

Honesty in Nepali Politicians: Does It Really Exist?

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Abstract

In principle, politicians should perform their public duties with honesty and professionalism. However, politicians' honesty is often observed to be quite low in the eye of the citizens. In this milieu, this study analyzed the perceived honesty of Nepali politicians using micro-level data from the Nepal National Governance Survey 2017/18. The data were analyzed using the ordered probit model. Results showed that the citizen's perception of honesty in Nepali politicians is quite low, with most Nepali citizens perceiving politicians as 'dishonest'. The perceived level of honesty in politicians varies with citizens' demographics and social associations. Men, urban populaces, younger generations, rich, and educated citizens believe politicians are less honest. In the case of social association, citizens who are members of self-help groups, user groups, and non-governmental organizations generally believe politicians are honest, whereas citizens who are members of professional organizations generally believe politicians are less honest. To gain the confidence of citizens, politicians must demonstrate professional political culture, work honestly for the nation and the citizens, and be free of personal self-interest.

Keywords

Politician, honesty, citizen, demographics, social association, Nepal

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Background

A politician is an elected public official who should foster and improve democracy in a nation. Politicians should be honest in their responsibility to maintain legitimacy in a democratic system. Maintaining citizen's trust is vital for politicians if they wish to retain legitimacy (Birch & Allen, 2015). A good politician is trustworthy (e.g., honest, genuine) and capable (e.g., competent, educated) (Clarke et al., 2018). Politicians differ in the degree to which they possess those skills and abilities. The levels of honesty, integrity, and competency vary greatly among politicians (Woon & Kanthak, 2018), but honesty and competency must be reflected in a politician's performance. Although it cannot be claimed that competent politicians meet all the citizens' needs effectively and efficiently, they are supposed to be honest, with this trait being deemed as the most desirable trait in political leaders (Aichholzer & Willmann, 2020). Politicians perform on behalf of the public and their activities are funded from the public purse (Birch & Allen, 2010). However, there is enough evidence to indicate that political leaders are often believed to act unethically by those they serve (Birch & Allen, 2015). A culture of integrity, honesty, devotion, commitment, sense of duty, and patriotism is rarely seen in many politicians. Shah (2019) argued that honest politicians are a rare breed today. An honest politician is someone who has dedicated her/himself to perform her/his public duties in the spirit of the constitution for the welfare of the people and the nation at large. Although citizens have granted legitimate power to politicians through a democratic electoral system, most of the citizens' perceptions of politicians are negative. Most politicians have been unable to create a positive image and improve the day-to-day lives of the citizens they serve.

During an election, citizens have confidence that politicians will work ethically and morally to advance and prosper the country and its citizens. Nepali politicians often show themselves as 'committed' to stability and development in their election manifestos and speeches. However, their 'commitment' has not been instrumental in producing and delivering the results as expected by the citizens. Much has been promised but very few things have been delivered. Now the citizens of Nepal have realized that these promises are generally meaningless and have started to raise the question of politicians' honesty. Failure to deliver promises undermines the legitimacy of democracy in the nation. Several political structures and systems have been changed since the establishment of democracy in 1951, but the old political mentality and culture has not significantly changed. There is a lack of democratic culture and ethos in Nepal's politics, and these have not only declined in the politicians of the ruling party, but also in those of the opposition. Politicians are often observed pursuing power, for which they will go to any extent. Guided by their self-interest, politicians are involved in a dirty political game of changing the government, "proving" the opposition ineffective, and clinging to power by grasping for opportunity instead of serving the citizens effectively. The politicians are often

accused of being involved in political scandals, rarely practice financial discipline, and are guided by inveterate political self-interest. The political culture of Nepali politicians for promoting and ensuring good governance, development, and prosperity is dubious. The 2015 Constitution of Nepal envisaged fulfilling the citizens' aspirations of sustainable peace, good governance, development, and prosperity. This can only be achieved if politicians perform their public duties honestly and professionally.

