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Democracy and Ethnicity in Nepal

Following a successful conflict transformation of a decade long Maoist insurgency (1996-2006) with the promulgation of the new constitution in September 2015, Nepal has entered into the verge of new conflict, an ethnic conflict. Ethnicity has recently become a critical issue in responding to the fact that the political structure of Nepal has not yet been framed in conformity to the social diversity of the country.

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Nepal is a country of social diversity² – home to three broad ethnic groups: (1) *Khas Arya* (an aggregated identity of Hill high castes Brahmin, Chhetri, Thakuri and Sanyasi); (2) *Madheshi* (a collective identity of people of non-hill origin or people originally settled in the plateau areas in

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² Based on ethnic, regional, cultural, religious and linguistic cleavages, 26.6 million Nepali population can be broadly classified into four major groups:

(1) Region: Pahadis (68%) and Madheshis (32%);

(2) Ethnicity: Hindu castes of both Hill and Tarai (59%, including 13% Dalit) and non-Hindus (by origin) or Janajati of both Hill and Tarai (37%), and Musalman (4%);

(3) Language: people speaking Nepali as mother tongue (49%) and minority linguistic groups, i.e Mathali, Bhojpuri, Abadhi, Magar, Tharu, Tamang, Newar, Gurung, Rai, Limbu etc.(51%); and

(4) Religion: Hindus (81%) and minority religious groups – Buddhist, Muslim, Kirat, Christian and others (19%).

Southern part of the country, i.e. flatland Hindu castes, Muslim and plains tribes) and *Hill Janajati* (a common identity of Hill Indigenous Peoples or IPs), each constituting approximately one-third of the population of the country. The core principles of governing the Nepali society are hierarchy and stratification,³ positioning the Hindu high castes at the top, the Janajati in the middle and the Dalit at the bottom. Horizontally, the old Civil Code 1854 placed the Hill castes of different ranking as superior to the plains castes of the same grade. Over the time, because of the assimilative model of nation-building adopted by the Nepali state since its unification in 1768 – through providing protection to one language (Nepali), one social group (Khas Arya), and one religion (Hindu)⁴ – the social hierarchy got expanded into the economic sphere and the political arena. Periodical surveys on Human Development Index, Poverty Index, and Governance Index (representation in the elected and non-elected bodies of the state) reveal a persistence of unequal position between the Khas Arya as a dominant group and the Janajati and Madheshi as excluded groups.⁵ The central thrust of ethnic movements in Nepal is to shape democracy in a way which could contribute to end the longstanding traditional system of hierarchy and inequality among the social groups of Nepal.⁶

At the outset, the trajectory of democracy in Nepal – introduced in 1951, reinstated in 1990 and revitalized since 2006 – has a direct bearing in shaping nature, content and course of ethnic movements in the country. The core content of democracy was understood differently in different historical juncture. At time of its first experiment (1951-1960), democracy was primarily understood as a struggle against the century-long Rana oligarchy (1846-1951) and a system that assured equal right to all citizens of the country and also guaranteed the citizens' right to freedom to speak without fear.⁷ In these days, voices of Janajati and Madheshi, like that of other marginalized groups, i.e. women and Dalit, were aired for the first time in the history of Nepal. But ethnic activism vanished along with the end of the first experiment of democracy, following a royal coup in December 1960. During the partyless Panchayat system under authoritarian monarch

3 See, Hoffer (2004); Bista (1991); Sharma (2004).

4 For details on interface between state and ethnicity see some outstanding literatures, i.e. Caplan (1970); Gaige (1975); Gellner et al. (1997); Gurung (1998); Lawati (2005); Neupane (2000); Riaz and Basu (2010); Hangen (2007).

5 For details see, NESAC (1998); DFID and World Bank (2006); UNDP (2009; 2014); Gurung et al. (2014); CBS (2005; 2011).

6 See, Bhattachan (2008); Lawati (2010); Hachhethu and Gellner (2010).

7 For details on politics under the First Experiment of Democracy, see Gupta (1964); Joshi and Rose (1966); Chauhan (1971).

