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## Paper for Panel 21:

# 'What A Village Can Tell – Democratisation in Nepal'


### Abstract

This paper provides an example of how studying villages may shed light on a wider national problem. It is focused on a factor, which may explain some of the political instability, which came to mark democratisation in Nepal from 1990-2002: the relationship between parties and voters. The paper provides evidence of how local perceptions of politicians influence voting behavior and, in turn, how parties and candidates respond to the electorate in the context of elections. Based on field research in six villages, the paper suggests that problems of democratisation in Nepal may have something to do with weak relations between the parties and a vast majority of rural voters. Without strengthening this relationship, it is asserted, democracy may remain weak, too.



### Contact Information

Hans Gorm Andersen, Email: hgn_a@yahoo.dk
Roskilde University, Dep. For International Development Studies
P.O. Box 260, 4000-Denmark

# What A Village Can Tell – Democratisation in Nepal

**By Hans Gorm Andersen, Ph.D. Candidate**

## 1 Introduction

This paper provides an example of how studying villages may shed light on a wider national problem. Sometimes processes that are seemingly concentrated in the capital, such as intensive infighting among political leaders competing for power, may have strong local roots. The paper is based on field research conducted for my Ph.D. thesis. The evidence, which is presented below, feeds into an analysis of a broader topic that has gained increasing relevance since the initial enthusiasm for political liberalisation in the 1990s: the failure of democratisation. The six villages, to which we shall turn shortly, are located in Nepal a few hours drive outside the capital of Kathmandu. Since the transition to democracy was initiated in 1990 following three decades of authoritarian rule, these villages as well as many others had become the site of struggles among political parties and their candidates trying to win votes. Local politicians and members of parliament (MPs) fought a total of five elections and in between villagers were expecting change.

Over decades of rule by the King most rural areas in Nepal had seen little of the improvements that numerous development programs had promised: public schools, local health centres, electricity installations, irrigations canals, and so forth. Soon, the expectations of democracy were replaced by scepticism or nostalgia for the authoritarian past. Politicians became seen as 'corrupt' and 'selfish' with 'excessive passion for private gain (Dahal, 1999, p. 1)'. They were portrayed as making 'excessive political intervention' in the administration of the country, creating 'a situation of disorder, indiscipline, aberration and anarchy…undermining the laws, rules and regulations…and paralysing state organs (Hachhethu, 2000, p. 110)'. A public oppinion poll identified the 'political parties and leaders' as the 'main threat to democracy (Sharma and Sen, 1999)'. Two years before the King staged a coup in October 2002, a Nepalese political analyst wrote:

> 'Democracy has promised recovery and relief. But, in reality, democracy has multiplied social anamolies with continued political instability…manifest with habits of plundering the resources of the state (…) Politicians are the mainsprings of the rampant corruption in the country and a decade of politicking on national bureaucracy…has reduced it to a football by the politicians (…) A reform…requires a reform in politics and [in] the habits of politicians… (Kumar, 2000, p. 2)'.

As the transition to democracy was abruptly ended in a royal coup, many blamed the politicians even more for their failure to consolidate a multiparty system in the country. Today, Nepal is effectively an authoritarian regime. I visited six villages on field research along with my Nepalese interpreter in 2002-2003. It was a time of great political instability. The absolute disappointment and resent that villagers expressed towards the politicians in Kathmandu echoed the utterances above. Was Nepal a country of 'bad politicians'? Seen from the top down, observing ministers and MPs engaging in large-scale corruption with impunity, one would tilt towards such a conclusion. Nepal remains

one of the poorest countries in the world with a rural population of around 90 percent – like fifty years ago – and some of the highest iliteracy rates seen in developing countries (UNDP, 1998). The failure of the politicians to concentrate on these problems, to fight corruption, and to address rising political instability led many to conclude that the politicians have a wrong 'mindset' at best or are corrupt and criminal at worst. In this paper, however, we shall try and flip the coin and study politics from a bottom-up perspective – from the villages outside the political battleground of Kathmandu. The sections below focus on a factor, which may explain some of the political instability, which came to mark democratisation in Nepal: the relationship between parties and voters.

