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CENTRALIZING POLITICS AND THE GROWTH OF THE MAOIST INSURGENCY IN NEPAL¹

This article argues that the over centralization of politics in Nepal contributed in the initiation and the growth of the Maoist insurgency. The centralized unitary state structure, hegemonic executive, powerful political parties and dominant leaders, and ethnic centralization led to extreme power concentration in the cabinet, which was controlled by a small group of political elite hailing from the dominant group (male Chettri-Bahun). The over centralization of state power and centralizing political culture fostered widespread power abuse and corruption, undermined accountability, caused neglect and underdevelopment of periphery, alienated minorities, and squandered opportunities to form coalition among mainstream political forces to resist the Maoists. The repression and exclusion pushed the Maoists into the insurgency, the absence of state agencies in the rural regions made it easy for the Maoist to operate, and the alienated people provided the support base for growth of the insurgency. This article argues that the over centralization of politics in Nepal contributed in the initiation and the growth of the Maoist insurgency. The centralized unitary state structure, hegemonic executive, powerful political parties and dominant leaders, and ethnic centralization led to extreme power concentration in the cabinet, which was controlled by a small group of political elite hailing from the dominant group (male Chettri-Bahun). The over centralization of state power and centralizing political culture fostered widespread power abuse and corruption, undermined accountability, caused neglect and underdevelopment of periphery, alienated minorities, and squandered opportunities to form coalition among mainstream political forces to resist the Maoists. The repression and exclusion pushed the Maoists into the insurgency, the absence of state agencies in the rural regions made it easy for the Maoist to operate, and the alienated people provided the support base for growth of the insurgency.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars and other commentators have cited a variety of explanations for the Maoist insurrection in Nepal, from ideological and personal power struggles within Marxist political parties, to failed development programs, to structural inequities favoring high castes (Lawoti 2001c; Shah 2001; Bhurtel 2002; Maharjan 2000; Neupane 2001; Shneiderman and Turin 2004; Gellner 2003; Bhattachan 2000a; de Sales 2003; Thapa 2001). No one, however, has yet analyzed how the formal and informal structure of the Nepali State has affected the growth of the insurgency. To fill this void and add to our understanding of Nepal's fratricidal war, I will explore the structure of the state and factors that affect it in this paper.

First, I describe the ways the constitution of the "democracy" period (1990-2002) created a highly centralized state, with power concentrated in the executive (cabinet) and a small group of political actors. Second, I show how this centralized politics led to

power abuse, rampant corruption, non-performance of duties by government workers, and alienation of the citizenry—all of which contributed to the growth of the insurgency. Third, I will suggest how events might have evolved differently if the Nepali State and politics had been organized to give power to district and village-level government agents (or to regions by establishing a federal state) and to locally elected officials who were accountable to the public. I conclude with my central argument that excessive centralization without democratic accountability leads to failed government, alienated citizens, and ultimately, to violent protest.

The period I discuss is the "democracy" period, between April 1990 when a popular uprising forced the king to allow political parties to form and compete in elections, and October 4, 2002 when a new king dismissed the elected government and appointed a caretaker government. The 1990 uprising not only led to the chance for political parties to contend for control of the government, but also expanded civil

rights and reduced state repression of political discourse. The new freedoms allowed citizens to discuss openly the inequalities of life in Nepal, without offering them the economic and political opportunities to improve their lives. The primary factor disempowering the citizenry was the centralized system of power distribution created by the 1990 Constitution.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE STATE

Democratic Models and Institutional Variation

Empirical analyses describe democracies as majoritarian or consensus (Lijphart 1984, 1999). In majoritarian systems the party with the most votes, even when it lacks a majority, gets all or most of the power of the state. Such systems usually have only two parties competing for control, a unitary system, and a dominant executive. The United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Botswana are examples of this model. Consensus systems, on the other hand, share power. Power sharing occurs when parties form coalition governments, when the state apparatus includes two balanced Parliamentary houses, or when the central government shares power with regional and local elected bodies, as in federalism. The institutions frequently associated with consensus state structures are proportional representation, more than two dominant political parties, federalism, and guarantees protecting minority rights. Switzerland and Belgium are examples of consensus systems. Many countries, such as the USA, India, Sweden, Norway, and Canada, combine majoritarian and consensus institutions.