Understanding citizens' viewpoints on politicians' honesty is crucial for the effective functioning of democracy in the nation. Several previous studies investigated the political system, political corruption, voting behavior, honest politicians, politician's behavior, politicians relation with administrators, political leadership, election behavior, and political trust (See: Davis & Ferrantino, 1996; Amundsen, 1999; Woon & Kanthak, 2001; Bean, 2008; Birch & Allen, 2010, 2015; Bhavnani & Condra, 2012; Wroe et al., 2013; Turper & Aarts, 2017; Citrin & Stoker, 2018; Devkota, 2019; De Vries & Van Prooijen, 2019; Gupta et al., 2019; Aichholzer & Willmann, 2020). Newspaper articles in Nepal, in general, regularly focus on the political system, political leadership, political behavior, and party politics. However, academic studies on the honesty of politicians from the viewpoint of citizens have received less attention in Nepal and are yet to be studied and discussed in the academic world. With this backdrop, this study aimed to analyze the perceived honesty of Nepali politicians using micro-level data from the Nepal National Governance Survey 2017/18. The outcome of this study will generate empirical evidence, help close literature gaps, provide grounded knowledge, and ignite academic discourse on politicians and political integrity (honesty) in the context of Nepal. This study may also help politicians to understand how citizens perceive them.

This article is comprised of four sections. It starts with an introduction to the issues and research purpose, followed by a section demonstrating the political environment in Nepal. The third section focuses on research methods, and the final section discusses the study's findings and conclusions.

Purpose and Research Questions

The central purpose of this study was to analyze the honesty of Nepali politicians as perceived by citizens. This study attempts to answer the following questions:

- What is the level of honesty in Nepali politicians?
- To what extent does the perceived honesty of Nepali politicians differ by citizens' demographics and social associations?

Political Environment in Nepal

King Prithvi Narayan Shah (1743-1775), often known as the father of the modern state of Nepal, established the Shah dynasty. The Shah Kings or their regents ruled Nepal between 1769 and 1846, a time marked by territorial expansion, where the government was heavily centralized and the king was the holder of all legislative, executive, and judicial powers (The Asia Foundation [TAF] & Enabling State Programme [ESP], 2012). The authoritarian regime of Rana began in 1846 and ruled for 104 years. Jung Bahadur Rana founded the Rana regime out of the Kot Parwo (bloody massacre). Throughout this time, Rana's Prime Ministers dominated the entire administration and governance system. The government employees were accountable to Rana's leaders rather than to the citizens. It was a period when even national income was considered to be the personal income of the Prime Minister (TAF & ESP, 2012). The citizens were not free to express themselves and raise their voices against Ranas, and those who did were declared anti-nationals. The formalized struggle for democracy in Nepal is characterized by the 1950 revolution, a concerted political maneuver between the Nepali Congress and King Tribhuvan to put an end to the Rana government (Snellinger, 2010). After a long struggle, the authoritarian Rana regime was dissolved with the establishment of democracy in 1951. Nepal entered the modern era after it was declared a democratic country in 1951 (Pyakuryal & Suvedi, 2000). The country was governed by its first set of laws, the Interim Government Act 1951, which was replaced by the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal in 1959 (TAF & ESP, 2012). This constitution established the King as the supreme head of the state, having exclusive power to exercise the executive, legislative, and judicial powers of the state.

Nepal's first election took place in 1959, but, unfortunately, after one year King Mahendra introduced an autocratic Panchayat (council) system by dissolving the democratic parliament. King Mahendra passed Nepal's constitution of 1962, which established a non-party Panchayat government structure. In this system, parties were banned, political activities were discouraged, and the rulers of Panchayat benefited from democracy (Devkota, 2019). The King appointed the Council of Ministers from that body, which was later allowed to elect the Prime Minister, who could recommend other ministers. However, the King remained the source of the executive, legislative, and judicial powers, and served as the Supreme Commander of the Army (TAF & ESP, 2012). Due to the growing civic consciousness and agitation from citizens and exiled parties, the King approved a referendum (a modified version of the Panchayat system) in 1980 (Bhattarai, 2004), and a direct parliamentary election was held in 1981. After nine years, the 1990 People's Movement ended the Panchayat regime and re-established democracy in the country with the promulgation of the constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal (1990). This was followed by an election in 1991. The political parties pledged during the 1991 election campaign that democracy would lead to growth and boost economic conditions for everyone, but no