## 2 Serving The People's Needs

We shall look at this relationship in its ideal form as one of demand and respond. The promise of democracy throughout the developing world is, prominently, that the government should serve the 'people's needs'. The introduction of democracy in many developing countries has been envisaged to make hitherto authoritarian system more responsive to these needs. Studying the relationship between parties and their candidates, on the one hand, and voters on the other, we first made a survey of the needs that politicians were expected to meet. Which were the demands that voters would raise to their representatives? Table 1 shows the respondents distributed on their three most important demands. It stands out that the demands are quite similar concerning basic goods.

**Table 1 What Are Your Three Main Demands To The Politicians? Distribution Pct.**

| | Total | Kharel-th. | Kushad. | Sanga | Hokse | Saathi-gh. | Meghauli |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total** | **100** | **100** | **100** | **100** | **100** | **100** | **100** |
| School | **6** | 13 | 5 | 8 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| Health | **3** | 1 | 2 | 8 | 1 | 5 | 3 |
| Toilets/sanitation | **10** | 5 | 12 | 10 | 14 | 12 | 11 |
| Sports | **1** | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Agriculture | **0** | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Roads and bridges | **14** | 13 | 24 | 12 | 16 | 3 | 11 |
| Electricity | **12** | 20 | 21 | 2 | 6 | 15 | 1 |
| Drinking water | **16** | 16 | 12 | 11 | 18 | 32 | 9 |
| Irrigation | **1** | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Community house | **1** | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Religious building | **0** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Help for the elderly | **10** | 25 | 20 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| Help for the jobless | **8** | 0 | 0 | 16 | 13 | 11 | 14 |
| Help for women | **8** | 1 | 0 | 11 | 13 | 10 | 15 |
| Help for the poorest | **3** | 0 | 0 | 4 | 8 | 6 | 3 |
| Other need | **6** | 4 | 3 | 9 | 1 | 1 | 18 |
| No need | **1** | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 |

Source: Survey in six villages and three settlements within each, the sample comprising 460 respondents

The main demands were concerned with infrastructure, on the one hand, notably roads, bridges, electricity, and drinking water, and help in economic matters, on the other, including pensions for the elders and jobs for the unemployed. Lack of sources of income was a great problem in these villages where land scarcity was escalating at the pace of population growth seeing sons dividing the plots inherited from their fathers. Women demanded training in sewing and other crafts to improve their capacity to make an income. One of the biggest demands was support for the older family members. The respondents indicated during the interviews that what they had in mind was not the wider groups of 'unemployed', 'women', or 'elderly'. Instead they were mainly concerned with themselves personally and the plights of family, friends or neighbors. Politicians were expected to solve economic problems of an economic nature. These expectations were covered under a second question in the survey. Would the respondents demand more personal services of the politicians in addition to public goods? The results are shown in table 2.

**Table 2 Would You Demand Of A Politician To Solve These Problems? Pct.**

| | Total | Yes | No | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Unemployment - finding a job | 100 | 99 | 1 | 0 |
| Sickness - provide access to treatment | 100 | 100 | 0 | 0 |
| Documents - accessing officials | 100 | 99 | 1 | 0 |
| Private disputes - mediation | 100 | 100 | 0 | 0 |
| Loan - help to ease economic problems | 100 | 97 | 4 | 0 |
| Police - help people out of prison | 100 | 99 | 1 | 1 |

Source: Survey in six villages and three settlements within each, the sample comprising 460 respondents

A majority of the respondents expected not only public goods but also assistance of a personal nature. In the rural areas, people would face numerous constraints and risks, which they may sometimes be unable to handle without the assistance of an influential person. When a villager turned ill and needed access to the hospital, assistance would sometimes be needed in anything from transport to the hospital, communicating with the doctors, and paying for medicine or treatment. Villagers, who were illiterate, would encounter difficulties accessing officials in the district administration. Also in this matter, politicians, who were a bit more literate, could help villagers contact the higher levels. Villagers would seek the mediation of the 'cleverer persons'. In problems with the police, good relations with the chairman of the local government, the Village Development Committee (VDC) or the right district party committee or MP, could open the doors when in custody or facing a penalty. Local politicians were always expected to mediate in local disputes and the villagers. Moreover, these respondents would not hesitate to ask for help in economic problems. It seemed that the obligations of parties and candidates towards the voters were almost without limits and went far beyond what the formal requirements entailed.