(1960-1990)⁸, ethnic politics were banned, as well as party politics. During the struggle against the partyless Panchayat system, led by banned political parties, ethnic contents were subdued to a broader mission, restoration of multiparty system.

Democracy in its second experiment (1990-2002) was mainly considered as an achievement that reinstated multiparty system along with parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy.⁹ Since the post-1990 political structure was framed in line with conventional liberal democracy, it denied to recognize ethnic groups as bearer of collective rights. Nevertheless, taking into advantage the fact that democracy provided a space for ethnic mobilization, the period since the second experiment of democracy was observed as a period of ethnicity building.¹⁰ The ethnic issue has gained a new weight, height and strength as a consequence of a number of new developments, i.e. emergence of independent ethnic mobilization under the banner of Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN, an umbrella organization of over 50 different Janajati groups). A decade-long Maoist insurgency (1960-2006) which blended class ideology and ethnic aspiration, contributed further to boost up ethnic agendas. Furthermore Nepal has become part of a global ethnic upsurge with the UN declaration of 1994-2003 as a decade of indigenous people. The first and second Madheshi uprisings of 2007 and 2008, which landed successfully in broadening the contents of state restructuring, i.e. federalism and proportional representation, were continuum of ethnic upsurge in Nepal. Democracy was derailed for short time with the resumption of executive monarchy (2002-2006).

The third experiment of democracy (since 2006), unlike its limited scope in past as a system that provided citizens' rights of equality and freedom (1951-1960) and a system of parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy (1990-2002), is equated with a mission of state restructuring with new attributes of republic, secularism, inclusion and federalism.¹¹ In the first phase of transition following a successful people uprising in 2006 (popularly known as Jana Andolan II), and subsequently during the negotiation on constitution making by the first Constituent Assembly or CA-I (2008-2012), the possibility of transforming ethnic identity into

⁸ To understand politics during the panchayat system, see Baral (1977; 1983); Shah (1982).

⁹ For details on politics under the Second Experiment of Democracy, see Hutt (1994); Hoftun et al. (1999); Borre et al. (1994); Kumar (1995; 2000); Hachhethu (2002; 2015); Brown (1996).

¹⁰ For details see, Gellner (2007); Dahal (2014).

¹¹ See, Hachhethu (2009); Mishra and Gurung (2012); Lawati and Hangen (2013); Jha (2014); Karki and Edrisinha (2014); Gelneer et al (2016); Adhikari et al (2016).

political constituency was high. The buzz words in those days were creating a ‘New Nepal’ with attributes such as identity-based federalism, rights to self-determination, priority rights of First Nations on natural resources in areas of their historical land, inclusive electoral design, recognition of customary law. But the CA-II, formed as a consequence of the change in the power equation in favour of traditional political parties which followed November 2013 general elections, largely looked backed to the system of conventional liberal democracy which characterized the 1990 constitution, though it partly adopted some inclusive contents. The new constitution, promulgated in September 2015, curtails the space of all the three key aspects of inclusive democracy, i.e. identity-based federalism, electoral system based on inclusive representation, and reservation/affirmative action. Consequently, social diversity is rapidly leading to an ethnic divide between those who assert the recognition of ethnic identity as political resource and those who try to *de-ethnicize* the political structure of the country.