improvement was noticeable (Hatlebakk, 2017). The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) started the rebel insurgency in February 1996 and was actively involved until 2006. Around 13,000 soldiers, civilians, and rebels were killed in the fighting during the decade of the Maoist civil war (1996–2006).

With the claim that he would restore peace and security, the King, both in 2002 and 2005, seized the reins of democracy by removing parliament and appointing royalist bureaucrats to run the government and oversee the Royal Nepal Army's protracted armed conflict with the Maoists (Snellinger, 2010). In November 2005, the leaders of the seven political parties signed a 12-point agreement with the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and jointly led a mass movement that forced the King to step down and re-establish the parliament (TAF & ESP, 2012). There was a new People's Movement in April 2006, with massive street protests, and the parliament was re-established with Congress leading the government (Hatlebakk, 2017). The parliament acquired complete legislative power on 19 May 2006 and provided executive authority to the government of Nepal. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in November 2006 between the government of Nepal and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and officially ended the civil war. The Maoists joined an interim parliament in January 2007 and an interim constitution (2007) was declared. The Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 declared Nepal a federal, democratic-republican state by duly abolishing the monarchy.

The election of the Constituent Assembly (CA) for the drafting of a new constitution was held in 2008. The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) won this election and became the largest party. After the election in 2008, the CA was formed to draft a new constitution. However, it failed to draft a new constitution within the allocated timeframe and dissolved in 2012. There was great dissatisfaction among the citizens when the CA was dissolved. A second election for the CA was held in 2013. The newly elected CA promulgated the Constitution of Nepal 2015 that replaced the Interim Constitution 2007. With the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal 2015, Nepal transformed from a unitary governance system to a federal democratic republic governance system. The constitution divided Nepal into three levels – federal, provincial, and local – and provided the legal framework for exercising state authority at each level. The federal, provincial, and local levels exercise the state authority based on the principles of cooperation, coexistence, and coordination. The Constitution of Nepal 2015 envisioned removing all forms of injustice and prejudice created by the centralized and unitary system of governance. It promoted social justice and was committed to fulfilling the aspirations for perpetual peace, good governance, development, and prosperity through the federal democratic republican system of governance. In 2017, central, provincial, and local level elections were held under the new federal system. No local elections had been held from 1997 to May 2017. A local level election was scheduled for 2002 but, due to the civil war, the government decided to postpone it. Local elections were held in three phases in 2017. The first round of local elections took place in the core hills on 14 May

2017. The second round took place on 28 June 2017 in the Terai and the eastern and western hills. Finally, the third round took place in the core areas of Madhes on 18 September 2017. Since the establishment of democracy in 1951, several political structures and systems had changed, but the living standards of citizens had not changed much. No matter what type of political structure and system there is, if those in charge are bad, it will be bad.

Study Method

We used data from the Nepal National Governance Survey 2017/18, which provides a national representative sample of Nepali citizens. It is a citizen perception survey carried out by Nepal Administrative Staff College with the technical support of the Central Bureau of Statistics to capture the views of citizens about different aspects of the state government of Nepal. This survey selected 12,920 Nepali citizens 18 years and older from 43 districts of Nepal using four-stage multiple cluster sampling designs. Data was received from 12872 respondents (99.6% response rate) through face-to-face interviews with help of trained and skilled research associates from December 2017 to March 2018.

