



State of Democracy in Nepal

Key Findings of the Second Round Survey 2007

The Nepali team of the State of Democracy in South Asia network—in collaboration with International IDEA—has completed the second round of the national citizens' survey on the State of Democracy in Nepal. The first Nepal Democracy Survey was conducted in August-September 2004 as part of a regional initiative to carry out a baseline evaluation of the democratic enterprise in five South Asian countries. In the second survey, the researchers chose the same sample areas and respondents as in 2004. The survey field work was carried out from 28 March-27 April 2007, in 162 polling stations (23 urban and 139 rural areas) spreading over 41 parliamentary constituencies and 40 districts. The survey was conducted by interviewing a nationwide sample of 4,089 respondents.

Sampling Method

The reliability of a national citizens' survey is generally assessed by the *sampling method* used in the study as well as by the level of *representativity* of the sample areas and respondents *vis-à-vis* the national characteristics. The Nepal Democracy Survey was based on probability, proportionality, three-phase sampling and the systematic sampling method.

- In the first phase, 41 of 205 parliamentary constituencies (20 per cent) were selected.
- In the second phase, 4 polling centers were selected from each sample constituency (41 x 4 = 164 polling centers).
- In the third phase, respondents were sampled proportionately based on the size of the voter population in the sample polling stations.¹

¹ Since this survey used the voter list updated in 2002 and respondent list prepared during the first survey round, people who belonged to the age group of 18-21 at the time of the second survey are not in the original respondents list. They constitute 15 per cent of the voting age population, according to 2001 census. So a different sample frame was designed to include them. 15 per cent of respondents coming from this age group were selected randomly. For this, the fifth household after every seventh respondent from the original list was selected. From the selected household, the interview was done with the person of the 18-21 age group whose name came first in alphabetical order.

**Distribution of the sample areas (parliamentary constituencies):
Ecological Zones and Development Regions**

Ecological Zone	Total	Sample
Mountain	22 (10.7%)	3 (7.3%)
Hill	95 (46.3%)	20 (48.8%)
Tarai	88 (42.9%)	18 (43.9%)
Development Regions		
Eastern	49 (23.9%)	10 (24.4%)
Central	65 (31.7%)	13 (31.7%)
Western	43 (21.0%)	9 (22.0%)
Mid-Western	30 (14.6%)	6 (14.6%)
Far-Western	18 (8.8%)	3 (7.3%)
	205 (100%)	41 (100%)

Characteristics of the respondents (in percentage): Sex, Area, Education and Caste/Ethnicity

Sex	National	Sample	Caste/Ethnicity	National	Sample
Male	49.9	47.2	Hill caste	30.9	33.5
Female	50.1	52.8	Hill ethnic	28.6	30.2
Area			Hill dalit	8.9	8.4
Rural	86.0	86.6	Madhesh caste	13.7	12.1
Urban	14.0	13.4	Madhesh ethnic	8.7	9.6
Education			Madhesh dalit	3.9	3.6
Illiterate	45.9	39.6	Muslim	4.3	3.6
Educated	54.1	61.4	Unidentified	1.0	0.1

Sample areas and respondents are more or less representative of the characteristics of the national population.

Context

The April 2006 popular uprising (*Janandolan II*) was a watershed in Nepal's democratization process which started in 1990 with the mass movement (*Janandolan I*) but was derailed by the royal takeovers of October 2002 and February 2005. The *Janandolan II* was broader in scope than the *Janandolan I*, because it aimed to bring comprehensive changes to the social, economic and political spheres of the country through the restructuring of the state.

After *Janandolan II*, opinion makers, intellectuals, media persons and social activists started to use terms such as inclusive democracy, federalism, republic, secular state. No wonder the ordinary people of Nepal also started talking in such terms, without necessarily understanding their academic and technical meanings.

The 18 May (2006) Declaration - considered to be a Nepali *Magna Carta*- accelerated the recent changes. Parliament promised to hold constituent assembly elections and intends to reduce the king to a non-entity (and the prime minister is now performing the symbolic activities formerly assigned to the head of state). The future of the nearly 250 year old Shah Dynasty remains one of the key contentious issues among political parties.

The exit of the monarchy from the state affairs coincided with the entry of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), a former insurgent group, into the government. Negotiations between the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and the CPN (Maoist) resulted in several important decisions including the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in November 2006, the promulgation of the Interim Constitution in January 2007 and the formations of the interim legislature and the interim government in March-April 2007, both of which included representatives of the CPN (Maoist). People are now keeping their eye on how well the CPN (Maoist) is able transform itself from an insurgent group into a competitive political party.