The majoritarian model can only address problems of non-plural societies in which a single division such as class differences between workers and the rich dominates. On the other hand, the consensus model works in societies with multiple divisions, such as those between several ethnic groups, or between both cultural and class entities (Lijphart 1984, 1999). In attempts to deepen their democracies, even the prototype majoritarian governments have begun to adopt some consensus institutions: Britain has devolved power to the regions and seriously considered adopting a proportional-representation electoral method. New Zealand adopted the proportional electoral process in the mid nineties.

Lijphart (1999) identifies ten political elements that distinguish these models, including the degree of centralized authority, the type of executive, the electoral system, the cameral structure, the structure and role of the central bank, the constitutional amendment procedure, the judicial review process, and the roles of interest groups. In Nepal, these political institutions are highly majoritarian and hence they concentrate power. In fact, Nepali political institutions are more majoritarian than those of the prototype UK and New Zealand.² The consequence has been the political exclu-

sion of socio-cultural, ideological opposition, and lower class groups (Lawoti 2002 b). I focus on the two major institutions that concentrate power: the unitary state structure and the executive.

The Unitary and Centralized State in Nepal

Nepal has a unitary state structure; this affects the power distribution of the society in two ways. First, the unitary structure of the state has meant that autonomous regional governments do not exist. Second, even the minimal power enjoyed by the districts and local governments is dependent upon the central government, as was shown in 2001 when the center appointed regional administrators throughout the country. The power of the center in this unitary structure can be better understood by contrasting it with a federal system, in which the regional governments have a significant amount of power guaranteed by the constitution, so the center can neither overrule the regions' decisions nor take away their powers. Thus, regional and local governments may hold substantial taxing authority and maintain their own police forces. In unitary Nepal, on the other hand, the police and civil administration are all under the control of the central government.

A unitary polity can be decentralized, which means that the center allocates to regional or local entities some of its power. Finland, Norway, Denmark, and Japan illustrate this. However, as discussed earlier, the center can take away power from the local governments in a unitary state, though not in a federal state. Additionally, the federal states can provide autonomy to ethnic/cultural groups. The Nepali State is highly centralized and has given local governments very little power and virtually no responsibility for delivering services.³ Even when some authority is delegated to the local governments, such as the right to collect taxes, it is negligible. In fact, the center's power in Nepal is further concentrated because of its high degree of monopoly over revenue collections and distribution, making local governments dependent on the center for resources and aid. In arenas such as education and culture, Kathmandu has almost monopolistic power over policy formulation and implementation. For instance, the educational curriculum for the whole country is set at the center, and local governments have to get permission from the central government or its line agencies to decide even small matters. A comparative study of power distribution gives a perspective on the Nepali case.

POWER DISTRIBUTION IN NEPAL: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Nepal has initiated a number of decentralization schemes since the sixties, but the actual devolution of power is minimal (Dahal 1996). The Self Governance Act of the 2055 v.s.

Degrees of Federalism and Decentralization	Established Democracies plus Nepal ¹
5: Federal & decentralized	Australia, <i>Belgium</i> (after 1993), Canada, Germany, Switzerland, US
4: Federal & centralized	Austria (4.5), India (4.5), Venezuela
3: Semi federal	<i>Belgium</i> (before 1993), Israel, Netherlands, <i>Papua New Guinea</i> , Spain,
2: Unitary & decentralized	Denmark , Finland, Japan , <i>Norway</i> , Sweden
1: Unitary & centralized	<i>Bahamas</i> , <i>Barbados</i> , <i>Botswana</i> , <i>Colombia</i> , <i>Costa Rica</i> , France (1.2), Greece, <i>Iceland</i> , <i>Ireland</i> , <i>Italy</i> (1.3), <i>Jamaica</i> , <i>Luxembourg</i> , <i>Malta</i> , <i>Mauritius</i> , Nepal, <i>New Zealand</i> , Portugal, <i>Trinidad</i> (1.2), United Kingdom