Study Variables, Data Management and Analysis

This study used two broad predictor variables and one outcome variable to examine the perceived honesty of Nepali politicians, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Study Variables

Predictor variables	Outcome Variable
<i>Demographics:</i> age, urban/rural, sex, education, economic status	<i>Honesty:</i> ministers and
<i>Social Associations:</i> self-help groups, user groups, non-governmental organizations, political parties, trade unions, religious/cultural organizations, professional organizations, ward citizen forum, caste/ethnic organizations	parliamentarians

This survey provided background characteristics (age, sex, urban/rural, education, and perceived economic status) and social associations (self-help groups, user groups, NGOs, political parties, trade unions, religious/cultural organizations, professional organizations, and ward citizen forums) of the respondents. We used these background characteristics and social associations as predictor variables. Similarly, we used the honesty of ministers and parliamentarians as an outcome variable for this study. The outcome variable of honesty of ministers and parliamentarians is perception based. We used the perception-based honesty index because the survey gathered the information on the honesty of ministers and parliamentarians by asking, 'How honest do you think they are in their work?'. In the survey question, individuals were asked to rate the honesty of ministers and parliamentarians on a scale of 1= very honest, 2= honest to

some extent, 3= not very honest, 4= not honest at all, and don't know/can't say. We removed 'don't know/can't say' responses from the analysis because it does not provide a clear-cut judgment on the honesty of ministers and parliamentarians.

There were 1381 and 1730 don't know/can't say responses for ministers and parliamentarians, respectively. After omitting the response don't know/can't say, the sample size for the study became 11491 for ministers and 11142 for parliamentarians. Outcome variables became ordinal after eliminating the don't know/can't say response. We then ordered outcome variables by shortening in ascending order ranging from 1= 'not honest at all' to 4= 'very honest'. We then used the ordered probit model because the data of outcome variable is in ordered categorical responses and the distance between the categories is not equal (Daykin & Moffatt, 2002; Liddell & Kruschke, 2018). We used this model to estimate the association between an outcome ordinal variable (honesty of ministers and parliamentarians), and a set of independent/predictor variables (demographics and social associations) (Rivera, 2001). This model more precisely reflects the distribution of ordinal responses within each group and more correctly describes the data (Liddell & Kruschke, 2018). The ordered Probit link function is denoted as follows:

$$\Pr [Y = 1|X] = \Phi (\beta x_1 + \beta x_2 \dots + \epsilon)$$

Where, Pr denotes probability, $1|X$ is the output categories in the outcome variable (honesty of ministers and parliamentarians), Φ indicates logistic cumulative density function. βx is the ordered Probit coefficients for each predictor variable [demographics: age, sex, education, urban/rural and perceived economic status), social associations (self-help groups, user groups, NGOs, political parties, trade unions, religious/cultural organizations, professional organizations, and ward citizen forums)].

We also calculated the mean to identify the degree of honesty in ministers and parliamentarians. We used SPSS 26 software for data processing and statistical analysis. The generated data were tabulated and analyzed with the help of suitable literature.

Results

The level of honesty in politicians (ministers and parliamentarians) is presented in Table 2. Overall honesty of ministers (Mean=2.38) and parliamentarians (Mean=2.36) appears to be low. Citizens rate lower levels of honesty in ministers compared to parliamentarians. A lower level of honesty shows that citizens are dissatisfied with the decisions, conducts, actions, behaviors, and performance of ministers and parliamentarians. Several interesting results are demonstrated by the estimated coefficient and Exp (β). The Exp (β) is interpreted in terms of the change in odds ratio. It is worth noting that an odds ratio larger than 1 implies that as the predictor rises, the odds of the event occurring rise. Demographics and social associations have both positive and negative impacts on the honesty of ministers and parliamentarians.