We asked six MPs whether they had experienced all of these demands, too, and how they had responded. Two statements are quoted below as examples of how they saw their role. Not only local politicians but also the MPs would face these demands. It was not

uncommon that villagers would venture all the way to Kathmandu asking politicians for help:

'The villagers come here [to my house], and I have to try and solve all their problems. Sometimes we go to the ministry and meet with the minister. They show up in delegations and sometimes alone. Some of the delegations can be big depending on the issue…15-20 villagers often with development issues, personal works. It is my duty to help and support them, so I try my best to help. The personal issues are about jobs, or a relative might be sick. If I tell them that I should only make laws and rules, they will not vote for me…25 percent of the meetings are in my house'.

'The police sometimes harrass our voters, and then we call [the Chief of Police] and request him to help. So we have to maintain good relations. Only then can we serve the voters. Otherwise it is very difficult to serve the people, because the MP's job is indefinite – it includes everything. We have to do all sorts of jobs to the benefit of the villagers, to the benefit of our voters. A Nepalese family has to solve so many different problems – so an MP, too, has to do many sorts of things'.

The MPs stated that much of their time was spent on meeting the voters and local supporters. According to one MP, looking back on his five years in parliament, among Nepal's 205 MPs, 'only 15-20 were involved in law making. Most MPs were always running to the hospital, the police office, to the villages, to attend to their villagers' problems. MPs as well as local politicians explained that failure to meet these diverse demands would usually mean loosing the elections. This was not always the case, as we shall see, but statement recorded in the selected villages clearly indicated that the politicians – or any other privileged person – were expected always to help the less fortunate.

## 3 The Obligation To Help

The average villager in Nepal tills less than one hectar of land (Bhattarai, 2003, p. 132). Throughout the country, food security is low, and access to public services such as education and health is unreliable and of poor quality (NPC-GIS, 2002). While Nepal is among the poorest countries in the world, such is the situation in many other rural societies. Studies have shown that in these circumstances the 'peasant' adopts various strategies of survival in order to cope with the resource scarcity and vulnerability that he faces. Included among these strategies is the creation of relations with those, who are more privileged and can provide access. When a poor villager is looking for help, the first person he asks is often a relative or friend. Knowing influential people through kin or friendship is valuable in a volatile environment, because such relations tend to be more stable and reliable than other types. A study on northern India finds that when a peasant

'…must venture outside the confines of his own kinship unit, he tends whereever possible to establish with whomever he encounters ties which approximate as nearly as possible those customary between genuine kin. This is an expression of the idea implicit in the peasant's mind that the most stable relationships in one's life are those based on kinship (Gould, 1977, p. 289)'.

A similar pattern of behavior was found in the six villages, as we shall see shortly. The villagers that we interviewed stated that relations of kinship or friendship would impart a mutual obligation to help one another in times of need. When a house was to be built, when financial needs were pressing, or in the case of illness, one's relatives and friends, or

in Nepali terms, one's 'Afno Manche' (one's own people), were expected to provide assistance. Two statements suffice as examples of how villagers would describe this obligation:

'My Afno Manche always helps me, and I must always help my Afno Manche. If he asks me to do anything I'm obliged to help him… If I don't help my Afno Manche then he'll get hurt…then the relationship becomes week'.

'Yes, Afno Manche has always helped me, for example while making my house and also in field at the time of plantation, and I have received help whenever somebody was sick in the family. Every Afno Manche expects in return the same kind of help, which was given to you in times of need – if you don't help your Afno Manche, then you create a distance between you and Afno Manche'.

As it turned out, anybody to whom villagers felt such an obligation, were placed in the category of Afno Manche. Conversely, even a near relative or a friend, who failed to comply with the informal norm of helping one another in times of need, would become detached. We asked villagers to point out examples of how the relationship could break up:

'Yes it can happen – if my Afno Manche listens to the "backbiters" and believes anything they say, bad things about me, then my Afno Manche becomes "Tadako Manche" [far away person]. Any kind of conflict between Afno Manches can create distance between them. If you don't agree…then it can happen that one day he is close and the next day he is far'.