Against the background of persistence of hierarchy and inequality among the ethnic groups of Nepal, ethnic assertion for maximizing the inclusive contents, the state’ resistance against the voices for radical change and transformation, this paper attempts to explore public opinion and perception, captured by Nepal Democracy Survey (NDS), on two critical issues on democracy and ethnicity.¹²

Democracy: Understanding and Evaluation

In contrast to the rise of ethnicity at the macro level, which seeks a balance between individual rights and collective rights, and has its own pet vocabularies to express democracy (i.e. identity, inclusion, preferential rights, affirmative action etc.), the conventional notion of liberalism is what

¹² Nepal Democracy Surveys – a part of larger study on State of Democracy in South Asia – were conducted periodically in 2004, 2007 and 2013. It adopted three-stage probability sampling in following ways: stage 1: systematic sampling of 41 parliamentary constituencies from the total 205 parliamentary constituencies; stage 2: systematic selection of 4 polling stations from each sample parliamentary constituency (total 164 polling station); and stage 3: selection of respondents, 100 from each set of 4 polling station (total 4,100), from the updated voter list prepared by the Election Commission of Nepal. Besides, the first Nepal Democracy Survey 2004 added other methodological tools, i.e. dialogue, case study, commissioning papers. Furthermore, the second survey conducted in 2007 included surveyed with members of parliament and personal interview with stakeholders. The third one, conducted in 2013, was confined to citizen survey.

first comes to mind, when ordinary people think about democracy. In a series of surveys run in 2004, 2007 and 2013, interviewees were asked the following open question: “What does democracy mean for you?”

Based on the results of the surveys, respondents seem to mainly identify democracy with “freedom and equality” (2004), “institution and process” (2007), and “principles” (2013).¹³ In fact, just an insignificant number of respondents defined the concept of democracy with the terminologies commonly used by Nepali ethnic activists (i.e. federalism, secularism, inclusion, pluralism, multiculturalism etc.). As a consequence, it can be concluded that ethnicity might be an additional but not essential component of the Nepali concept of democracy.

Table 1: Understanding Democracy, 2004, 2007, 2013

Multiple responses converted into 100%

	2004	2007	2013
Freedom and equality	37	23	26
Institution and process	21	25	7
Principles	15	27	45
Development	2	4	5
Justice	1	3	4
Peace and order	3	10	4
Basic needs	3	1	3
State restructuring	1	2	2
Negative appraisal	8	4	5

Source: Hachhethu (2004; 2013); Hachhethu et al (2008).

Expected democracy is found different from perceived democracy. Indeed, class matters more than ethnicity on aspect of expected democracy. Responses on economic opportunity scored more than other parts of expected democracy (i.e. political freedom, democratic process, and accountability). Disaggregated data, however, shows somehow overlapping between class and ethnicity since

¹³ This is an aggregated number of interrelated responses, i.e. multiparty system, periodical election, rule of law, separation of power, independent judiciary, fundamental rights, etc.

respondents belonging to Madheshi and Janajati, like other excluded groups (i.e. Dalit, women, poor and rural dwellers), stressed more on economic opportunity while expressing their expectation from democracy.

Table 2: Expectation from Democracy, 2004 and 2013

Multiple responses converted into 100%

	2004	2013
Economic opportunity	51	34
Political freedom	6	28
Democratic process	12	14
Accountability	31	24

Source: Hachhethu (2004; 2013).

Outcome of democracy seemed a balance of both positive and negative developments. Overall, the results show a number of phenomena, common to all the three periods considered. These are: the formation of a social capital; growing people's awareness; increasing level of association between people and formal organizations such as CBOs, NGOs, ethnic organizations and political parties; rising citizens' participation in both political and civil activities; and emergence of social movements, focusing on ethnicity, women and Dalit issues.

Among the negative aspects ascribed to democracy, the 2004 survey highlighted the following: the royal takeover against the system of constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy that occurred in 2002; state of insecurity created by Maoist insurgency; political instability caused by frequent upheavals in the government leadership; rampant corruption.

The second round of NDS, conducted in 2007, found that people, following the restoration of democracy with the successful mass uprising of April 2006, lived in a frenzied aftermath. Following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the state and the former Maoist insurgents in November 2006, people were hoping to return to peace and stability; also, they were expecting the democratic state to advance, with the development of new institutions such as a republican form of government, secularism, inclusive representation, and federalism. It was a unique period that people's faith on democracy noticed highest.