The urban and rural populace is negatively associated with the honesty of ministers ($\beta = 0.945, p > 0.05$) and parliamentarians ($\beta = 0.946, p > 0.05$). Municipal citizens believe that ministers and parliamentarians are more dishonest compared to the citizens of the rural municipality. Like urban/rural, there is a negative association between the sexes ($\beta = 0.907, p < 0.05$) and parliamentarians ($\beta = 0.923, p < 0.05$). This suggests that men believe ministers and parliamentarians are more dishonest compared to women. The respondent's age and the perception of the honesty of ministers and parliamentarians are positively associated. The coefficients for ministers and parliamentarians are .001 ($p > 0.05$) and .002 ($p > 0.05$) respectively, indicating that the ordered log-odds increase by .001 and .002 for each unit of increase in age. As citizen's age increases, their perception of honesty in ministers and parliamentarians also increases. Older citizens considered ministers and parliamentarians more honest than younger citizens. Positive coefficients are observed between education and the honesty of ministers (illiterate $\beta = 1.301, p < 0.05$; no formal education $\beta = 1.346, p < 0.05$; basic education $\beta = 1.175, p < 0.05$; secondary education $\beta = 1.129, p < 0.05$) and parliamentarians (illiterate $\beta = 1.150, p < 0.05$; no formal education $\beta = 1.221, p < 0.05$; basic education $\beta = 1.177, p < 0.05$; secondary education $\beta = 1.105, p > 0.05$). This shows that, compared to no education and lower levels of education, citizens of higher education believe that ministers and parliamentarians are less honest. This is because citizens with higher education have a higher level of knowledge about the governance system and critically judge the behavior and performance of ministers and parliamentarians. The expectation of honest behavior and performance increases with higher education attainment. If honest behavior and performance are lower than the expectations of citizens, the perception of honesty may decline gradually. The perception of honesty of ministers and parliamentarians is declining as the economic status (moving poorer to richer) increases. Richer citizens perceive lower honesty in ministers ($\beta = 0.745, p < 0.05$) and parliamentarians ($\beta = 0.769, p > 0.05$) than that of poorer citizens.

The perception of honesty of ministers and parliamentarians also varies with social associations. Social associations have mixed (positive and negative) impacts. Except for professional organizations ($\beta = 0.937, p > 0.05$), citizens who are members of a social associations believed that parliamentarians are more honest, but this scenario is different for ministers. Citizens who are members of political parties ($\beta = 0.996, p > 0.05$), trade unions ($\beta = 0.854, p > 0.05$), religious/cultural organizations ($\beta = 0.989, p > 0.05$), and professional organizations ($\beta = 0.956, p > 0.05$) believed that ministers are dishonest, however the citizens who are members of self-help groups ($\beta = 1.065, p > 0.05$), user groups ($\beta = 1.022, p > 0.05$), NGOs ($\beta = 1.030, p > 0.05$), ward citizens' forums ($\beta = 1.071, p > 0.05$), caste/ethnic organizations ($\beta = 1.065, p > 0.05$) believed that ministers are honest. Some social associations have higher level of honesty in ministers and parliamentarians whereas some have significantly low.

Table 2. Honesty of Ministers and Parliamentarians

Predictors	Ministers [^]		Parliamentarians ^a	
	Estimate	EXP (β)	Estimate	EXP (β)
Demographics				
Age	.001**	1.001	.002**	1.002
Municipality	-.057**	0.945	-.056**	0.946
Rural Municipality (Ref.)				
Male	-.098*	0.907	-.080*	0.923
Female (Ref.)				
No Education	.263*	1.301	.140*	1.150
No Formal Education	.297*	1.346	.200*	1.221
Basic Education	.161*	1.175	.163*	1.177
Secondary Education	.121*	1.129	.100**	1.105
Higher Education (Ref.)				
Rich	-.295*	0.745	-.263**	0.769
Medium	.031**	1.031	.055**	1.057
Poor (Ref.)				
Social Associations				
<i>Self Help Groups</i>				
Yes	.063**	1.065	.064**	1.066
No (Ref.)				
<i>User Groups</i>				
Yes	.022**	1.022	.056**	1.058
No (Ref.)				
<i>NGOs</i>				
Yes	.030**	1.030	.038**	1.039
No (Ref.)				
<i>Political Party</i>				
Yes	-.004**	0.996	.095**	1.100
No (Ref.)				
<i>Trade Union</i>				
Yes	-.158**	0.854	.141**	1.151
No (Ref.)				
<i>Religious/Cultural Organization</i>				
Yes	-.011**	0.989	.012**	1.012
No (Ref.)				
<i>Professional Organizations</i>				
Yes	-.045**	0.956	-.065**	0.937
No (Ref.)				