'I needed some money and went to my Afno Manche to [ask him to] lend me some money but my Afno Manche doesn't trust me, thinking that I won't return his money. He still doesn't lend me money although he has money. In that case Afno Manche becomes Tadako Manche… If he doesn't help me in difficult times then he can nolonger be Afno Manche'.

'If you are very sick and your Afno Manche doesn't help you, he is no more Afno Manche'.

'If Afno Manche believes in third persons [spreading hostile rumours] then the close relationship becomes far…so we should not listen to dividers and rather talk to each other face to face'.

The relationship of Afno Manche was here described as an 'inner circle' in which members should protect the closed, social relationship both by following the norms involved and by protecting it against hostile outsiders. In the selected villages there were several such 'inner circles'. Villagers would usually mention relatives as their closest Afno Manche. Kinship bonds would – naturally – create the stronger obligation. As one noted, 'My relatives are closer to me, and then friends, then comes the Ward Chairman'. Another villager explained, similarly, that 'for me all [of these] are Afno Manche, but our brothers are closer. In case the brothers are not there then friends are the closer, and if friends [are not there] then the neighbors… then comes the Ward Chairman'. These were relations of concentric circles of descending obligation or expectation towards the periphery. A local shopowner, a moneylender, a teacher, or a local politican, who was considered in a position to provide assistance, on the one hand, and who responded positively towards this request, on the other, would gain status as Afno Manche. While relatives could loose that status due to a conflict, however, they were usually the closer persons.

## 4 The Role Of The 'Thulo Manche'

Most villagers are poor and so are most of their relatives and friends. Therefore, in times of need they would scout for help among the privileged villagers. In Nepal the better-off person whether in the village or at the center are called 'Thulo Manche' (the big man). These could include such actors as the local government chairman, the MP, the moneylender, the landlord, and others, who are in a position to help in matters where a villager depends on help from richer or better-connected people. The villager, who would find within his or her Afno Manche a Thulo Manche, would usually be relatively fortunate. This would normally increase their chance of receiving help. Others were compelled to seek the support of the 'big man' by other means. What, then, would make a Thulo Manche? The following statements illustrate how villagers gave meaning to the concept:

'There are no Thulo Manche in our village, but in Kharel-thok there are Thulo Manches, like Rajendra Kharel [an MP] who is willing to help us in times of need. He has also provided jobs for my relatives, and he also says, "your soul and my soul are the same – if you need any help, you ask me", so that is the sign of a good person who is always helpful. Helping people makes him Thulo Manche'.

'A Social worker is a Thulo Manche. For example, a Japanese came from another country and helped us, brought us water, he even helped us in growing fruits, and he provided poultry farming and goats… He gave us a jeep in case of emergency for sick people. He also brought clothes and stationary for the pupils. He did more than our own VDC [local government] so he is our Thulo Manche'.

'I would say that the VDC [local government] chairman is Thulo Manche because in times of need he can help – I don't know where to go and what to do in times of need. When there is conflict or when I have to deal with the government officers, I can ask the VDC chairman to help me'.

Villagers described the Thulo Manche in a number of similar terms, such as 'those, who are gentle and helpful towards everybody', 'the one who is honest and a social worker', 'those who speak politely and help in times of need', or 'the one, who brings development to our village'. Conversely, the person, who has the capacity to provide help, but who turned down the villager's request, would quickly loose that status. Three statements illustrate:

'Good connections don't mean he is Thulo Manche, if he only looks out for himself and not for others. Those are only selfish rich contractors, who get the big contracts from the army. They have good contacts, but never helped us people, so they are not Thulo Manche'.

'Well, the person who has contacts in the ministry, court, and the district are also Thulo Manche, but only if they use those contacts to help others and not themselves only'.

'There are two types of Thulo Manche. One with the high positions such as the Chief Officer, the DDC (District Development Committee] Chairman…another is the social worker, who is working for the society. So the person, who works for the society, is the Thulo Manche'.

Conversely, the Thulo Manche, who helped in times of need, could gain status of Afno Manche:

'If Thulo Manche looks upon others as lower than him, and at himself as a big man, then he cannot be your Afno Manche. But if he is unselfish and respects others like he expects others to respect him, then he becomes Afno Manche'.

