

IMPACTS OF UNSTABLE POLITICAL COALITION IN NEPAL

No. 7 | March 2024

| SUMMARY

Political party alliances are inevitable because no single party commands a majority in the House of Representatives. However, the instability induced by repeated changes in the government equation has a longstanding impact on the state's paraphernalia. The recent (March 2024) formation of new coalition government has also made an impact on the political parties. Though the province is an autonomous government in the federal structure, provincial government equations are made and unmade according to centralized decisions. As a result, the relatively stable provincial governments have also become unstable. Due to the instability in power politics, citizens' desire for development and good governance has faced a crisis. Thus, people's disenchantment and frustration with the system have been soaring. This tendency is a challenge to the longevity of federal democratic republic. If the narrative of political parties forming alliances solely for self-centered interests becomes established, it will further erode people's trust in the political process. However, it would be a mistake to hurriedly reach any conclusion as to why such instability is seen in the functioning of the government: is it due to the lack of political culture? Or is it the result of the existing electoral system? Or could there be other reasons for such instability? Before any action is taken on this front, it would be wise to prompt extensive debate aiming to bring stability and even to seek another electoral process that is more democratic and inclusive than the existing one.

| INTRODUCTION

Political party alliances have repeatedly changed in Nepal in the last few years. The government has diverted its attention from ensuring long-term peace, good governance, prosperity, and stability to making and unmaking power equations. Due to the electoral system Nepal has adopted, it is less likely for a single party to command a full majority in the parliament. Thus, an alliance is inevitable for the formation of the government. However, the repeated alliance changes have not sent the citizens a good message. It is generally believed that political party leaders change alliances to serve their self-centered interest of power exercise. Undoubtedly, the repeated exercise of changing alliances and garnering the required majority in the parliament to form a government driven solely by the interest of being in power has created instability in the country. This instability has affected not only Singha Durbar, the central executive, and the House of Representatives, but also the provinces.

This political update attempts to analyze the inconsistent power equations and their impacts. The first section explains some dimensions of the last few alliances, followed by the second section, which investigates the effect of alliance changes on political parties. The third section details how the provinces have felt the repercussions of the new power equations in the center. The fourth section covers the dimensions of instability created by the new power equation. The fifth section envisages the future of the new alliance. The last section concludes the political update.

1. BACKGROUND OF THE ALLIANCE

Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist) [CPN (UML)] and Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Center) [CPN (Maoist Center)] allied to participate in the parliament and provincial assembly election in 2017. Later, these two parties unified, forming the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) [CPN (CPN)]. Before long, a power struggle began between the two chairpersons - KP Sharma Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' - of the newly formed party. As the intra-party struggle soared, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli dissolved the House of Representatives (HoR) on December 20, 2020. In the meantime, the Supreme Court nullified the CPN (CPN) unification and declared the two formations as individual parties. Even after the re-emergence of CPN (UML), the intra-party feud continued between its leaders, KP Sharma Oli and Madhav Kumar Nepal. Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli could not win the vote of confidence on May 10, 2021, in the HoR. Twenty-eight Members of Parliament (MPs) supporting Madhav Kumar Nepal did not participate in the voting process. The chairperson of CPN (UML) and Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli dissolved the HoR for the second time on May 22, 2021.

146 MPs, including those representing Madhav Kumar Nepal-faction of the CPN (UML), registered a writ at the Supreme Court against the Prime Minister's decision to dissolve the HoR. They also declared their support to Nepali Congress' Sher Bahadur Deuba for Prime Minister position. The constitutional bench of the Supreme Court, giving its verdict against the decision to dissolve the HoR, ordered Sher Bahadur Deuba to be declared Prime Minister. Along with this declaration, the CPN (UML) leader Madhav Kumar Nepal split the party and registered a new party, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Socialist) [CPN (US)]. Following this, the Nepali Congress, CPN (Maoist Center), CPN (US), Janata Samajbadi Party of Nepal (JSP), and Rastriya Jana Morcha Nepal (RJM) formed a five-party alliance. Though the JSP left the coalition during the parliament and provincial assembly elections held on November 20, 2022, another party, the Loktantrik Samajbadi Party of Nepal, joined the alliance.