Table 2. Honesty of Ministers and Parliamentarians (Cont.)

Predictors	Ministers [^]		Parliamentarians ^a	
	Estimate	EXP (β)	Estimate	EXP (β)
<i>Ward Citizen Forum</i>				
Yes	.069**	1.071	.115**	1.122
No (Ref.)				
<i>Caste/Ethnic Organizations</i>				
Yes	.063**	1.065	.165*	1.179
No (Ref.)				

*P<0.05, **p>0.05; Mean [[^]Ministers=2.28; ^aParliamentarians=2.36 (Min 1, Max 4)]; In percentage [Ministers= Very honest (3.7%), honest to some extent (37.2%), not very honest (28.2%), not honest at all (21.9%), don't know/can't say (9%); Parliamentarians= Very honest (3.3%), honest to some extent (40.7%), not very honest (27.6%), not honest at all (17.2%), don't know/can't say (11.3%)]

Discussion and Reflection

In this section, we analyzed the overall honesty of Nepali politicians instead of focusing on the impact of citizens' demographics and social associations on politicians' honesty. The answers to the first and second research questions are addressed in the results section. Here, we analyzed the overall honesty of politicians as follows:

Honesty in politics and politicians is the foundation for the effective functioning of democracy in the nation. Democracy in the nation cannot survive in the absence of honest politics and politicians. The legitimacy of democracy heavily depends on honest politics, and honest politics begins with politicians' honest behavior. Politicians should be honest, skilled, enthusiastic, trustworthy, loyal, fair, and far from lying, cheating, stealing, breaking promises, and deceiving. Honesty has been observed in politicians when they speak the truth, act truthfully, and do not do morally wrong things. Political actors are perceived by citizens to behave ethically and to perform governmental functions effectively and efficiently (Wroe, Allen & Birch, 2013). Gupta (2020) argued that citizens expect politicians to work on their benefit and deliver promises. Citizens demand politicians be honest and serve the interest of citizens and the nation at large without any prejudice and manipulation. Politicians should maintain honesty and integrity in the service of the nation and citizens, with positive, loyal, and fair behavior all the time and committed to working for the betterment of the nation and the citizens. When asked whether politicians should be honest, they would possibly say, 'In principle, yes!' (Luhmann, 1994), but in reality, they respond 'No, as expected.' It is a common understanding that most politicians are dishonest and have poor ethical standards (Gallup survey, 2015 cited in Fehrler et al., 2016). Generally, trust in politicians is low (Dalton, 2005; Turper & Aarts, 2017; Citrin & Stoker, 2018). Politicians are perceived to be low on honesty-humility and high on extraversion and narcissism (De Vries, & Van

Prooijen, 2019). The overall picture of how the citizens view the honesty of politicians is evident (Birch & Allen, 2010). As per the Nepal National Governance Survey (2017/18), less than 4% of citizens believed that ministers, political parties, and parliamentarians are 'very honest,' and comparatively large numbers mentioned that they are 'not honest at all' (over 17%). Approximately 41% of Nepali citizens perceived that ministers, political parties, and parliamentarians are honest to some extent (Nepal Administrative Staff College, 2018). The Global Corruption Barometer– Asia, published by Transparency International, showed that 43% of respondents (Nepali) believed that members of Parliament are corrupt (Transparency International, 2020, p. 48). It has also been clear through posts and comments on social media such as Twitter and Facebook that honesty is very low in politicians. Of course, real-world politicians may be inherently dishonest, as many people think they are (Woon & Kanthak, 2018). The fundamental problem with politics today is that politicians are simply living off politics.