The situation was looking fine after the Maoist combatants were put in cantonments and surrendered their arms after the signing of the Peace Agreement. But then the ethnic movements, which were slowly gaining momentum after the *Janaandolan I*, suddenly flared up and put all the other important issues on the backburner. The *madbesh* uprising compelled the government/parliament to make a categorical commitment to federal arrangements. In addition, dalits and women took to the streets seeking a constitutional remedy to ensure their inclusion.

In this context, what do Nepalis across the country think about democracy and other pertinent issues: the future of the monarchy, transformation of the CPN (Maoist), arms management, credibility of political parties and leadership, exclusion and inclusion, agendas of state restructuring etc.?

Ten Key Findings

1. Opinion swinging in favor of a republic dramatically and exponentially

59 per cent of the respondents were in favor of a republic while 41 per cent were in favour of the monarchy. During the first survey (2004), the idea of a republic was favoured by only 15 per cent. Since then public opinion has changed greatly in favour of a republic.

Analysts say that the royal massacre of June 2001, the royal takeovers of October 2002 and February 2005, and the poor image of the present king and the crown prince were instrumental in the rapid decline in popularity of the institution of monarchy in Nepal. It seems that these are but secondary reasons because the latest survey revealed that more than half of the respondents who supported a republic rejected the monarchy on the grounds of principle. They chose the option: 'I want a government ruled by the people', in replying to the question '*If you are in favor of a republic, which one is the most important reason for the abolition of the monarchy?*' 24 per cent respondents supported a republic because they suspected the king was behind the royal massacre. Nine per cent cited the poor image of the king and the crown prince as the reason for their wanting to abolish the monarchy.

Those who wanted the continuation of the two and a half century long institution of monarchy argued that monarchy is 'a symbol of national unity and nationalism' (31 per cent), 'the protector of Hindu religion' (34.5 per cent) and it 'ensures continuity and stability of the country' (35 per cent). Even though people are divided on the future of the monarchy, opinion has swung in favor of a republic by 44 per cent over the last three years.

2. The majority of Nepali voters doesn't understand the meaning of Constituent Assembly but have a sense of what it means

When asked what a Constituent Assembly (CA) is, 59 per cent said, 'I don't know.' Among those who gave definite answers to this question, 81 per cent understood it as the process of 'making a new constitution'; 13 per cent associated it with their desire for 'peace and conflict resolution'; and another 13 per cent equated it with a 'political institution'.

Some analysts say that it was logical to postpone the CA elections, originally scheduled for June 2007, as most Nepali voters still didn't understand what the CA is all about. But others argue that the announcement of the election date would have forced the political parties and other stakeholders to go to the people to educate them about the principles and process of the CA. Even though 59 per cent said they didn't know about the CA, they appeared to have at least some sense of it because 85 per cent of the total respondents shared their expectations when they were asked, in a different context, what they expected from the elections of the CA. On the list of people's expectations of the CA, 'governance with peace and security' came on top with 62 per cent while 'economic development' and 'framing a new political structure' came second and third with 37 and 14 per cent respectively.

3. People think that it is possible to hold the CA elections fairly—and they put their trust in the international community

Some analysts see the security situation as being critical to the postponement of the CA elections. But the majority of the respondents didn't agree with this. 38 per cent said that it is not possible to hold fair and peaceful elections. On the other hand, 62 per cent were confident that it is possible to hold peaceful and fair elections. Besides, 48 per cent said they felt safer now when asked, 'Do you feel more safe now than a year before?' Only 10 per cent said that they felt 'less safe'. 42.5 per cent, on the other hand, said that the safety situation was more or less the same. Comparatively, the security situation has improved significantly as those who felt 'more safe' during the first survey was only 12 per cent. Only 26 per cent said that political institutions (i.e. Maoist, political parties, police/army/administration, armed rebellions,) and protests in the form of rally/bandh/chakkajam pose security threats to them. 56 and 30 per cent of respondents respectively gave credit to either the 'eight party alliance' or the 'resolution of the Maoist conflict' for creating a safer environment. 84 per cent affirmed that supervision by the international community would ensure free and peaceful elections. Around 82 per cent said that the international community plays a significant role in the process of democratic transition in Nepal. Respondents put India at the top of the list of countries (or union of countries) that is likely to play the most important role in the transition. India is followed by the UN, the USA, China, the European Union, Japan and the UK on the list.