Table 1. Degrees of Decentralization in 36 Democracies and Nepal (1900-2001)

Italicized countries had population less than 5,000,000 in 1995. Bold are culturally plural countries. Nepal's rank is an average of assessments made by me and two other Nepali decentralization experts. Source: Lijphart (1999) and Lawoti (2003 b) for Nepal.

gave more power to local governments than previous acts, but the actual authority allowed is still tiny (NKBBS 2055 v.s). Comparing Nepal across time does not give a useful picture; to find out how power is distributed in Nepal, one has to compare Nepal with other countries (Table 1).

Table 1 is based on an index of power sharing devised by Lijphart (1999). It gives ratings of 36 democratic countries and Nepal for intergovernmental power distribution. The most devolved polity, ranked 5, is both federal and decentralized. The second most devolved, ranked 4, is federal but centralized. Semi-federal systems are ranked 3, while unitary and decentralized system rank 2. The least devolved, ranked 1, is both unitary and centralized.

Table 1 reveals that Nepal is one of the least decentralized countries. Despite a number of decentralization initiatives, decentralization level remains at index 1. If there had been a lower index, Nepal would probably have received it; index 1 group contains more decentralized polities than Nepal, such as the UK and Italy. In the UK, the local governments receive substantial funding from revenue collected by the center, and in Italy a lot of power has devolved to regional governments (Putnam 1993).

Additionally, the unitary and centralized structure of Nepal is distinctly unable to accommodate the country's ethnic diversity, a factor best accommodated by federal democracies (with indices of 3 to 5). In sum, this analysis shows two things: first, power is highly concentrated in Nepal because of the state structure; second, the unitary state structure makes achieving a desirable level of decentralization impossible.

THE HEGEMONIC EXECUTIVE

Not only does the unitary structure of the state concentrate power, but virtually all that power is also centralized within one institution, the executive. Only the executive, i.e., the

cabinet, is empowered to introduce legislation that affects finances (HMG Nepal 1990), so the cabinet effectively controls all legislation and its implementation. In other Parliamentary democracies (Germany, Belgium etc.), substantial legislation with budgetary provisions can also be introduced by members of Parliament.

Further, until 2002 no governmental entity, not even the Commission for Investigation of Abuse and Authority (CIAA), could challenge or review the decisions and policies of the cabinet. For example, when the cabinet awarded excessive amounts of money to contractors for infrastructure projects, a practice that occurred repeatedly through all of the administrations that ruled during the 12 "democracy" years, the CIAA could not investigate what was defined as a "policy decision." It is alleged that many powerful cabinet members became rich on this provision. Another example of cabinet's extreme power is that, in one instance in mid 1990, the cabinet withdrew an election-related murder charge against one of its members.

The strength of the executive is enhanced because the executive either directly or indirectly controls the budgets and personnel appointments of the other branches of government and of "independent" constitutional commissions. Likewise, the executive can also influence the performance of the judiciary, which is otherwise relatively independent, through budgetary and personnel decisions. The role of the strong judiciary, on the other hand, is limited in practical terms because it can only assert its power when the contesting parties bring constitutional matters to its attention.

The royal palace might be considered a countervailing force that could constrain the power of the executive. However, during the 12 years considered here, the royal palace did not intervene in the daily and policy level activities of the government. It seemed satisfied with guarding the power that the 1990 Constitution gave it, and with appointing its loyalists as

ambassadors and members (10) to the Upper House. Palace interventions have not directly favored the poor and underprivileged groups, except for the regular appointments of a few dalit (traditionally considered 'low caste and untouchable'), indigenous nationalities (adibasi janajati), and women to the Upper House.

On the other hand, if the interests of the executive and palace are congruent, the centralization becomes even more severe. In a later section, I argue that in cultural matters, the state became even more hegemonic because of the common interests of the cabinet, the royal palace, the judiciary, and other central agencies—all of which were dominated by high caste hill Hindu elite males.