Nepal is a fragile state owing to political self-interest. After years of struggle, Nepal has achieved its democracy and is still in its early stage of development. Despite the establishment of democracy in Nepal in 1951, Nepali citizens don't completely enjoy the fruits of democracy. There are many reasons behind this; one of them is the lack of honesty and sincerity of Nepali politicians. A nation becomes prosperous and developed not only because of the availability of resources, but also because of dedicated, fair, loyal, and honest politicians. Per David-Barrett (2013), members of parliament are elected to serve the public interest, but they abuse their position and serve private interests rather than the public interest. Citizens are accusing politicians of self-interest rather than working for national and citizen's needs (Gupta, 2020). Politicians should serve, and if they fail to do so they will face a crisis of legitimacy. The political atmosphere in Nepal is more polarized, and there is a lack of democratic and shared political culture among Nepali politicians. There are factions, coalitions, and squabbles between politicians for acquiring political power. Politicians struggle for political power and do not hesitate to play dirty games to acquire it. Every politician has a personal interest in coming to power. They are actively involved in the political system and may go to any extent to capture the power. Most politicians need power at the earliest, whether by splitting the party or changing factions. There is opaque work for positions and chairs; they are willing to do anything for it. The politicians are tempted to form and overthrow the government for power and position. There is a trend in Nepali politicians to think when he/she is in power, everything is good, when he/she is not, everything done by those in power, is bad. Interestingly, most politicians do not hesitate to repeat the same actions (bad actions) as their opponents without feeling ashamed when they gain power. Politicians are always more critical of the opposition who prove ineffective when in government. Ongoing power struggles have made the situation worse in Nepal. The struggle for power and the feeling of self-competition serves to demonstrate dishonest behavior. Nepali politicians seek honesty in other politicians rather than beholding it on their own. In the eyes of many citizens, honesty appears to

be a myth in Nepali politicians. It is no surprise that genuinely honest politicians are so rare in Nepali politics.

In Nepali politicians' speeches and their election manifestos, political stability and development are two common agenda items, but they have failed to produce and capitalize on the desired results. Voters (citizens) expect elected politicians to enforce their manifestos and pre-election promises (Aichholzer & Willmann, 2020). De Vries and Van Prooijen (2019) argued that voters, in general, are guided by their political preferences, and favor preferred politicians over non-preferred politicians. Some voters prefer the left party, while others prefer the right party; but all voters prefer honest parties (Amundsen, 1999). An honest party is made up of honest politicians. Citizens want honest elected politicians (Birch & Allen, 2010). Citizens do not accept false election promises from politicians, even if they come from the same political ideology, and penalize politician's dishonesty in the election. Dishonest politicians typically attempt to appear trustworthy, imitating the actions of honest candidates in the election campaign, making it much more difficult for voters (Fehrler et al., 2016). Politicians often cultivate their certain image in media which departs from their actual character (De Vries & Van Prooijen, 2019). Bhavnani and Condra (2012) argued that voter trade-off between positive characteristics of the candidates against their negative ones. Voters prefer politicians who lie less to more laid-back politicians. Nepali citizens believe that politicians lie, and some politicians lie more than others. Citizens are knowingly voting for dishonest politicians because there are no options for honest politicians. If politicians are elected based on positive claims, they must be aware that their promises will be assessed against their performance (Davis & Ferrantino, 1996). The less honest politicians will stray more readily from their promises to reap higher private benefits (Fehrler et al., 2016). Commitments and promises made by dishonest politicians have no meaning whatsoever. They just promise everything and deliver nothing. Delivering promises is critical to the healthy functioning of democracy in the nation. Most citizens object to the failure of politicians to deliver the promises made during the election. This is not to say that politicians never work; they do, of course, in some ways. Some citizens are also showing faith in politicians and their working style