'Any person either Afno Manche, or from another country – if he helps the village, he becomes Thulo Manche in front of the villagers, like the Japanese [tourist, who had helped the village]. He is considered Thulo Manche and Afno Manche at the same time. He became closer to the villagers through his social work, which was needed in our village'.

'A person who is Afno Manche can become Thulo Manche if he becomes helpful. And if Thulo Manche helps people and is not selfish, he becomes Afno Manche'.

We see here the tendency of these informants to evaluate the Thulo Manche according to the standards of the Afno Manche relationship. The big man, who has access to scarce resources, are expected to provide help for those in need in an unselfish manner as would, presumably, one Afno Manche to another. We asked whether the Thulo Manche, though, would not receive anything in return of his kindess?

'According to our capacity, we will try to help him. It depends on what kind of help he needs. The poor cannot help the Thulo Manche economically. We can only help him by giving our time in his field or on his farm'.

'We can help him according to our capacity, like we can help him while making his house, and we can give him wood for the construction. We have a norm in our village that if a near person is making a house, we help him by donating our own tree for the construction of his house. So in a similar manner, we help Thulo Manche. We can also help him by involving ourselves in the construction work. I know how to lay bricks, so I can help him in laying bricks for his house. Similarly, other persons might know carpentry work, so they help Thulo Manche in carpentry works'.

'Well, we can thank him by gathering the Women's Committee and give him flower garlands and show him respect by offering a reception in return of what he have done for our village'.

'When Thulo Manche help you in return you can help in different manners, like one can help in the Thulo Manche's household work like doing shopping, working in his fields, or if somebody speaks against Thulo Manche then you can warn him that somebody is talking bad about him… There could be many others things… Well, these are the basic things the Thulo Manche expects from you in return'.

## 5 The Politician As 'Thulo Manche'

The possible implications for the relationship between villagers and politicians began to present themselves. Elections – the exchange of votes for various types of services in between elections – could occur within the relationships of the Afno Manche and the Thulo Manche. We now approached the villagers with another question. Would they vote for the Thulo Manche rather than another person? Not surprisingly, the informants

explained that since the Thulo Manche had helped, or was likely to do so in times of need, they had voted for him. But there was a thin line here between voting for the Thulo Manche, on the one hand, and the Afno Manche, on the other. In case the same candidate was both, the informants would select that candidate as the better alternative. As one villager commented, 'Yes we did vote for him [the Thulo Manche] but more as Afno Manche… Afno Manche is always closer to you, like brothers'. Where such a tie did not exist, some informants would consider which candidate would seem to fit the role of Thulo Manche:

'I voted for the Ward Chairman thinking of him as a Thulo Manche. I still consider him Thulo Manche although he is staying in Kathmandu most of the time'.

'Yes I did vote for a Thulo Manche. He is Thulo Manche but he lost the elections, so he didn't get the chance to show his kindness towards the village… I still think of him as Thulo Manche'.

'Thulo Manche has asked us to help him at the time of elections and we voted for him because he is like our very close brother'.

'In the first elections we did think of him [the MP] as Thulo Manche, but after winning [the elections] he forgot about us and our village, so in the second elections I didn't think of him as Thulo Manche'.

'Back then I did vote thinking of him [the MP] as Thulo Manche. But now he is nolonger Thulo Manche, because he didn't look out for development in our village'.

The Thulo Manche – or the Afno Manche for that matter – did not always meet the expectations. As a result, he could loose his status in the eyes of the villagers. The politician would face the same obligations, as would any other Afno Manche or Thulo Manche. When these villagers had cast their votes, it was on the basis of a hope or expectation that their problems – the lack of drinking water, the need for road maintenance, the inavailability of electricity, unemployment, and so forth – would be taken care of. The candidate, who honored these expectations, would tend to be evaluated as a kind and unselfish person or in a common expression in these villages, a 'social worker'. Failure to meet expectations could be met with rejection of the candidate as a selfish person.