The irony of the Nepali State, however, is that even though it is highly centralized, it is weak and limited. The concentration of power at the center does not mean that the state is powerful, it only means that whatever power the state possesses is concentrated at the center. As such, the state's reach and influence in development, service delivery, administration, and security is severely limited. The state does not have any effective presence in many sectors and regions. Even at the center, it has failed to carry out efficiently its responsibilities, such as collecting taxes, providing security, and maintaining law and order. However, in arenas where it intersects with local bodies and non-state agencies, the center often has the upper hand. The consequence is that the center is powerful compared to the local and non-state agencies, but it is absolutely weak because it has no effective presence through much of its territory due to, among other reasons, powerless local and district governments.

THE CENTRALIZED POLITICAL CULTURE

Powerful Parties and Dominant Leaders

The power taken away from the king in 1990 was mostly transferred to the political parties and political leaders, not to the people (Brown 1996). The leaders' power comes from their actual or potential control of the executive and from their ability to appoint their party members to positions of authority. The party leaders' powers are further enhanced because the agencies and institutions that wield countervailing power in most societies, groups like trade unions, professional associations, human rights groups, and civic organizations, are either weak or under the influence of the political parties in Nepal⁵ (Bhattachan 1999 b).

The political leaders, especially the top leadership, can exercise unrestrained power, appointing syncophants to administrative posts, ignoring party rules and procedures, and often governing on their personal whims. The leaders nominate at least half the central committee members, often relatives (such as in the NC), friends, and/or caste brethrens (as in the

CPN-UML). The appointees, in turn, remain personally loyal to the leaders. Leaders may also appoint party candidates for parliamentary, local, and organization elections. This centralizing political culture can eviscerate local party organizations and marginalize competent but more independently minded members. Local leaders often compete to please the central leadership, thereby further reinforcing centralization.

ETHNIC CENTRALIZATION

Many of Nepal's ethnic groups have no real access to the state and other influential institutions in Nepal. The numbers of dalit⁶, indigenous nationalities⁷, women, and madhesi⁸ in the influential institutions are negligible, and reduced since the panchayat and the first parliamentary (1959-60) eras (Lawoti 2002, Neupane 2000; NESAC 1998; Gurung 1998). High caste Hindu elite males from the hills (Caste Hill Hindu Elites – CHHE) overwhelmingly dominate power positions in politics, administration, the judiciary, parliament, academia, civil society, industry/commerce, local government, and education. Jointly the CHHE and Newari⁹ were 37.2 % of the population, but in 1999 they held more than 80% of leadership positions (CHHE 66% and Newari 15%) in the important arenas of governance (Neupane 2000).

The interesting point about this CHHE domination is that even the relatively progressive realms such as media, civil society, and human rights demonstrate the same absence of minority exclusion (Neupane 2000; NESAC 1998; Gurung 1998; Onta and Parajuli 2058 v.s.; Lawoti and Yatra 2001; Lawoti 2000a). The mainstream media dominated by the CHHE group is often responsible for spreading stereotypes about minorities and misrepresenting their issues (Kraemer 2003; Thapa-Magar 2000 a; Lawoti and Yatra 2001).

In sum, the centralizing state structure and centralized political culture have concentrated power in the hands of several small ethnic/caste groups and excluded the majority of the population from meaningful participation. No wonder then that the lack of democratic opportunity has induced apathy in the wider population and the explosive expansion of the Maoist insurrection.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CENTRALIZED POLITY

The Centralized State and the Underdevelopment of the Periphery

One consequence of the centralized state has been the underdevelopment of the rural areas, where nearly 90 percent of the people live. The central authorities either ignore or are unaware of the needs of these rural residents. As noted above, regional representatives in Parliament lack power to represent rural aspirations effectively, and local agencies are without

authority and resources. This neglect has created huge inequalities. For example, in 1991 life expectancy in Mugu in remote northwestern Nepal, was 37 years; it was 71 years in Kathmandu (Thapa 1992).