4. People trust the CPN (Maoist) Party to be serious about transformation—trust in other parties is even higher

The CPN (Maoist) Party put down its arms and entered into the peace agreement agreeing to the subsequent power sharing arrangement and publicly affirmed its commitment to multiparty democracy. 67 per cent of respondents thought (11 strongly and 56 not so strongly) that the CPN (Maoist) would stick to its changed ideological position. This change in people's perception about the CPN (Maoist) is substantiated by the findings of some other questions. For instance, only 7 per cent considered the CPN (Maoist) to be a source of insecurity; whereas 42 per cent had considered the CPN (Maoist) as a threat to security in the first survey. Also, respondents thought that the CPN (Maoist) sympathizes with the cause of excluded groups the most. 74 and 61 per cent of respondents

respectively agreed with the CPN (Maoist)'s proposals for the 'integration of the Nepal Army and the People's Liberation Army' and 'land ceiling'.

Nearly half of the respondents (49 per cent) had trust in the CPN (Maoist) and 62 per cent in its leader Prachanda (a combined figure of 17 per cent 'a great deal of trust' and 45 per cent 'somewhat trust'). But 57 per cent trusted the political parties (more than they did the CPN (Maoist)). 76 per cent (25 per cent 'a great deal of trust' and 51 per cent 'somewhat trust) had trust in G. P. Koirala; 64 per cent (13 per cent 'a great deal of trust' and 51 per cent 'somewhat trust') trusted UML leader Madhav Kumar Nepal.

The survey indicates that the CPN (Maoist) is an emerging force but it is also the most significant misfit among the political forces of Nepal. Out of 4,089 respondents, 934 identified themselves as being 'close to a political party'. However 15 per cent of those who were close to a party said they were closer to the CPN (Maoist). 34 and 32 per cent associated themselves with the NC and the UML respectively.

It is too early to predict election results as 52 per cent respondents said either 'I will decide later' or 'I will not tell right now' to the question '*Which party will you vote in the upcoming CA elections?*' Some had however already decided who they wanted to vote for. 13 per cent said they would vote for the NC while 11 per cent said that they would vote for the UML and CPN (Maoist) each.

5. People are in favor of affirmative action for the excluded groups and have a sense of who the excluded and included groups are.

Both analysts and the general public sympathize with excluded groups in society. In general, the hill high castes (Brahmin, Chhetri and Thakuri) are considered to be included, and others—like dalits, janajatis, madheshis, Muslims and women—are considered to be excluded. The respondents were asked to categorize both of these groups to see to what extent this generalization applies in the local context. 88 per cent ticked the hill high castes as the included group and an overwhelming majority of them identified janajatis, madheshis, Muslims, dalits and women as excluded groups.

The meaning and scope of inclusion and exclusion were elaborated through open ended questions like '*Who would you say are the excluded and included groups in Nepal?*' 68 per cent, not surprisingly, said that the hill high castes were the included group. Others who belonged to this group were: rich people (15 per cent), hill dwellers (13 per cent) and political elites (11 per cent). On the list of excluded groups, dalits came first (63 per cent), followed by hill ethnic groups (20 per cent), poor people (13 per cent), madheshis (11 per cent) and women (11 per cent). Factors like class, religion and language play a marginal role when it comes to exclusion, since those surveyed perceived that 'tradition' and 'caste hierarchy' played a greater role in creating the problems of exclusion. It seems that democratization has made people aware of the negative impacts of exclusion. A majority of respondents (55 per cent) felt the conditions of the excluded groups were improving. (Only 35 per cent had said that their conditions were improving in the first survey.) Inclusion is an ongoing project and an overwhelming number of respondents (91 per cent) agreed that special provisions need to be made for the excluded groups in the new constitution.

6. Assertion of ethnic and regional identity is rising

Nepal witnessed the rise of ethnicity particularly after the *Janaandolan I*. In the post-*Janaandolan II* period, the issue of ethnicity became more prominent with madheshis of the Tarai and janajatis coming into the streets demanding amendments to the interim constitution. This issue needs to be addressed urgently. Analysts are debating whether janajati and madheshi demands are mass based or elitist. Do janajati and madheshi movements bring positive changes in the lives of the concerned groups? The emerging trend of ethnic and regional assertion is quite clear. In the first survey, 59 per cent identified themselves by national identity, but in the second survey only 43 per cent did so. But the number of people identifying themselves with ethnic/regional identity is increasing (23 per cent in the first survey; 25.5 per cent in the second). Obviously, identification by both the hill high caste and hill ethnic groups with national identity is higher, but to different degrees—the hill high caste 64 per cent and the hill ethnic groups 40 per cent. There is, however, a clear division between the people of hill origin and Tarai origin. Madheshis belonging to different groups (caste, ethnic, dalit and Muslim) gave more weight to ethnic/regional identity (30 per cent in aggregate of all these four groups) than national identity (18 per cent in aggregate). The story was just opposite three years before; the reversal indicating the source and impact of the recent madheshi uprisings. What are the implications of the rising trend of ethnic and regional identity politics on national integration of Nepal? There is a reason to be optimistic that the rise of ethnicity and regionalism won't contribute to the disintegration of the country. An overwhelming majority of respondents (more than 90 per cent) belonging to different groups, including madheshis, said that they were 'proud' to belong to their own community and also 'proud' to be Nepali. In short, the present survey reveals that though people are proud about belonging to a certain community and also to be Nepali, they are increasingly asserting their ethnic/regional identity and will continue do so in the future.