On behalf of the alliance, the Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba, the Chairperson of the CPN (Maoist Center) Pushpa Kamal Dahal, and the Chairperson of CPN (US) Madhav Kumar Nepal had pledged the continuation of the alliance even after the elections. Likewise, they had published a written appeal asking the voters to vote for the coalition to protect the constitution, bring stability, and ensure the country's prosperity. In the appeal, they had mentioned that a stable and robust government would be necessary to ensure the delivery of quality services to the citizens at the federal, provincial, and local levels.¹

Against the pledge to form a coalition government of the five-party alliance, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, the chairperson of CPN (Maoist Center), and KP Sharma Oli, the chairperson of CPN (UML), allied to form a new coalition government, and the consensus was that the government formed as such would be led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal. JSP, National Independent Party Nepal (RSP), Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), Janamat Party Nepal, and Nagarik Unmukti Party joined the alliance. At that point, CPN (US) President Madhav Kumar Nepal said that since Sher Bahadur Deuba declined to accept Pushpa Kamal Dahal as the Prime Minister as per the previous deal, a new coalition was formed with the CPN (UML).² With the alliance of the seven parties, including CPN (UML) and CPN (Maoist Center), the Nepali Congress, which had become the largest party winning the November 20, 2022 elections, was pushed to the opposition bench. However, on January 10, 2023, the Nepali Congress gave a vote of confidence to Pushpa Kamal Dahal. It was unusual for the opposition party to provide a vote of confidence to the party in power, especially for the Nepali Congress, which had always claimed to uphold parliamentary values; the move was against the standard parliamentary practices.

Against the agreement of supporting the CPN (UML)'s candidate in the president's election by the seven-party alliance formed on December 25, 2022, the CPN (Maoist

¹ Onlinekhabar. 2079 B.S. Deuba-Prachanda-Madhav ko Pratibadhatta: Chunab Pachhi Pani Gathabandhan Sarkar. Kartik 1. Available at <https://www.onlinekhabar.com/2022/10/1206515>, accessed on March 23, 2024.

² Nepal, Madhav Kumar. 2079. B.S. Congress ko Rabaiya Dekhi Pidit Thiye, Mutu Mathi Dhunga Rakhi Hasnu Parya Chha. *Onlinekhabar*, Pus 11 (Interview with Basanta Basnet) Available at <https://www.onlinekhabar.com/2022/12/1238014>, accessed on March 22, 2024.

Center) decided to support Nepali Congress's candidate Ram Chandra Poudel. Following this, the partnership between UML and the Maoist Center faced a crisis, eventually leading to UML and RPP revoking their vote of confidence given to the Dahal-led government. Once again, the pre-election alliance between the Nepali Congress and Maoist Center emerged. Pushpa Kamal Dahal took a vote of confidence for the second time on March 20, 2023. Prime Minister Dahal took the Nepali Congress ministers on board on March 31, 2023. However, less than a year since the Nepali Congress joined the coalition; the CPN (Maoist Center) again ended the alliance with the party on March 4, 2024, to ally with the CPN (UML), forming a new coalition government. Due to this unstable power politics, the last fourteen months has seen three different alliances, and the cabinet of ministers has been expanded more than a dozen times.³ The reorganization of the cabinet seems to continue further.

2. INSTABILITY AND IMPACT ON POLITICAL PARTIES

The largest party in the HoR, the Nepali Congress, was dumbfounded when the CPN (Maoist Center) abruptly broke the alliance.⁴ With the formation of the partnership between the CPN (UML) and the CPN (Maoist Center), it was apparent that the Nepali Congress would lose many constitutional and other positions at the federal and provincial levels. The top leaders of the Nepali Congress accused each other of breaking the alliance.⁵ However, this time, after the power equation changed on March 4, 2024, unlike before, there has been no intraparty dissatisfaction in the Nepali Congress. The party, erstwhile divided between the ruling group and the other faction,

is currently unified in voicing its protest against the Prime Minister's move. The Nepali Congress Parliamentary Party has declared Prime Minister Dahal's decision to change coalition partners a political dishonesty. Nepali Congress Chief Whip Ramesh Lekhak asked Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, "There is hardly any party which Mr. Prime Minister has not betrayed. What will be your position if all parties you betray stand together?"⁶ With the formation of a new alliance, the Nepali Congress began process to form a rival coalition. However, the Nepali Congress's attempt was not successful. Nepali Congress has again been pushed to the bench of opposition in the federal parliament. Playing the efficient role of an opposition, the party has decided to adopt the strategy of creating fissures in the ruling coalition.