The rural regions not only suffer from inadequate programs, policies, and budget, but they have no role in planning or implementing development projects. This centralized control makes it likely that projects will not fulfill the needs of the people or produce sustainable results. Yet local elites who are connected to the center benefit from these rare services. For example, Justice (1986: 24) found that the few health programs provided by the center were usually located where the local elites would benefit from them. These failures have alienated rural people to the point that they are susceptible to the Maoists' promises of radical transformation. No wonder then that the Maoist insurgency began from the mid-west, one of the most neglected and isolated regions in Nepal.

Another consequence of the centralization is that the central authorities, especially the cabinet members and administrators, are bogged down by minor decisions and details, such as when central bureaucrats must decide whether distant schools will receive tin roofs worth a few hundred dollars. Inefficiency is further intensified because local community leaders must go to Kathmandu and lobby these officials for the roofs with gifts. Parliamentary representatives also must waste their time in such lobbying.

Scholars have argued that federalism enhances economic growth by fostering competition for investment among regions, leading to efficiency and market development (Weingast 1995; Bohora 2002). Moreover, devolution of power to local people, as occurs in federal states, is more efficient because locals are more familiar with the issues, needs, and resources in the village. Finally, devolved decision-making facilitates economic development and generates employment, giving people a stake in the existing system and reducing alienation among the rural people.

The Lack of Penetration of the State and its Consequences

The irony of Nepali centralization is that the state has no reach beyond district and sub district centers. This has allowed the Maoists to establish themselves easily in the rural areas because no state agencies are present to resist them. When the people saw the police and other agencies like banks and agricultural extension services leaving rural areas because of the Maoist threat, they further lost faith in the government. Even the people who opposed the Maoist ideology did not dare resist publicly because they realized that the state could not guarantee their security. However, the Maoists have not been able to take over positions where the government has been determined to stay, such as the district headquarters. This indicates that the growth of the Maoists is largely a con-

sequence of the absence of the state in the periphery.

The Lack of Horizontal Accountability and Power Abuse

The extreme centralization of power within the executive has resulted in an absence of accountability. We can distinguish horizontal accountability, where the executive is accountable to independent central authorities, and vertical accountability, where the voters hold leaders accountable during periodic elections. In democracies the constitution generally establishes state agencies, such as the election commission and investigative commissions, to ensure fair elections and investigate and punish misbehavior by the executive and other central agencies (O'Donnell 1999). In Nepal, however, the election commission and the Commission for Investigation of Abuse and Authority (CIAA) were under the influence of the executive, so they failed in their missions. In the absence of check and balances, a culture of power abuse pervaded the political circle and administration, fuelling wider corruption.¹⁰ The necessity to pay bribes for regular state services, such as driver's licenses and passports, undermined people's faith in the authorities and the system.

Similarly, though the ruling parties have been able to manipulate illegally the electoral process, but the election commission has failed to control it. These cases reduced the legitimacy of the 1990 democracy in the eyes of the people and alienated them from the regime. It prepared the ground for an alternative ideology—that of the Maoists—attractive to the alienated people. Public opinion surveys in 1999 and 2001 illustrate this alienation. In 1999 a survey showed that ordinary people did not consider the Maoists to be one of the top three problems faced by Nepal (Himal Association 2001; Sharma and Sen 2056 v.s), even though the leaders, intelligentsia, and the journalists were crying themselves hoarse against the rebels. This discrepancy indicates that the people did not at that time disapprove of an insurgency that the elite labeled a major enemy.¹¹

The growth of the Maoists in the more neglected regions also supports the thesis that alienation is a factor in their expansion. The midwest, the hotbed of the insurgency, is one of the most neglected regions. Likewise, politically excluded groups like the women, indigenous nationalities, and dalit have been found to support the insurgency in higher numbers (Lawoti 2003).

As the central administration has ignored the needs of the local people, the people in turn have not supported them. This is evident in the failure of local people to inform the government about Maoist movements and activities. In some attacks the Maoists have gathered in hundreds or even thousands of fighters, but the administration remained unaware of the mobilization because local people do not inform them. Yet ordinary citizens in the district headquarters were aware

of the imminent attacks and fled their houses for safety during the raids. The small number of local residents of district headquarters killed or injured in the attacks supports this conclusion.¹²

An administration not made up of local leaders does not receive local support to resist the Maoist expansion.¹³ Local leaders could have pitted the major political parties against the Maoists, hindering Maoist growth. Additionally, an administration headed by local leaders could have avoided many of the unnecessarily repressive acts of the government, which pushed people in the middle into the insurgency.

