated with Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Ganesh Man Singh (Hachhethu, 2000). Both leaders were senior to Girija Prasad Koirala.

Ganesh Man Singh and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, in fact, were in doubt about the capacity of Girija Prasad Koirala to lead the government, but they accepted him to become Prime Minister out of compulsion. Moreover, both Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Ganesh Man Singh were not happy with the way Koirala was leading the government. So, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai contested the by-election of Kathmandu Constituency 1 held in April 1994. The constituency was vacant due to the death of Madan Bhandari, the General Secretary of the CPN-UML.

As Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala was against his candidacy, he did his best to defeat Bhattarai (Maharjan, 1999). As a result, Bhattarai lost the elections.

The reshuffle of the cabinet and the defeat of Krishna Prasad Bhattarai divided the NC vertically into factions. Therefore, thirty-six parliament members of the NC associated with Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and Ganesh Man Singh did not attend the the parliament when the annual policy of the government was put to vote (Hachhethu, 2000; Maharjan, 1999; Mahat, 2005). The policy was not passed, and the government faced the legitimacy crisis. Prime Minister Koirala was to either step down on moral grounds or dissolve the House to seek a new mandate through fresh elections. He chose the second option and recommended the dissolution of the House of Representatives to King Birendra who accepted the recommendation. Thus, the factional rivalry of the NC led to the collapse of the first House without completing its tenure of five years after restoration of democracy in 1990.

The factionalism in the NC continued even after the elections of 1994 in which the party came second. As mentioned above, the CPN-UML formed a minority government after the mid-term elections of 1994 and the Supreme Court reinstated the House of Representatives dissolved by King Birendra on the recommendation of Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikari, leading to the emergence of coalition politics in Nepal until the next mid-term election of 1999. Sher Bahadur Deupa of the NC headed the first coalition government. But the government collapsed as it failed to demonstrate a majority at a meeting of the House of Representatives due to the absence of two parliamentarians associated with the faction opposed to Sher Bahadur Deupa (Hachhethu, 2000). The NC gained a majority of seats in the House of Representatives in the mid-term elections of 1999 and its leader Krishna Prasad Bhattarai became the Prime Minister. But he stepped down in just seven months due to the non-cooperation of the party president, Girija Prasad Koirala (Hachhethu, 2000; Maharjan, 1999).

The CPN-UML, the other major loyal actors, was also full of factionalism after 1990. The factionalism became intense after the death of its General Secretary, Mandan Bhandari. The parliamentarians associated with the factions led by Chandra Prakash Mainali did not vote for the official candidate of the party in the elections for the National assembly (Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist and Leninist, 1998; Khadka, 1995). The factionalism in the party became even more intense after the fall of its minority government with the removal of Bam Dev Gautam from his position of Deputy General Secretary. Bam Dev Gautam had taken his removal from the position as an offense (Adhikari, 2018). He was, in fact, looking for an opportunity to take revenge for it. The Mahakali Treaty gave him such an opportunity. The treaty was about the allocation of water and electricity from the Mahakali River, which is a border river in the west between Nepal and India. The treaty was initiated by the minority government of the CPN-UML. No leaders of the CPN-UML were against it at its initiation (Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist and Leninist, 1998). After the collapse of the government, Bam Dev Gautam and his faction called it unequal and unpatriotic. When the treaty was put in the parliament for an endorsement in July 1996, the parliamentarians associated with his faction voted against it by violating the whip of the party. The faction broke away from the CPN-UML in April 1998 and formed the Communist Party of Nepal-Marxist and Leninist. As a result of the split, a significant section of cadres and leaders from both parties joined the Maoist party. One of the reasons for the spread of the Maoist insurgency was the split of the CPN-UML (KC, 2008).

Authoritarian successor parties are the parties of the past authoritarian regime or organized by the leaders from the past authoritarian regime (Loxton & Mainwaring, 2018). Some of such parties have contributed to the consolidation of democracy as in Taiwan, Korea, and Malaysia (Chen & Huang, 2018; Slater & Wong, 2018). The National Democratic Party, the only authoritarian successor party of Nepal after 1990, failed to contribute to the consolidation of democracy in Nepal due to its inability to manage factionalism. The party was the key player during the era of the coalition politics of Nepal between the fall of the CPN-UML minority government in 1995 and the 1999 mid-term elections as neither the CPN-UML nor the NC, formed the government without its support.

But the party missed the opportunity due to factionalism and rather became a cause of governmental instability as explained below.