The foremost task of CPN (UML), which aims to become the largest party in the next parliamentary election in 2027, was to break the five-party alliance. Thus, according to UML General Secretary Shankar Pokhrel, the party has created a new coalition.⁷ As per UML's analysis, the party could not become the largest party in the last election because of the opposition's alliance. Even in the National Assembly election held in January 2024, UML was defeated because of the opposition's alliance. It would be easy for the UML to check the ongoing erosion in the party organization if it joined the government.⁸ Participation in the government as a ruling partner would bring the opportunities to place their sympathizers in positions of power and leverage the mobilization of state resources. This would be a significant opportunity for a political party. The longevity of this coalition relies on the actions of the alliance's largest partner, the CPN (UML). The past partnership has been bitter due to the personality clash of the Chairpersons of these two parties. Since the alliance's

³ Sharma, Jivan. 2080 B.S. Asthir Rajniti ko Parinam: Ek Barsa ma Tin Gathabandhan, 13 Patak Mantri Mandal Bistar. *News of Nepal*, Falgun 22. Available at <https://newsofnepal.com/2024/03/05/629770/>, accessed on March 24, 2024.

⁴ Ghimire, Parwatraj. 2079 B.S. Congress ma Asafalata ko Shrinkhala, Antim Kasarat Rastrapati. *Kantipur Television*. Magh 7. Available at <https://kantipur.com/politics/2023/01/21/1674267450.html>, accessed on March 24, 2024.

⁵ Thapa, Gagan. 2079 B.S. Gathabandhan Tutnu ra Congress ko Sarkar Banauna Nasaknu ko Jimma Aru le Lindainan Bhane Ma Linchhu. *Shilapatra*, Pus 26. (Interview with Dipendra Adhikari). Available at <https://shilapatra.com/detail/103310>, accessed on March 24, 2024.

⁶ Himalaya Times. 2080 B.S. Pradhan Mantri lai Congress ko Prashna: Tapai le Dhokha Diyeka Dal Ek Thagma Ubhiye Tapai Kaha Pugnu Huncha? Falgun 24. Available at <https://himalayatimes.com/2024/03/208287/>, accessed on March 23, 2024.

⁷ Kantipur. 2080 B.S. Mission-2084 Safal Banauna Naya Gathabandhan Banayau: Mahasachib Pokharel. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/news/2024/03/23/we-have-created-a-new-equation-to-make-2084-successful-general-secretary-pokharel-22-27.html>, accessed on March 24, 2024.

⁸ BC, Ganga. 2080 B.S. Gathabandhan ma UML Udartako Antarya. *Kantipur*, Falgun 30. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/news/2024/03/13/within-the-coalition-the-uml-is-liberal-evident-in-mission-084-42-16.html>, accessed on March 24, 2024.

primary motive is to serve the petty political interests of the partners, the coalition may not sustain long.

The other key player of the coalition is the RSP. In this coalition, the RSP chairperson, Rabi Lamichhane, has taken on the significant responsibilities of the Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister. However, he has been accused of embezzling funds from the Suryadarshan Saving and Credit Cooperative Ltd. Pointing out the accusation, the main opposition party, Nepali Congress, has been obstructing the federal parliament proceedings, demanding Lamichhane's resignation. Nepali Congress is trying to create a crisis in the alliance by pressurizing RSP.⁹ The number of RSP MPs in the HoR is decisive for the formation and dissolution of the government. Thus, it is difficult for the Prime Minister to oblige to the Nepali Congress's demand for Lamichhane's resignation. The RSP, which, when in opposition, constantly raised questions about the ills of the government, is now in a position to answer the questions. People are interested in seeing how the RSP ministers handle their responsibilities. Indecisive for a few days, JSP and CPN (US) finally joined the coalition government, saying they supported the government, with some reservations. Rajendra Pandey, the leader of CPN (US), and Rajkishor Yadav, the leader of JSP, said in the parliament that they would examine the government's activities and if needed would rethink the vote of confidence they extended to the government. Different parties have joined the coalition, making the Prime Minister agree with varied conditions.¹⁰ The longevity of this government also depends on whether Prime Minister Dahal can fulfill those diverse conditions.

Prime Minister and CPN (Maoist Center) chairperson Pushpa Kamal Dahal's move of repeatedly changing alliances has been perceived as his attempt to stay in power. He has already changed alliances three times in the last fourteen months. He has been able to garner the required number of votes in the vote of confidence from the parliament all three times. However, in each

⁹ Shilapatra. 2080 B.S. Mahesh Bartaula ko Aarop - Congress Rabi Lamichhane mathi Prahar Garera Sarkar Dhalne Chalkhel ma Chha. Chaitra 4. Available at <https://shilapatra.com/detail/132760>, accessed on March 17, 2024.