Centralization and Civil Strife

Empirical studies covering a large number of countries have demonstrated that unitary and centralized states are prone to rebellions, whereas federal countries are prone to conflicts of less severity, such as protests (Cohen 1997; Saide-man et al. 2002). The reason for the different outcomes is that federalism, with multiple levels of governments, creates multiple power centers that dissatisfied and mobilized groups can access to attain their goals. Access allow groups to air and sometimes resolve their grievances, thereby preventing dissatisfaction from escalating into rebellion. Unitary states, on the other hand, provide few points at which the people can express their grievances, which may deepen and sometimes turn into rebellion. The peoples' grievances in Nepal were many and were seldom addressed because, among other things, the people had no place to go to complain. In such circumstances, the Maoists who promised to work for the welfare of the poor and marginalized people, attracted those who felt excluded by the state.

Likewise, scholars have found that consensus (proportional) electoral systems help to manage conflicts, whereas the majoritarian (first-past-the-post) systems, which have been used for parliamentary and local elections in Nepal, are significantly associated with violent conflicts (Powell 1981; Cohen 1997; Saideman et al. 2002). The majoritarian system facilitates conflicts in culturally plural societies for two reasons. First, they promote concentration of power by giving the larger parties more seats than are proportional to their vote totals, as we saw in Nepal's last three elections. Second, they undermine smaller parties by providing no seats in Parliament to parties with notable vote totals. In the 1999 general elections CPN-ML and RPP-C did not get a single seat in the Lower House even though they had received 6 percent and 3 percent of votes respectively.

In Nepal, the centralized polity worked to fuel rebellion in other ways as well. Prior to the initiation of the insurgency in 1996, the Nepali Congress government jailed and tortured the activists and leaders of the Maoist political party (United People's Front Nepal, UPFN), in their stronghold of Rolpa and

Rukum, including the elected official of the district development committees.¹⁴ The power abuse by the central authority, which controls the police and administration, though designed to help the NC, helped to push the Maoists into the insurgency (INSEC 1999; Prachanda 1999). This repression could take place because of the unitary and centralized structure of the state. If there had been regional governments or if the police force had been under the district governments, the extensive one-way abuse of power by the center would not have been possible. After all, the Maoists controlled the district government in Rolpa while the NC controlled the center. Without this state repression, the insurgency might have been avoided.

Non-Power Sharing Attitude and Absence of Compromises

The desire to confine power within one's party or faction has led to many opportunities being squandered, at both the national level and within the parties. For instance, the Deuba government of the NC thought that the situation had deteriorated enough to declare the state emergency in 2001, but did not choose to form an all-party national government to face the crises. In countries around the world, emergency cabinets are often formed in times of crises (Lijphart 1999). In Nepal, the CPN-UML leaders, as communists, would have been useful cabinet partners for tackling the Maoists because they understand better the strategies, tools, and psyche of the Maoists leaders and cadres. This knowledge might have been more effective to counter the Maoists in their initial stages of growth. Likewise, the lack of inclusion of the other political parties in the dialogue with the Maoists and the lack of consultation with them in the declaration of the emergency indicates the government's unwillingness to share power and authority. This attitude was also apparent earlier in the formation of a committee to study the Maoist problem by the Bhattarai government. It consisted only of the NC members.

The lack of a coherent strategy by the state and political parties for the Maoists can be attributed to the non-power sharing attitude as well. The parties have spent most of their time, energy, and resources since 1996 attempting to form governments dominated by their own party or faction rather than cooperating with other parties to govern the country. This has resulted into extreme instability during both the hung parliaments of the 1994-1999 period and the majority Parliament after 1999. The parties were often more intent on using the Maoists for their own partisan purposes than they were on forming coalitions to implement a coherent strategy against the Maoists.