4.3. Governmental Instability

The second episode of democracy in Nepal chronically suffered from the instability of the governments, as there were eleven governments in twelve years (Table 1). The only government that completed its full tenure was the interim government formed in 1990 after the restoration of democracy to write a constitution and conduct the elections for the parliament. Since the CPN-UML government was the minority government, its death just in nine months can be considered natural. As shown below, the falls of the other governments were the result of factionalism within the political parties.

Table 1: Governments between 1990 and 2002

Government	Prime Minister
Interim government, 1990	Krishna Prasad Bhattarai
Nepali Congress, 1991	Girija Prasad Koirala
CPN-UML, 1994	Man Mohan Adhikari
Coalition Government, 1995 (Nepali Congress, Nepal National Democratic Party, Nepal Goodwill Party)	Sher Bahadur Deuba
Coalition Government, 1997 (Nepal National Democratic, Communist Party of Nepal-Marxist and Leninist, Nepal Goodwill Party)	Lokendra Bahadur Chand
Nepali Congress Minority Government, 1998	Girija Prasad Koirala
Coalition Government, 1998 (Nepali Congress, Communist Party of Nepal-Marxist and Leninist, Nepal National Democratic Party, Nepal Goodwill Party)	Girija Prasad Koirala
Coalition Government 1999 (Nepali Congress, Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist and Leninist, Nepal National Democratic Party, Nepal Goodwill Party)	Girija Prasad Koirala
Nepali Congress, 1999	Krishna Prasad Koirala
Nepali Congress, 2000	Girija Prasad Koirala
Nepali Congress, 2001	Sher Bahadur Deuba

Source: Shimkhada, 2017

While peaceful transfer of power is indicative of good health of democratization (Huntington, 1991), frequent changes of government pose a challenge to the existence of democracy itself (Diksin et al., 2005; Powell, 1981). Governmental instability hinders policy implementation (Buber, 1998; Fortunato & Loftis, 2018). People can excuse even poor performance and stay loyal to the democratic system so long as they find “democracy working democratically” (Diamond et al., 1999, p. 5). However, frequent changes of government purely motivated by power grabs not only lead to the loss of popular trust in politicians and the democratic system, but also overshadows good performance done in the democratic periods. Therefore, governmental instability is likely to make loyal actors weak.

Nepal’s performance indicators, including development and social safety nets, improved significantly after the restoration of democracy in 1990. Compared to the 1980s during the royal regime, gross domestic product, road networks, population with access to electricity and drinking water, health service, life expectancy, and alleviation of poverty scored better in the 1990s (Mahat, 2005). With regard to social safety nets, the elderly and widowers were granted pensions. Furthermore, the Dalits (untouchables) got allowance for studies. Yet, there was very little opposition from the citizens when King Gyanendra suspended democracy in October 2002 (Whelton, 2005). It shows that people had lost trust in loyal actors.

4.4. Ethnic Exclusion

Ethnic exclusion occurs when certain ethnic groups continuously monopolize political power through their exclusive representation in state structures, (Kymlicka, 1996; Lawoti, 2005; Young, 2000). Permanently excluded groups from the state power become alienated from the system and resort to violence and strife, leading to the instability of democracy. Therefore, inclusive institutions such as proportional electoral systems are required to avoid permanent winners and losers along ethnic lines (Lijphart, 1977, 1999).

The constitution of 1990 formally declared Nepal as a multi-cultural society, which was a drastic departure from the past (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 2008) and a positive direction toward the pluralist national building (Gellner, 2008). However, non-Khas groups were severely underrepresented within various state bodies, including the government and parliament between 1990 and 2002. All the governments formed from 1990 to 2002 were predominated by the Khas-Arya group (Hachhethu, 2023; Lawoti, 2005; Neupane, 1999; Parajulee, 2010; Shrestha, 2017; Simkhada, 2017).⁵ Nepal held three elections for the House of Representatives (Lower House) in 1991, 1994, and 1999 on the basis of the first-past-the-post electoral system. The representation of the non-Khas Arya groups in the House of Representatives was very low in proportion to their population (Hachhethu, 2023; Lawoti, 2005; Neupane, 1999; Shrestha, 2017; Simkhada, 2017). According to the constitution of Nepal of 1990, members of the House of Representatives elected the members of the National assembly in 1991, 1994, and 1999 using the single transferable vote rule of the proportional representation electoral system. Despite a slightly better performance as compared to the House of Representatives, the representation of non-Khas Arya Groups in the National Assembly was still low (Shimkhada 2017).