¹⁰ Neupane, Kulchandra. 2080 B.S. Sartai Sarta ma Bishwas ko Mat. *Kantipur*, Chaitra 9. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/news/2024/03/14/a-conditional-vote-of-confidence-17-13.html>; accessed on March 18, 2024.

successive round of voting, the number of votes he received has decreased.¹¹ Dahal explains this change of alliances as an example of his ability to remain apace with the time.¹² The CPN (Maoist Center)'s number of votes and seats in each successive general election has consistently gone downhill. The narrative that Dahal is a character who steers Nepali politics toward instability has been robustly established. His reliability has dwindled every time he has changed the alliances while accusing others of being the culprits.¹³ If, as per the Nepali Congress stated in the parliament, all those betrayed by him stood together against him, this could be his last installment of changing alliance without even hinting at his coalition partners. On the other hand, the political equation has not been changed by Dahal alone or by his party. As he keeps changing alliances, the parties that back him have also been complicit in the instability created. Thus, the unstable character has also been a consistent feature of other parties and their leaders.

3. REPERCUSSIONS IN PROVINCES

Any change in the federal government immediately impacts the provinces. Though the country has adopted a federal system, the political parties' structure is unitary and centralized. Thus, while constitutionally provincial governments are autonomous, the Chief Ministers and the Ministers function as per the decisions of the central leadership. As the alliances are formed in the center, the provincial government's leadership is divided by the central leadership, and the members of the provincial governments have to meekly accept the decision. In

¹¹ Following the HoR election held in November 2022, Dahal took the first vote of confidence on January 10, 2023. At that point, out of 270 MPs in the House, 268 had supported him. The second time, following the President's election, Dahal broke the alliance with the UML and allied with the Nepali Congress to form a government; he received the support of 172 MPs out of 262 in the voting held on March 20, 2023. The third time, on March 12, 2024, he could only garner 157 votes from 268 MPs in the House.

¹² Kantipur TV. 2080 B.S. Pradhan Mantri Pushpa Kamal Dahal sanga Antarbarta. *Fireside*, Chaitra 5. Available at https://youtu.be/YAwC_7ZSGTY?si=1T44Lcwp31FDJ4AE, accessed on March 24, 2024.

¹³ Bajgain, Raghunath. 2080 B.S. Gathabandhan Badalu Pradhan Mantri: Harek Patak Aru lai Dosh. *Onlinekhabar*, Falgun 24. Available at <https://www.onlinekhabar.com/2024/03/1446205>, accessed on March 19, 2024.

addition, no regional parties exist that are predominantly influential in certain provinces. Therefore, the changes at the federal level will have repercussions at the provincial level. This has raised questions about the autonomous existence of the provincial government.

As the CPN (UML) and CPN (Maoist Center) allied to form a coalition in March 2024, the federal cabinet of ministers decided to oust the existing Province Chiefs of the Gandaki, Madhesh, and Sudurpaschim Province, and appoint new Province Chiefs. There is an established ill practice of dividing the posts of Province Chief among the political parties in the coalition. According to media reports, the provinces with Nepali Congress-leaning Province Chiefs have been replaced by those affiliated with the CPN (UML).¹⁴ The hurried move of changing the Province Chiefs, even before taking the vote of confidence, reflects the center's lack of trust in the provinces. Since the Province Chiefs could impact the formation of provincial governments, it can be surmised why they were hastily replaced. Constitutional expert Radheshyam Adhikari thinks that the trend of changing Province Chiefs with the change in power equations, has caused the respect and gravity of the constitutional posts to dwindle.¹⁵

The moment the Nepali Congress was made an opposition in the federal parliament, Ministers and Chief Ministers at the province level from the Nepali Congress have faced enormous challenges. Since the party is in a weaker position regarding the number of MPs in the provincial assemblies, the party's provincial positions are likely to be lost. In some provinces, the new alliance will also face challenges to meet the required number to form the governments. The bargaining power of smaller political parties and independent candidates have increased in these provinces. Even in the ruling coalition, there is a dispute about which parties would lead in specific provinces. For example, the CPN (UML) has claimed leadership in the Gandaki Province, while the CPN (Maoist Center) has laid its claim on the Chief

Minister of Karnali Province. Even the CPN (US) has claimed leadership in at least one province.