This same distrust has blocked the political parties from forming all-party coalitions in the districts and villages to counter the Maoists.¹⁵ Yet cooperative attitudes and readiness to compromise could have also sent positive signals to

the Maoists that a power-sharing culture had developed. It might have shown the Maoists that they had a better chance of sharing power if they were to join the mainstream electoral politics.

Ethnic Centralization and Minority Participation in the Insurgency

Even though the state is weak in terms of development and in providing services and security, it has affected the society very deeply with its social and cultural policy of assimilation, homogenization, and mono-cultural nationalism. These policies seek to impose the values and norms of the dominant group on the society as a whole.¹⁶ The state has promoted one language (Khas-Nepali), one religion (Hindu), one culture (hill 'high caste' male), and one dress. Its impact on marginalized groups has been devastating. Many languages face extinction, and many groups have lost land and culture.

The monopoly of the electronic media and education policy has played a very significant role in the assimilation process, because radio reaches every nook and cranny of the country, and education policy affects everyone who goes to school. After 1990, radio programs in some of the other major languages were begun, but Yatra (2058 v.s) found in 2001 that programs featuring the 14 major ethnic languages were only 7.84% of the total broadcast time, while Khas-Nepali alone accounted for nearly 90 percent; the remaining time was allocated to broadcasts in English, Hindi, and Urdu. Similarly, although some explicitly prejudicial discussions of minorities in the textbooks were dropped after the minorities protested, the books are still imbued with dominant group values. For instance, most of the heroes discussed in the social studies and Nepali texts are from the dominant group (Lawoti 2000a).

Even though these policies reached their peak during the Panchayat period, they continue today. This is largely because of the ethnic centralization of the state. The decision-making processes have no significant representation by minorities. Hence, minority perspectives, interests, and needs are not well represented or included in government policies. The resulting discrimination and the lack of social reforms have alienated the minorities. It is important to note that although the political parties and factions may be in political/ideological conflicts, they all converge in the accepting and promoting

the hill Hindu religious ideology.

Davidheiser (1992) argues that strong state policies have destabilizing impact in the society and may contribute to revolutions. In Nepal, these cultural and social policies often destabilized the minority societies by uprooting them, marginalizing their cultures, alienating them from their ancestral lands, and undermining their communal stability. The destabilization has produced a large population of fluid minorities. They are attracted to the Maoists who have promised them voice, recognition, rights, space, and dignity in their 'new regime.'



PHOTO: SHYAM K.C.

The Maoists have raised the issues of self-determination, cultural and regional autonomy, and linguistic, religious, and gender equality more vociferously than other mainstream political parties. They have formed many ethnic liberation fronts. These strategies have been more attractive to the minorities facing cultural and communal destabilization as a result of state policies, as demonstrated by a high participation of the indigenous nationalities, dalit, and women in the insurgency (Lawoti 2003).

CONCLUSION

I have argued in this paper that the centralized polity has contributed in the growth of the Maoist insurgency. The further danger of the centralized polity is that it may facilitate the growth of other types of violence, such as inter-ethnic conflicts. Riots between cultural and ethnic groups (Hill groups versus Tarai lowlanders, Hindus versus Muslims, and indigenous nationalities insurgency) have already taken place. The conflicts might grow if the issues producing them are not addressed (Bhattachan 2000a; Lawoti forthcoming).

This study argues that the dramatic growth of the Maoists has been fostered by the weakness of the state, not solely because of the organization, mobilization, and strength of the Maoists. This suggests that if the state capacity increases, as the security sector seems to have strengthened since mid 2003, the Maoists would face greater difficulties in attacking security posts in the future. However, it does not mean that the Maoists can be wiped out. Furthermore, a military solution is not a viable long-term option for the country because of the high economic and socio-political costs.