Undoubtedly, citizens are a source of power and politicians are servants. In reality, however, this is not seen. Politicians have failed to appear as a servant of citizens. As supreme boss, politicians demonstrate their behavior and execute their duties. Politicians use their political power for self-interest and usually break laws. The behavior of a politician is strongly regulated by a set of complex, unwritten laws. Over time, this may lead to a greater demand for the implementation of the rule of law, as well as a reduction in tolerance for violations of the law by political leaders (Adhikari et al., 2014). A politician seeks an unlawful benefit from his/her post in a specific instance (Bean, 2008). Members of parliaments may also be accused of misuse of office or abuse of public funds if they use their powers or parliamentary resources in ways that serve private interests at the expense of the public interest (David-Barrett, 2013). Politicians have a

proclivity to exploit the state's resources for personal gain in the name of the citizens. Citizens expect politicians to be honest and avoid fraud and corruption. However, Nepali citizens have seen many examples of politicians' dishonesty over the last three decades. Politicians are accused of misuse of public funds, rape scandals, the promulgation of controversial laws, unwanted interference in the state bureaucracy, misuse of diplomatic (red) passports, failure to maintain financial discipline, corruption related to procurement, and so on. Daily newspapers continue to report on the involvement of ministers in various forms of malpractice (Gupta, 2020).

Nepali politicians are accused of nepotism, selfishness, misappropriation, monopoly, and indulgence. In Nepali politics, clientelism is very popular. Clientelism, for example, when taking the form of nepotism, is criticized for violating fairness rules (Johnston, 1989; Mancuso et al., 2006). Similarly, David-Barrett (2013) contended that members of parliament who use power to help their friends or family might be guilty of nepotism. Per Shah (2019), several political leaders have tried to protect their place of power by appointing family members in various public councils and committees and the state apparatus. He further argued that, through such mechanisms many politicians have been able to move their family members from public positions to private business and transfer public power to private wealth. If politicians in power are dishonest and corrupt, we cannot expect the system to be fair. Nepali citizens have begun to disdain and hate dishonest politicians. Citizens expect politicians to demonstrate high moral values and act with integrity and honesty to develop the nation by aligning their self-interest into national interest, and contribute towards the national aspiration of 'happy Nepali and prosperous Nepal.'

Implications of the Study

This study's findings have far-reaching implications. Politicians are the citizens' representatives in a democratic political system, and they are responsible for driving the nation toward prosperity. Politicians' positions and power are not permanent because of the periodic election system, in which they hold office for a fixed term. Politicians should be honest in their public duties during their fixed tenure, and they should play a creative role as opposition when not in position and power. The study's findings alert and compel Nepali politicians to maintain the integrity and fulfil their responsibilities honestly. It also provides clear cues for citizens to make rational decisions to vote for honest and trustworthy politicians who can drive and lead the nation to prosperity and to speak out against dishonest politicians. Furthermore, it offers insightful evidence to political institutions for promoting and straitening the honest political culture.

Conclusion

There is unlikely to be a single citizen in a nation who doesn't seek honesty in politicians. Honesty in politicians is the backbone for stability and healthy democracy. Politicians must possess standard and moral qualities and perform their duties professionally with the virtues of honesty. Perceived honesty in politicians seems to be less in the view of citizens and varies across citizens' demographics and social associations. Demographics and social associations have both positive and negative impacts on the honesty of politicians. Although demographic and social associations of citizens have a positive and negative impact on politicians' honesty, most citizens perceived politicians as dishonest. This is because most citizens are neither happy nor satisfied with the acts, decisions, and behavior of politicians. Citizens expect politicians to meet their needs and develop the nation at any cost. However, politicians rarely quench citizens' thirst of development, which has raised a serious question in their honesty. Citizens are continuously criticizing politicians publicly and openly on social media. Citizen's faith in Nepali politicians has declined sharply. It is, therefore, an urgent need to restore citizens' faith in politicians at the earliest for ensuring development, prosperity, and good governance in the nation. For this, politicians' honesty is not only instrumental, but also a pivotal and obligatory prerequisite.

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