The repercussions on the province have been visible in actions. For example, in some provinces, the vote of confidence has been revoked, while ministers have been ousted in other provinces. In the Koshi province, it would not be difficult for the new alliance to form a new coalition government. However, a section has argued that the existing government led by the Nepali Congress leader Kedar Karki has been formed based on Article 168 (5) of the constitution; it cannot be changed and can only be dissolved, leading to a fresh election. However, another argument says a new Chief Minister could be reappointed using the same article of the constitution. Here lies the constitutional confusion.¹⁶ In the Madhesh province, the Chief Minister Saroj Kumar Yadav, representing JSP, has ousted three Nepali Congress ministers, inviting CPN (UML) to the cabinet. Since JSP has been a partner in the federal government's coalition and the new coalition has a majority in the provincial assembly, Chief Minister Yadav would face no challenge.¹⁷ In the Bagmati Province, the new coalition partner parties are short of one seat for the majority. This has given rise to the significance of the smaller parties.¹⁸

The Chief Minister of the Gandaki Province, Surendra Raj Pandey, ousted two CPN (Maoist Center) ministers and has already appointed the independent MP of the provincial assembly, Rajiv Gurung (Dipak Manange), as Physical Infrastructure Minister. Accused of his involvement in criminal activities, it is significantly meaningful for Gurung to be given the ministry with a considerably larger development budget. The RPP Parliamentary Party leader, Pancharam Gurung, said that he has asked the central leadership if the party is willing to join the provincial

¹⁴ Uker News. 2080 B.S. Ahileka lai Hatayera Tin Naya Pradesh Pramukh Pathaune Nirnaya, Tinajana UML ka. Falgun 28. Available at <https://ukeraa.com/news/detail/145122>, accessed on March 19, 2024.

¹⁵ Shahi, Dipesh. 2080 B.S. Satta Anukulataka Lagi Pradesh Pramukh Barkhasta. *Onlinekhabar*, Falgun 28. Available at <https://www.onlinekhabar.com/2024/03/1447777>, accessed on March 19, 2024.

¹⁶ Rai, Dakman. 2080 B.S. Sabai Pradesh ma Afno Sarkar Banauna Satta Gathabandhan lai Sakas: Kaha Kasto Adchan? *Thahakabar*, Chaitra 6. Available at <https://thahakabar.com/news/198988/>, accessed on March 23, 2024.

¹⁷ Tiwari, Ajit and Pratikshya Kafle. 2080 B.S. Madhesh Sarkar ma UML, Gandaki ma Manangye. *Kantipur*, Chaitra 6. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/news/2024/03/19/uml-in-madhesh-government-manage-in-gandaki-30-09.html>, accessed on March 23, 2024.

¹⁸ Bajgai, Raghunath. 2080 B.S. Bagmati ma Afthyaro Ankaganit, Dohorina Sakcha 'Koshi'. *Onlinekhabar*, Chaitra 12. Available at <https://www.onlinekhabar.com/2024/03/1454412>, accessed on March 23, 2024.

government, but the center has not yet decided.¹⁹ Since the new coalition cannot meet the required majority in this province, the role of the independent member Gurung and RPP would be significant. Lumbini Province has Nepali Congress led-government, but since the new coalition's number of seats is very close to a majority, it is difficult for the party to win the vote of confidence.

When the coalition changed in the federal government, three Nepali Congress ministers in the Karnali Province government resigned. The new alliance has a majority in the province with CPN (Maoist Center)-led government, however, CPN (UML) has laid claim on the post of Chief Minister. In the Sudurpaschim Province, the new alliance and the Nepali Congress both will face difficulty meeting the required majority. This province has Nagarik Unmukti Party with seven seats, and it has the decisive strength to form the government. Sudurpaschim Province's Chief Minister Kamal Bahadur Shah, representing the Nepali Congress, expelled a CPN (Maoist Center) minister to invite one more member from the Nagarik Unmukti Party. Chief Minister Shah has given five members of Provincial Assembly from Nagarik Unmukti Party, who had won the election from Kailali, the posts of ministers in his cabinet.²⁰ The government is still short of two members for the majority. Chief Minister Shah could command the majority only if he gathers the support of one RPP member and another independent candidate in the provincial assembly. However, there is split within the Nagarik Unmukti Party on whether to support or oppose the current coalition. The Chief Minister in provinces are required to take a vote of confidence within one month since the parties in the previous coalitions have withdrawn their support. As such, in coming days provincial politics can be expected to be filled with disruptions and upheavals.