However, hope turned into frustration soon mainly because the first CA-I ended in May 2012 without giving birth to a new constitution. The third round of NDS run in 2013 reflected people's frustration in more than one way. For instance, respondents declared that the state of affairs was 'undemocratic', and that the state of the national economy was 'bad'; in addition to this, the prolonged process of transition was seen as cause of political instability and economic anguish. The percentage of respondents who were dissatisfied with democracy's performance was strikingly higher, compared to that of respondents supporting other views. In contrast to the findings of the NDS run in 2007, both the first and the third survey present a remarkable majority of surveyed respondents dissatisfied with the way democracy worked in Nepal

Table 3: Evaluation on the way democracy work, 2004, 2007, 2013

Data in %

	2004	2007	2013
Very satisfied	4	10	8
Satisfied	39	63	36
<i>Sub total</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>73</i>	<i>44</i>
Not satisfied	36	19	31
Not at all satisfied	20	8	25
<i>Sub total</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>56</i>

Source: Hachhethu (2004; 2013); Hachhethu et al (2008).

Political parties were mainly blamed for administrating democracy differently from people's expectation. The third NDS run in 2013 highlighted 'bad' performance by political parties. Indeed, political parties' leaders were accused of indulging in power games rather than sincerely striving to make the new constitution. Consequently, the level of trust towards political parties fell considerably.

Table 4: Trust to political parties

Data in %

	2004	2007	2013
Great extent	14	9	7
Somewhat	39	48	29
<i>Sub total</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>57</i>	<i>36</i>
No	25	22	30
Not at all trust	22	21	34
<i>Sub total</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>64</i>

Source: Hachhethu (2004; 2013); Hachhethu et al (2008).

Changes in the role of political parties caused people's support to decline. In the 2004 survey, while standing in the opposition against the executive monarchy, political parties were trusted by a majority of 53% of the respondents. Such percentage grew up to 57% in the 2007 survey, as a result of the mass uprising occurred in April 2006, and of people's belief in parties' potential in bringing about a political change. Hence their role changed as key actors of the third experiment of democracy. In 2013 the level of trust in political parties fell considerably down to 36%, as a consequence of their failure in restoring democracy in both economic and political terms. The failure of the CA-I to produce a new constitution was particularly determinant in this sense.

Along with the decline of trust in political parties, people's support to democracy noticeably decreased as well, from 67% in 2007 to 53% in 2013. Similarly, the percentage of people who adopted an indifferent position between democracy and dictatorship raised up to 36%, a relative increase of 8% vis-à-vis the results of the 2004 and 2007 surveys. The most striking point, observed in all the surveys, is that the Janajati and Madheshi, like other disadvantaged groups (such as women, illiterate and less educated, poor and rural dwellers) were always more likely – when compared to the average respondent-- to adopt an indifferent position with regard to the choice between democracy and dictatorship.

Table 5: Choice of Regime, 2004, 2007 and 2013

Data in %

	2004	2007	2013
Democracy at all times	62	67	53
Authoritarian government in some circumstances	10	6	11
Does not matter	28	28	36

Source: Hachhethu (2004; 2013); Hachhethu et al (2008).

Nevertheless, there is reason to be optimistic on the future of democracy in Nepal. The number of people who said to prefer democracy over dictatorship decreased; nevertheless, the majority of the respondents still declare to put their trust in democracy, even after its performance had been disappointing in critical areas such as constitution making and economic policy. Although unhappy with the present state of democracy in the country, nearly two-thirds of the 2013 survey interviewees hoped to have a better democracy in future. On top of that, a system ruled by elected representatives was approved by almost all surveyed respondents.

Table 6: Approval to a system of rule by people's elected representatives, 2004 and 2013

Data in %

	2004	2013
Strongly approved	64	65
Somewhat approved	30	29
<i>Sub total</i>	<i>94</i>	<i>94</i>
Disapproved	4	3
Strongly disapproved	2	3
<i>Sub total</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>6</i>

Source: Hachhethu (2004; 2013).