After the takeover in October 2002, King Gyanendra included ethnic leaders in the government. Yet, there is no evidence that both Kings, Birendra and Gyanendra, used ethnic exclusion to dismantle democracy. However, the CPN-Maoist, the disloyal actor, used ethnic exclusion to become a political force to be reckoned with (Chamlagai, 2022; Subba, 2006). In this sense, it can be argued that the ethnic exclusion was one of the factors that made loyal actors weak and could not put political pressure on semi-system actors.

4.5. Corruption

While launching the democratic movement of 1990, democratic leaders had promised to root out corruption nurtured by the royal regime between 1960 and 1990 (Baral, 1993; Kumar, 1999). The promise, however, did not materialize when they came to power. Instead, Nepal became increasingly corrupt. According to World Governance Indicators, its score on control of corruption declined from -0.64 to -0.36 in this period.⁶

Corruption data from World Governance Indicators are the opinions from experts, citizens, and entrepreneurs. Given it, one may argue that perception data are less reliable. But in the 1990s, real corruption cases were pervasive. Putting aside bureaucrats, democratic leaders themselves were found to be involved in the corruption as the Supreme Court indicted Khum Bahadur Khadka, Govinda Raj Joshi, and Jaya Prakash Gupta of the NC who were Ministers after 1990. Girija Prasad Koirala, who became Prime Minister thrice after the restoration of democracy, suffered from corruption scandals all through the 1990s (Thapa, 2002). The other two leaders, who patronized corruption in the 1990s, were Sher Bahadur Deupa of the Nepali Congress and Bam Dev Gautam of the CPN-UML (Thapa, 2002).

Corruption, which is “the exercise of public power for private gains” (World Governance Indicators, 2024), benefits individuals but weakens the democratic system (Bermeo, 2016; Diamond, 2015). People do not trust politicians who are involved in corruption. The loss of people’s trust makes them weak. Worst of all, non-democratic

⁵ The ethnic groups include Khas Arya, indigenous ethnicities, Madheshis and Dalits. For details, see the 2021 CENSUS National Report at <https://censusnepal.cbs.gov.np/results/downloads/caste-ethnicity>.

⁶ The control of corruption index ranges from -2.5 to 2.5, from least to most. A lower score indicates a higher level of corruption. For details, see <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/>.

actors are certain to use corruption to tarnish the democratic system itself. As mentioned above, corruption was pervasive throughout Nepal's second democratic experiment and the political leadership themselves were involved in it. While terminating democracy in 2002 and during the royal regime, King Gyanendra cited corruption as a reason behind the royal takeover (Shah, 2005).

5. Concluding Remarks

King Birendra acted as a semi-loyal actor after 1990 and did his best to disrupt democracy before he was assassinated in 2001. Following Birendra's footprints, King Gyanendra stood against democracy. In fact, he was looking for an appropriate opportunity to strike down democracy. The failure of the government to hold the parliamentary elections at the stipulated time gave him such an opportunity. Therefore, he unconstitutionally assumed executive power on 2 October 2002. The case of Nepal, thus, provides support to what Linz and Stepan (1978) claim that semi-system actors play a decisive role in the process of a democratic breakdown and become the immediate beneficiary of the regime change.

Behind the actions of the King was the inability of weak loyal actors to put him under check through political pressure. Nepali loyal actors became weak because of their disunity, unmanaged party factionalism, governmental instability, ethnic exclusion, and pervasive corruption. Of the indicators that made loyal actors weak in the 1990s, party factionalism was the most significant. As mentioned above, Nepal witnessed governmental instability throughout the 1990s. The instability was the product of the inability of system actors to manage factionalism. Governmental instability led to the loss of democratic institutions in several ways. First, the performance of the government was undermined. Second, absolute monarchy rather than democracy was seen to be the engine of stability and development. Third, democratic political leaders were denigrated as power grabbers and political entrepreneurs. After the restoration of democracy, Nepali democratic actors promulgated a constitution and held the first parliamentary elections in a year. However, they could not maintain unity afterwards. The disunity among loyal actors strongly factored into dismantling Nepal's democratic breakdown in 2002 as well.

Nepal has performed historic democratic exercises since its third democratic transition. The exercises include settlement of the Maoist insurgency, promulgation of the constitution through the constituent assembly, inclusive policies and mechanisms, several peaceful power transfers, and administration of two free and fair parliamentary elections. Most importantly, Nepal has done away with the monarchy to ensure the longevity of democracy. Yet, Nepal's third democratic experiment is less likely to endure so long as the existing low level of economic standards of Nepali people persists. Two unconstitutional dissolutions of the House of Representatives and extreme governmental instability after 2008 further indicate that democratic stability in Nepal is still under question.

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