¹⁹ Tiwari, Ajit and Pratikshya Kafle. 2080 B.S. Madhesh Sarkar ma UML, Gandaki ma Manangye. *Kantipur*, Chaitra 6. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/news/2024/03/19/uml-in-madhesh-government-manage-in-gandaki-30-09.html>, accessed on March 23, 2024.

²⁰ Chaudhari, Unnati. 2080 B.S. Sudurpashchim ma Sat Samsad raheko Naupaka Panch Mantri. *Himal Khabar*, Fagun 28. Available at <https://www.himalkhabar.com/news/140552>, accessed on March 27, 2024.

4. THE VICIOUS CYCLE OF INSTABILITY

The change in the government has a multidimensional impact. The primary duty of the parliament is to legislate laws, form the government, and become a watchdog of the government's activities. However, due to the repeated formation and dissolution of the government, the parliament's attention has veered away from the legislation of laws. Instead of focusing on its principal tasks, the parliament is embroiled in the formation and dissolution of governments. The government must register laws in the parliament, but the instability has impacted the government's job. This is the reason why some significant laws have not been enacted.²¹ The act related to transitional justice has not yet been formulated, even though it has been seventeen years since the agreement between the then-rebels Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) [CPN (Maoist Centre)] and Nepal Government has been signed. Due to this delay, thousands of conflict victims have been deprived of justice. Though the erstwhile alliance between CPN (Maoist Center) and the Nepali Congress wanted to put forward the act, the attempt failed due to the opposition party's disagreement. The federal parliament also could not promulgate a significant law related to the execution of the federal system. Before this, when the CPN (UML) was on the opposition bench, it had obstructed the parliamentary proceedings by asking for the ministers' resignation on different controversial issues. After the ruling coalition was changed, the Nepali Congress repeated the same process, demanding the resignation of the Home Minister embroiled in some contentious issues like the embezzlement of the funds of a microfinance cooperative. This has halted the promulgation of laws. On the other hand, Nepali Congress leader Gagan Thapa has said that the ruling coalition is focused more on the management and division of the resources and posts they can leverage while in power than on resolving the

²¹ Dhungana, Shambhu. 2080 B.S. Pratinidhisabha ko 7 Mahina ma Banena Eutai Pani Kanun. *Ratopati*, Shrawan 10. Available at <https://www.ratopati.com/story/375755/banena-kanun->, accessed on March 23, 2024.

day-to-day problems of the people, maintaining good governance, and gearing up the developmental works.²²

With the change in the power equation, the government's policies, programs, and priorities change. This negatively impacts economic, administrative, service delivery, and developmental works. Even if the programs and budgets formulated by the previous government are decent and practical, the new government does not prioritize those. This tendency has been visible in all three levels of the government. For example, during the tenure of Chief Minister Shankar Pokhrel, a periodic plan was formulated in Lumbini Province. While Pokhrel was in the post, the Lumbini Provincial Government formulated policies and programs per the same periodic plan. One of the aims of the periodic plan was to ensure the supply of drinking water in a hundred percent of households in the province in five years. Since the next government did not implement the periodic plan, the 78 plans formulated to supply drinking water in all households have remained unimplemented.²³

The Nepali Congress Finance Minister, Prakash Sharan Mahat, of the coalition government of the five-party alliance, had presented the principles and priorities of the Appropriation Bill 2024 in the parliament. With the change in the coalition, the CPN (UML) has demanded a change in the bill. A member of the HoR stated his confusion about speaking in parliament as it has not been clear if the bill's contents would change.²⁴ However, the bill put forward by the previous Finance Minister has moved forward in parliament despite the change in the government. At the juncture of building up a budget for the fiscal year 2024/25, four members of the Planning Commission resigned from their posts following the change in the coalition. They were appointed based on recommendation of Nepali Congress and the Janamat Party, and the new coalition parties have already recommended a new set of members to the Commission.

²² Thapa, Gagan. 2080 B.S. Sabai ko Dimag Nai Gathabandhan le Khai Diyo (Interview with Basanta Basnet). *Onlinekhabar*, Falgun 11. Available at <https://www.onlinekhabar.com/2024/02/1439595>, accessed on March 23, 2024.

²³ Chhetri, Kesharraj. 2080 B.S. Satta Ferida ko Asar Bikash Nirman ma. *Annapurna Post*, Falgun 30. Available at <https://annapurnapost.com/story/453774>, accessed on March 20, 2024.