Rise of Ethnicity and State Restructuring Agenda

Despite the criticism surrounding Nepali democracy, its contribution for ethnic awareness and empowerment has been absolutely relevant. Before moving to analyse the relation between democracy and ethnicity, let us first look into its definitional problem.

In the Nepali academic and political discourse, terms like *ethnicity* (except when referred to the Khas Arya), *minority* (used with reference to non-dominant groups) and *exclusion*, are all used interchangeably when dealing with the state of affairs of the Janajati and Madheshi, and, to some extent, the Dalit as well. But, as revealed by the 2004 survey, people's understanding of the concepts of *majority* and *minority* went beyond the ethnic paradigm. Most of the respondents obviously defined majority and minority in purely numerical terms; however, and in addition to this, a definition of majority/minority expressed in terms of relative categories was also often proposed, e.g.: dominating masculinity vis-à-vis discriminated women; superior high castes vis-à-vis inferior Dalits; privileged Khas Arya vis-à-vis disadvantaged Janajati; dominated Pahadi vis-à-vis deprived Madheshi; rich and poor; urban dwellers and rural inhabitants. When posed the same question using different terminologies – included (dominant group) and excluded groups (non-dominant) – in subsequent surveys of 2007 and 2013, an overlap of ethnicity and exclusion came up sharply. The Khas Arya was equated as included and those perceived as excluded groups are Janajati, Madheshi, and Dalit.

Table 7: Who are excluded? 2007 and 2013

Data in %

	2007	2013
Hill high caste	10	11
Janajati	73	52
Madheshi	84	42
Dalit	94	64

Source: Hachhethu (2013); Hachhethu et al (2008).

The survey results confirm the classical identification of Janajatis, Madheshis and Dalits as excluded groups; in addition to this, however, results also show that the perception of such groups as the excluded groups dropped considerably from the 2007 survey to the 2013 survey. In particular, it decreased from 73% to 52% for the Janajatis, from 84% to 42% for the Madheshis, and from 94% to 64% for the Dalits. The 2004 survey already pinpointed two ways of improving their position, being one ethnic mobilization (supported by 90% of the respondents) and the other a recommendation for affirmative actions (by 89% respondents).

Following the success of Jana-Andolan-II in April 2006, some visible and tangible steps were taken. The state policy of reservation of 45% seats in employment for the marginalized group (including women) has paved the way to the excluded ethnic group to get in civil service and other areas of public domain. Simultaneously, Nepal adopted a mixed parallel electoral system with greater weight to proportional representation (PR, 56%) than First-Past-The-Post (FPTP, 40%) for the election of CA; the remaining 4% of the total 601 seats was filled up by Cabinet nomination. The PR seats were distributed on the basis of ethnic representation, in proportion to the population size of each ethnic group. Consequently, in contrast to the domination of the Khas Arya occurred in parliaments constituted during the 1990s, the representation of the Janajati, the Madheshi and the Dalit in the CA increased considerably. The inclusion/exclusion debate in Nepal has heavily been weighted to headcount of persons with ethnic backgrounds in the state apparatus, i.e. political parties, parliament, cabinet, court, bureaucracy, etc. Perhaps this is the reason why Nepali people observed an improvement in the conditions of the mentioned excluded groups.

Table 8: Condition of excluded groups in comparison to the past: 2004, 2007 and 2013

Data in %

	2004	2007	2013
Improved	35	55	72
Deteriorated	24	6	7
Remained the same	41	39	20

Source: Hachhethu (2004; 2013); Hachhethu et al (2008).

Respondents who saw an improvement in the conditions of the excluded groups increased substantially, from 35% in 2004 to 55% in 2007, and to 72% in 2013.

The state's inclusive measures, i.e. affirmative actions and ethnic-based distribution of PR seats in particular, resulted as a consequence of the rise of ethnic movement. Ethnic upsurge is manifested in response to the following question: how do you want to introduce yourself?