How can the problems of over centralization then be addressed? The solution is to diffuse power so that different

political and socio-cultural groups can access it. When different groups access power, they will no longer have need to rely on violent means. This calls for reforms in the state structured composition of political culture. The state should be decentralized, political culture made egalitarian, and the state positions of power be open equally to all cultural and ethnic groups. First, the unitary state has to be replaced by a federal one to provide cultural autonomy, enhance decentralization, and promote economic development. Second, democratization of political parties will draw the disaffected into the political process. Democracy within the parties will ensure more accountability among political leaders and give voice and space to political activists. For instance, if the local political parties were to elect candidates for public offices such as Parliament through party grassroots cadres' voting, then the cadres' voices and influence may increase within political parties. Third, proportional electoral system can distribute resources (seats in elections) more judiciously. Affirmative action and policies to address historical discrimination and minority group concerns will also facilitate egalitarian distribution of resources.

No single remedy will work in Nepal because the problems are deep and wide. My recommendations will not control the Maoists insurgency immediately. In the short run, a settlement between the insurgents and the state is essential. However, a mere settlement is not enough to prevent violent conflicts in the future. Widespread structural, attitudinal, and cultural reforms are warranted to guide the country toward a more egalitarian path. As the society moves toward a more egalitarian structure, the rationale for violent conflicts will lessen.

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ENDNOTES

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² The judicial review and constitutional rigidity appear to ensure power sharing but if we analyze their broader role we see that they promote majoritarianism. For instance, because of rigidity in amending the Constitution it is difficult to reform the political institutions that perpetuate the domination of the dominant group. Likewise, since the Supreme Court interprets the Constitution, judicial review depends largely on a Constitution that has concentrated power in the executive and discriminates against minorities.

³ One distinction between unitary centralized and decentralized polities is that in the former taxes are collected and spent by the center's agencies, while in the latter taxes may still be collected largely by the center but are returned substantially to local governments for delivering services.

⁴ These countries remained democracies uninterrupted for more than 19 years, and the Freedom House rated them as 'free' (Lijphart 1999).

⁵ These organizations and mediums have grown considerably since 1990 but still have far less influences compared to similar organizations in other countries. One reason for their less influence is their lack of independence.

⁶ Dalit means "the oppressed." It is the name reform leaders of "untouchable" groups have adopted to identify their groups.

⁷ "Indigenous groups" refers to Tibeto-Burman groups who had settled Nepal before the expansion of caste Hindus into the mountains from India. These groups had more egalitarian social systems.

⁸ "Madheshi" refers to people from Nepal's Tarai, the region in the extreme south that is the northern edge of the Gangetic plain. Madheshi have culture and languages similar to north India and they are distinct from the mountainous "Hills" of Nepal.

⁹ The Newar are a Tibeto-Burman group who settled the Kathmandu basin more than 2,000 years ago and established a sophis-

ticated, caste-based feudal society. They were conquered by caste Hindus in the late 18th century expansion that created modern Nepal. Newar elites and merchants retained considerable power and share in positions of authority.

¹⁰ Corruption charges against the NC ministers were finally lodged in October 2002 but till then corruption had spread widely and consequent disillusionment and public apathy had grown to substantial levels.

¹¹ A more recent opinion poll (Nepali Times 2002) has shown that the people have begun to blame the Maoists for the current crises in the country. This attitude change has come after the Maoists began widespread destruction of development infrastructure, such as schools, health posts, telephone transmission towers, and Village Development Center (VDC) offices. In October 2003 Prachanda, the supreme Maoist leader, issued a statement saying that the politburo meeting of the party has decided to stop the destruction of development infrastructures. As of the writing of this paper, however, it had not stopped.

¹² Even if we assume that the people may not have supplied information to the administration because of the Maoist threat, the fear of the Maoists even in the district headquarters is an indication of the state's failure to provide security under its very nose.

¹³ Newspapers have published complaints of senior security personnel on the lack of popular support toward the fight against the insurgency.

¹⁴ In Rolpa, where the insurgency began, the NC and the Maoists were political competitors, leading to frequent conflicts between them (INSEC 1999).

¹⁵ See Ryan (1994) for the consequences of coalition formations for revolutionary movements.

¹⁶ Please see Lawoti (2000, 2002, especially chapter 4), Subba et al. (2000), FWLD (2000) for other examples of cultural discrimination.