²⁴ As per the conversation with the Member of the Parliament on March 21, 2024.

This abrupt change may also negatively impact the budget building and process of prioritizing plans. Due to a message of instability being sent out, former Finance Minister Mahat has stated his concerns, saying this may affect the Nepal Investment Summit stipulated for April 23 and 24, 2024.²⁵ The existing ten laws must be amended to create a conducive environment for investment, but no process has begun for the amendment. At the provincial level, new fiscal budgets are being formulated amid the confusion about who will lead the governments. This will likely negatively impact budgeting and the formulation of policies.

The change in the government will also impact the delivery of public services and administration. With the change in the government, the administration at the ministries will be caught up on bidding farewell to the former ministers, welcoming the new minister, and briefing them about ministerial affairs. It takes time for the new minister to understand the ministry's functions, and the new minister's policy priorities differs from the previous ministers. Similarly, there is a tendency to change bureaucrats as the ministers change. With the change in the government coalition, the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers changed the Secretary of the Home Ministry on March 11, 2024. Similarly, the new Home Minister, Rabi Lamichhane, amended the placement, transfer, and deployment procedure of the Chief District Officer (CDO), based on which he transferred CDOs of the eleven districts on March 15, 2024. In addition, going against the spirit of the constitution and narrowing down the potential of federalism, the Home Minister has given more authority to the CDOs by dispatching a circular.²⁶ In the context of provinces raising questions about the CDOs' roles, giving them more authority may invite disputes between the federal government and the provinces. Even at the local level, with the change of government, the newly elected representatives make attempts to bring in the Chief Administrative Officer of their liking. With the repeated changes in the bureaucrats, the formulated

²⁵ BBC News Nepali. 2080 B.S. Satta Samikaran Ferbadal le Lagani Sammelan ma Ke Asar Parla? Chaitra 1. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/nepali/articles/cz4z0n73xr7o>, accessed on March 24, 2024.

²⁶ Ghimire, Rabindra. 2080 B.S. CDO Marfat Shakti ko Abhyas Garne Grihamantri ko Prayas.. *Onlinekhabar*, Chaitra 9. Available at <https://www.onlinekhabar.com/2024/03/1453152>, accessed on March 24, 2024.

budget cannot be fully implemented which ends up hurting the country's overall economy.

5. DIRECTION AND FATE OF THE ALLIANCE

Past experiences have shown that the political parties have not cultivated the required culture of working in alliance. Alliances are not generally formed based on the ideological or programmatic proximity of the political partners. Instead, a handful of leaders' short-term power interests have driven the alliances and have broken them. There is a huge trust deficit among the leaders who ally for their petty power interests. Therefore, there is doubt about the future of this newly formed government coalition. There is a probability of the Nepali Congress and CPN (UML) coming closer, and Pushpa Kamal Dahal is fearful of this proximity. It is obvious that the Nepali Congress, which has been pushed to become an opposition, is critical of the present coalition. However, even the leaders of the ruling alliance expressed their concerns about the Prime Minister's move when they gave their vote of confidence to him. This hints at the likeliness of the continuation of the unstable power politics.

Since the Prime Minister is mainly concentrated on the durability of the new coalition, other significant responsibilities focusing on day-to-day governance and long-term policies and plans would be pushed to the back burner. Because of the ever-soaring power thrust among the leaders, people's resentment against politics has become palpable. In a survey conducted in 2022, 41 percent of Nepalis said that the country is moving in the right direction. However, in 2020, 65.6 percent of Nepalis had expressed this positivity.²⁷ The survey also shows that political parties are becoming the least trustworthy institutions.²⁸ The unstable politics has thrown

cold water over people's desire for good governance and development. As a result, frustration and resentment have increased among people. This poses a challenge against the federal republican system that Nepal has adopted.

The electoral system adopted by the constitution has been criticized, as it hardly allows any political party to form a majority government. Some have argued that the directly elected executive would help bring stability to the country. However, Nepali history is a testament to the fact that even the one-party-majority governments can be unstable. In a country where democracy is still fledgling, some people see a chance that the directly elected executive could become autocratic. On the other hand, the likelihood of individuals coming from economic, political, and socially dominant groups becoming rulers could not be completely ruled out. Therefore, the electoral system could not be singled out as a reason for this instability. Discussing different dimensions of the electoral system rather than nitpicking its weaknesses is essential. Nepal has adopted a proportionate electoral system to ensure inclusivity. However, some have argued that the existing proportionate electoral system has only benefited the section with access to power.²⁹ Political parties have abused the proportionate electoral system to fulfill their petty interest in political power and resources.³⁰ Political parties have shown the tendency of not giving any opportunity to Dalits, women, indigenous groups, and Madhesis in the first past the post system, only using the proportionate system to ensure inclusivity. Likewise, it has been perceived that the MPs represented via a proportionate electoral system are generally treated as second-class members.³¹ On the other hand, a concern has been raised that despite the system in place, the parliament has not yet become a fully inclusive institution. The debate must be prompted towards bringing necessary