Table 9: Preferred identity: 2004, 2007 and 2013

Data in %

	National identity			Ethnic identity			Mixed identity		
	2004	2007	2013	2004	2007	2013	2004	2007	2013
<i>Citizens</i>	59	43	57	22	25	32	19	31	10
Khas Arya	69	64	78	14	12	16	17	24	5
Hill Janajati	47	40	50	32	34	37	21	36	12
Madheshi	52	19	33	27	45	50	21	36	16

Source: Hachhethu (2004; 2013); Hachhethu et al (2008).

Table 9 reveals a number of interesting elements. Firstly, in all of the three surveys, the absolute or the relative majority of respondents preferred national identity over ethnic identity and mixed identity (a combination of both national and ethnic identity). Those preferring national identity represented the 59% in 2004, declined to 43% in 2007, but regained up to 57% in 2013. The reason behind such swings could be explained by the context that existed at the time when the survey was run. In the aftermath of the popular uprising occurred in April 2006 the Janajati and the Madheshi movements reached their highest strength. The first Madheshi uprising of January 2007 was remarkable since it resulted in the constitution to recognize ethnicity as political constituency in the electoral system and in the design of federal structure, creation of province as sub-national structure in particular. Such ethnic upsurge got reflected, at the survey level, in the decline of “national identity” by 16%, from 59% in 2004 to 43% in 2007. But why it raised again up to 57% at time of the 2013 survey? Once again, the context provides an explanation for the figures. In time period in question, the political climate witnessed a dramatic shift: the possibility of ethnic violence existing on the eve of the expiry of the CA-I in May 2012, faded away and left room to a

relaxed situation, which was the context in which the field work of the 2013 survey was carried out.

Disaggregated data reveals that the dominant Khas Arya prefer national identity irrespective of the changed context. The Madheshi instead identified themselves with ethnic identity rather than national identity, except in the case of 2004. The Janjatis were split, with largest numbers in favour of national identity (but lesser compared to the case of the Khas Arya) and substantial numbers of ethnic identity.

Two, preference for ethnic identity had increased constantly, from 22% in 2004 to 25% in 2007, and 32% in 2013. Among the ethnic groups of Nepal, The Madheshi was the most constant one in choosing *ethnicity* as the main criteria of self-identification; the figure of their adherence to ethnic identity climbed up respectively from 27% to 45% to 50% in the three surveys. Similarly the figure of the Janajati's preference for ethnic identity moved up steadily from 32% in 2004 to 34% in 2007 up to 37% in 2013.

Three, surveyed citizens preferring a mixed identity increased from 19% in 2004 to 31% in 2007 (coinciding with the decline of respondents' preference for national identity); but later the percentage referring to this category decreased substantially to a mere 10% in 2013. Such drastic change indicates a sharp (and potentially dangerous) polarization within the society between those supporting national identity and those advocating ethnic identity.

A point worth noting is that among Nepali citizens, particularly among the Janajati and the Madheshi, preference towards ethnic identity vis-à-vis national and mixed identity has been increasing steadily. This shows that in Nepal ethnic aspiration -- that aims to reform the Nepali state in a federal, inclusive, republican and secular sense -- is gaining momentum.

Table 10: Support to state restructuring agendas: 2004, 2007 and 2013

Data in %

	Federalism			Secularism			Multilanguage policy			Republic		
	2004	2007	2013	2004	2007	2013	2004	2007	2013	2004	2007	2013
<i>Citizens</i>	32	42	74	33	39	84	48	52	88	15	59	86
Khas Arya	31	33	66	26	15	78	27	34	82	14	62	87
Hill Janajati	35	41	75	20	31	81	55	46	92	18	60	87
Madheshi	40	54	82	39	35	81	71	86	88	17	52	78

Source: Hachhethu (2004; 2013); Hachhethu et al (2008).

