Does Revolution Work? Post-revolutionary evolution of Nepal's political classes*

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Abstract

Decentralization bears the promise of more representative and accountable democratic institutions. In many countries, particularly new and developing democracies, this vision of decentralization has yet to be realized, instead yielding more extractive and corrupt institutions. Can new democracies generate institutions that are both representative and effective? As one of the worlds most ambitious decentralization processes, Nepal's recent political transformation provides a useful laboratory to evaluate the consequences of decentralization in a new and developing democracy. In 2015, in the wake of the decade-long Maoist People's War, Nepal abolished its 240-year-old monarchy and established a new constitution formalizing Nepal's political structure as a federal republic. The 2017 local elections in Nepal innaugurated this decentralization process, ushering into elected office more than 30,000 newly elected representatives. Using a census of 3.68 million Nepalis across eleven districts, party nomination lists, and data on the universe of candidates and elected politicians, we provide a comprehensive documentation of patterns of political selection in Nepal's first local elections. We show that politicians are positively selected relative to both the population and their respective clans, being significantly more educated and richer than the population they represent. Politicians are also generally representative of the population in terms of Caste and gender. This representativeness, however, is largely the result of political reservations. Furthermore, elitism does not substantially drive political selection: belonging to historically elite castes is only weakly correlated with being a candidate in these elections and this relationship is absent among candidates from the Maoist party, consistent with Maoist ideology. We then compare these recent patterns of selection with electoral outcomes from local elections conducted under monarchic

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rule in 1992. These historic elections resulted in relatively less representative institutions, where almost no women and few Dalits gained representation. Remarkably, modern Nepal bears a closer resemblance to consolidated Western democracies, achieving both meritocratic and generally inclusive political institutions. We argue and suggestively demonstrate that this is in part the result of Maoist influence on the Constitutional process.

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