²⁷ Adhikar, Bishnu, Srijana Nepal, and Rakshya Bhattachan. 2080 B.S. Seven Years into Federalism, Is Nepal's Glass Half Empty or Half Full? The Asia Foundation. Available at <https://asiafoundation.org/2023/05/03/seven-years-into-federalism-is-nepals-glass-half-empty-or-half-full/>, accessed on March 24, 2024.

²⁸ School of Arts, Kathmandu University, Interdisciplinary Analysts and The Asia Foundation. 2022. A Survey of the Nepali People in 2022. Available at <https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/A-Survey-of-the-Nepali-People-2022.pdf>, accessed on March 24, 2024.

²⁹ Bishwokarma, JB (ed). 2023. Contradiction Between the Principle of Proportional Representation and Election Results: An Analysis of the Representation of Dalit and Marginalized Communities in Nepal's 2022 Elections. Available at <https://dignityinitiatives.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Election-Analysis-English.pdf>, accessed on March 24, 2024.

³⁰ Mainali, Shyam Prasad. 2079 B.S. Samanupatik ko Durupayog. *Annapurna Post*, Asoj 12. Available at <https://annapurnapost.com/story/213767/>, accessed on March 25, 2024.

³¹ Lamichhane, Raghunath. 2079 B.S. Pratinidhi ra Pradesh Sabha ma Sahabagita. *Nagarik*, Pus 6. Available at https://nagariknews.nagariknetwork.com/opinion/1031791-1671665802.html?click_from=trending; accessed on March 24, 2024.

changes in the electoral system, taking into account Nepal's caste, ethnic, and regional diversities while paying due attention to bringing democratic stability in power politics.

| CONCLUSION

The unusual inconsistencies in the formation and dissolution of political alliances have negatively impacted the government's primary duties, which entail maintaining sustainable peace, good governance, prosperity, and stability. This directly affects the federal level. Political parties sorely lack internal democracy and federal culture. Therefore, a change in the federal coalition immediately affects the functioning of the provinces. This cannot be accepted as a decent practice. Even the local levels are indirectly impacted. This has affected not just the delivery of services to the citizens but also has adversely impacted the development and good governance. This has increased citizens' frustration towards political parties and the government. This is a challenge to democracy. The parties must consider this fact seriously. The concerns of ideology, political programs, and principles in forming

alliances could be taken as serious considerations. However, the truth is that democratic values and principles are compromised when alliances are formed based solely on the calculations of the number of MPs in the parliament.

To sum up, a serious challenge has been posed against Nepal's drive towards progress and prosperity by the repeated changes in the power coalitions. It is evident that political parties either win or defeat in democratic competitions. Some parties may collapse while others emerge. However, as per the basic principles and characteristics of democracy, good governance, development, and service delivery must continue unabated. If these processes are disrupted, people's trust in the political system will be eroded. Hurriedly jumping to a conclusion to claim that the electoral process has caused political instability could be counterproductive. The instability could be caused by the lack of decent political culture in political parties, or other factors might have affected the political process; sustained debates and discussions could help us ascertain the primary causes of this instability. However, if a more democratic and inclusive electoral system could help stabilize the political system, there is no reason to hesitate to adopt it.



Founded in 2014, Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) is a national non-governmental organization dedicated to the study and research of social and political issues. Since its establishment, DRCN has consistently undertaken in-depth and evidence-based research into various aspects of Nepal's transitional political landscape, including the implementation of federalism, local-level restructuring, and election observation. The outcomes of these studies are shared with stakeholders, fostering discussions and debates. DRCN's overarching objective revolves around advancing efficient governance within Nepal's federal framework through these rigorous research endeavors and thoughtful discourse.

DEMOCRACY
RESOURCE CENTER

Democracy Resource Center Nepal

Kupandole, Lalitpur, Nepal | Tel: +977-1-5902286
info@democracyresource.org | <https://www.democracyresource.org/>