Throughout the decade covered by the three surveys, people's support to the reform agenda for a "New Nepal" has been constantly increasing. This occurred along with corresponding transformations taking place within the wider political scenario of the country. For instance, when the first NDS was conducted in 2004, Nepal was an executive monarchy. In addition to this, the Maoists' call for republic had been rejected by political parties, although these had been put aside by the then King Gyanendra. Support to republic at that time scored only 15% in the 2004 survey. Over time, the situation changed as Maoist and political parties built an alliance which produced the unprecedented Jana Andolan II. Such a mass uprising proved to be a republican movement. Not only it neutralized the powers of the monarch, the Interim Constitution 2007 vested the power to the CA to declare the country as republic by a simple majority of the CA members. This was the context within which the second NDS, in which a majority of 59% respondents opted for republic, was conducted. The situation further changed after monarchy was overthrown in May 2008 by the CA, and opinions favourable to republic consequently raised to 86% in the 2013 survey.

Similarly, Nepal was declared a secular state in the aftermath of the successful April 2006 Jana Andolan II. Before that, opinions favouring secularism represented the 33%, in the 2004 survey. In the following survey conducted in 2007, supporters of secularism grew marginally by 6%, accounting for a total 39%. But later, as in the case of republican issues, favour for secularism increased up to 84% during the 2013 Citizen Survey.

The government constituted after the 2006 Jana Andolan II declared it would have adopted a multi-language policy. Even before that, public opinion favouring multi-language policy was recorded as 48% in the 2004 survey. In the 2007 survey, it increased only of 4 percentage points. But later, in the 2013 survey, support for multi-language policy reached its maximum, equal to 88% of the respondents.

In the pretext of the January-February 2007 Madheshi uprising, federalism was proclaimed as one of the agendas of restructuring the Nepali state. Before that, people seeking a federal solution for Nepal were recorded to be only 32% of the participants in the 2004 survey. By the time the second democracy survey was conducted in 2007, supporters of federalism scored an additional 10%. Support to the federal system suddenly increased up to 74% in the 2013 survey.

Ethnic-based disaggregated data shows disproportionality of support on state restructuring agendas, particularly on federal question, among the ethnic groups of Nepal. Support to transformation of Nepal from a unitary to a federal state by the Khas Arya had always been lower than that of the Janajati and Madheshi. The Khas Arya's support to federalism reached to 66% in 2013 but adherence of Janajati and Madheshi to this system is much higher, 75% and 82% respectively. Such ethnic-based disproportionality was found on some other, if not all, questions associated with federal design that entertained by the 2013 survey.

There is largely a convergence of opinion among the different ethnic groups of Nepal on 'perceived federalism' and 'aspirant federalism'. At the same time, they differ about the role of ethnic identity as a criteria for designing the federal organization of the country. For instance, only 19% of the respondents prescribed ethnic names for the provinces. But disaggregated data organized on an ethnic-based show a considerable difference: while the 34% of the Janajati group recommended ethnic names, followed by 30% of the Madheshi, but only 5% of the Khas Arya did so.

Table 11: Understanding Federalism: 2013

Multiple responses converted into 100%

	Principles	Identity	Development	Create problem	Others
All respondents	41	23	19	15	3
Khas Arya	40	22	17	19	3
Hill Janajati	43	22	21	11	3
Madheshi	41	29	15	11	3

Source: Hachhethu (2013).

The majority of the survey respondents (41%), composed of individuals proceeding from the various ethnic groups, said to identify federalism primarily with federal principles.¹⁴ But, 23% of the respondents declared to understand federalism in terms of ethnic identity, while 19% of them equated federalism with economic development. A considerable percentage of the interviewees defined federalism as a system that produces undesirable results (i.e. social tension, national disintegration etc.).