7. Pahadi (hill origin) and Madheshi (plain/Tarai origin) divided on the agenda of 'state restructuring'

Today's dominating issue is the restructuring of the Nepali state. People want to change the fundamental characteristics of the Nepali state (from Hindu to a secular state, from unitary to a federal state and from uni-language to bi/multi language policy). What do the common people think about the content of the 'state restructuring' project? The present survey discovers a paradox. For instance, public opinion in favor of federalism—a core issue of state restructuring project—has increased by 6 per cent in the last three years. But a clear majority of respondents (58 per cent) still wanted to retain Nepal as a unitary state. Similarly, opinion favoring a 'secular state' has increased from 34 per cent in 2004 to 39 per cent in 2007. But 61 per cent respondents of the present survey still wanted Nepal to be a Hindu state. However, a majority of the respondents (52 per cent) were in for bi/multi lingual policy. People of hill origin supported the *status quo* when it comes to language policy and the nature of government whereas a majority of madheshis wanted bi/multi lingual policy and federalism. A majority of caste and dalit groups of both hill and Tarai opted for a Hindu state while hill ethnic groups and Muslims sought a secular state.

8. Political awareness and participation are rising

People's awareness and participation have largely been conditioned by recent political processes and developments. The early 1990s strongly politicized society along party lines and brought many people into the political arena. The political participation of the people went down considerably because of the cumulative effects of poor governance by political parties, the CPN (Maoist)'s wide-scale insurgency and the royal takeovers. The success of the *Janandolan II* has created an environment for the people to be politically active again. The media has always helped to increase political awareness and participation. More and more people are now being exposed to the media. In 2004, only 36 per

cent of respondents said that they listened to the radio (daily or occasionally), but in three years this increased to 76 per cent. Similarly, the percentage of people/respondents who watched television for news went up by 22 per cent (from 23 to 45). People's participation in political discussions (regularly or occasionally) increased by 10 per cent (from 34 per cent in 2004 to 46 per cent in 2007). Participation in 'protests/rallies/movements' also increased from 15 per cent to 29 per cent. People's involvement in different organizations, i.e. NGOs, ethnic/regional organizations, women organizations and political parties, also rose from aggregate of 6 per cent in 2004 to some 23 per cent in 2007.

9. Civic education and economic development are the key challenges of transition

The present survey reveals a paradox: the common people are aware about recent political developments (i.e. *Janandolan II*, arms management, madhesh uprising etc.) but they don't quite understand pressing issues. A substantial number of respondents (44 per cent) said they 'don't know' what democracy is and similarly 59 per cent said the same thing about the CA. This suggests that the political parties and other stakeholders are not giving adequate attention to civic education.

Economic hardship (with 70 per cent) tops the list of the major challenges/problems facing the country, but the transitional government has continuously neglected economic development. Some of the problems that citizens pointed out are: weak government/administration (30 per cent), uncivil protest/agitation (24 per cent) and political conflict and instability (22 per cent). These provide insights into how we can link democratic transition with people's voices.

People expect that the successful *Janaandolan II* and the upcoming elections of the CA will bring peace and political reconciliation, help form a stable and effective government and usher in economic development.

10. Democracy is expanding and deepening in Nepal

The rise of political awareness and participation as discussed above indicate that democracy in Nepal is expanding and deepening. Democracy is understood in popular terms as 'rule by the people and rule for the people' (38 per cent) and it is equated with 'equality/liberty/freedom' (32 per cent) and defined by the principle of 'fundamental/human rights' (25 per cent). More than two-thirds respondents (67 percent) said that 'democracy is preferable to any other kind of government'. Above all, 92 percent respondents said 'democracy is suitable to Nepal'. Though the intention and capacity of elites were doubted, trust in the state and political institutions (in aggregate 64 per cent trust in eight organizations: government, Maoists, political parties, bureaucracy, police, army, court and election commission) was admirable.