There is gap between people understanding of federalism and their aspiration from federalism. As stated above, federalism is identified/defined in terms of ethnic identity rather than economic development. But when respondents expressed their aspiration with regard to federalism, the answer category ‘expedition of economic development’ scored as high as 34%, leaving all the other expectations far behind. Federalism was acknowledged as an instrument to promote ethnic identity only by 6% of the respondents.

Furthermore, respondents of the 2013 survey preferred *economic development* over *management of social diversity*. Actually federalism has the potential necessary to serve both management of social diversity and development goals, and the two elements should be seen as complementary to each other. Instead, the two elements are kept separate in the discourse on federalism in Nepal. Therefore, the 2013 survey featured a question asking the respondents to choose between *management of social diversity* and *development*.

¹⁴ It includes answers received with terms like, self-rule and shared rule, two or more than two levels of government, creation of provinces, division of power between centre and province, a system that place government close to people, decentralization/devolution, sharing of natural resources, division of national territory, unity in diversity, etc.

Table 12: Federalism for... and contribute to ...:2013

Data in %

	For		Contribute to	
	Management of social diversity	Economic development	National integration	National disintegration
All respondents	42	58	69	31
Hill high caste	31	69	61	39
Janajati	47	53	74	26
Madheshi	53	47	77	23

Source: Hachhethu (2013).

Over two-fifths of the total respondents identified the transformation of Nepal into a federal state as a solution for managing the social diversity of the country. On the other hand, nearly three-fifths of the respondents advocated federalism as an instrument to pursue economic development. Overall, the gap in the score recorded consists in 16 percentage points in favour of economic development.

Caste/ethnic-based disaggregated data, however, show a different picture. Most of the respondents from the Madheshi group attributed greater relevance to ‘management of social diversity’ (53%) than ‘economic development’ (47%). Nevertheless, Janajatis mainly opted for ‘economic development’ (53%); however Janajatis’ share of the recorded support to ‘management of social diversity’ (47%) is much higher than the one provided by the Khas Arya (31%).

The statement “Federalism in Nepal is aimed to national integration” was endorsed by 69% of the respondents in the 2013 survey. But nearly one third of them had a completely different opinion, believing it may jeopardize the national integration of the country. The Khas Arya (39%) was the group that, in this sense, expressed concern with regard to the federal solution far above the national average of the respondents (31%). Respondents from the Janajati and Madheshi groups supported such an idea at a much lower scale (26% and 23% respectively).

Conclusion

The promulgation of a new constitution in Nepal on 20 September 2015 triggered an ethnic conflict. A nine month-long Madheshi agitation (June 2015- February 2016) was a glaring expression of discontent towards the new statute. Also the Janajati – although their anti-statute movement has not become as effective as the Madheshi – have also disenchantment with the new constitution. Therefore, social diversity is now resulting into an ethnic divide. So social diversity is now heading towards an ethnic divide. NDS carried out before the promulgation of new constitution hinted a potential dangerous ethnic conflict in Nepal if the new statute fail to address aspiration of excluded groups, such as Madheshi and Janajati.

The findings of the NDS have spread light about what form of democracy would be more suitable for Nepal, a country of social diversity where ethnic groups live in inequality and in a situation of asymmetric distribution of power between the dominant Khas Arya and the excluded Janajati and Madheshi. Irrespective to dissatisfaction the way democracy has been handled, adherence to a universal principle of democracy (i.e. rule by elected representatives) across the ethnic groups is distinct. Indeed, democracy has served to thriving ethnic awareness and aspiration. One of the indicators of ethnic rise is that particularly those belonging to the Janajati and Madheshi people preferred ‘ethnicity-based identity’ in all the surveys. The rise of ethnicity has direct bearing in pushing forward the reform agenda for the Nepali state, i.e. federalism, secularism, republic, multi-language policy, proportional representation, reservation, affirmative action, etc. Indeed, the Janajati and Madheshi are far ahead than the Khas Arya in expressing their support to such an inclusive agenda. However, the new constitution of Nepal largely fails to satisfy ethnic aspirations to political space.

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