## 6 The Plight Of The Parties

Village party chairmen and MPs were well aware of the nature of the demands in the villages. We met with a dozen different local party chairmen and party workers. They stressed that one of the great challenges was to create a profile for a party in the village. In their experience, most villagers would look to the person rather than the party. The MPs interviewed on this issue concurred. They stated that 'preaching ideology' was usually ineffective. It was better, for instance, to win the support of a local Thulo Manche, who was respected among the majority of the villagers, or to deliver infrastructure and services at a greater rate than the opponent party. We shall look at these strategies more systematically in a later section. They pointed out that in general voters were concerned with two issues. Firstly, they would vote for the person rather than the party. Secondly they would expect a concrete return on their support. This impression was echoed in our

data. Table 3 shows the percentage of voters, who had considered the 'person' rather than the 'party'.

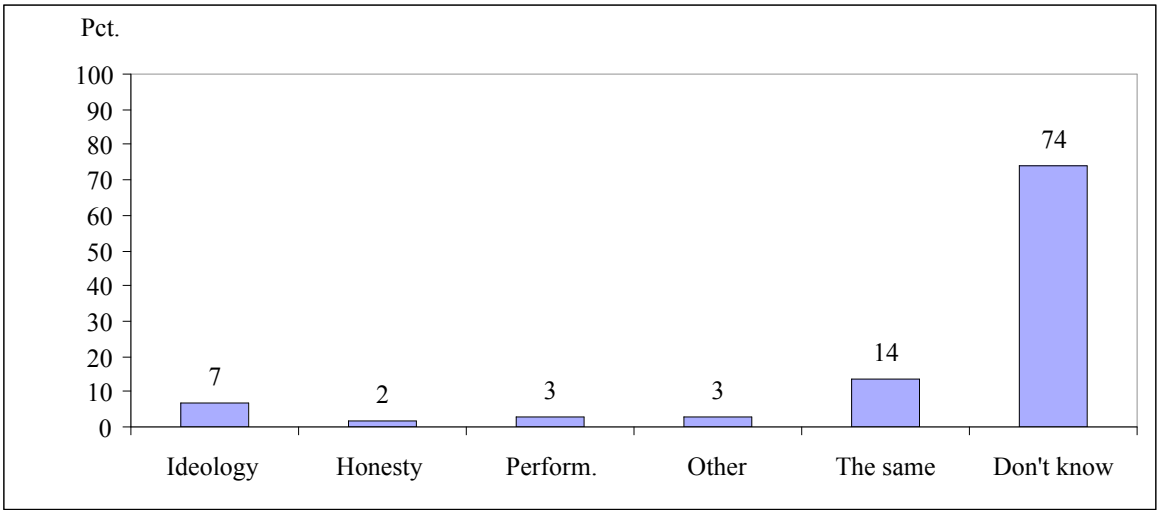
**Table 3 Voting For The 'Party' Or the 'Person' – Local And General Elections**

| | Total | Party | Person | Both | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total** | **100** | **35** | **56** | **6** | **5** |
| Local elections | 100 | 28 | 60 | 6 | 6 |
| General elections | 100 | 47 | 49 | 6 | 3 |

Source: This and the following data is from a survey in 23 random settlements including 263 respondents

When asked which they had considered more important, the majority pointed to 'person'. 56 pct. had considered the person rather than the party and a slightly greater share had done so in the local elections. The observation that this tendency is more pronounced in local elections, where more voters actually know the candidate, than in general election, in which the candidate is often a stranger, is typical. Yet this information prompted a second question: how would the voters, then, evaluate the person – or the party? The first observation to be made in order to make these preferences intelligible is that most informants could not tell the difference between the parties contesting in the elections. Asked to point out a difference between the two leading parties, Nepali Congress (NC) and United Marxist-Leninists (UML), few were able to identify a single difference. Some added that in their oppinion, the parties were the same. This data is shown in figure 1 below.

**Figure 1 What Is The Difference Between The Parties, NC and UML – Voters In Pct.**




A small group of 7 pct. pointed to a difference in terms of ideology. NC was known as a socialdemocratic party to some, and a conservative and oppressive party comprising

mostly the elite, to others. UML, on the other hand, was described as a socialist party serving the poor, in one version, or a group of opportunists siding with the King against democracy, in another. Some found one party to be less corrupt, more honest, or to have contributed to development more than the other. Yet most were unable to point out a difference. 14 pct. stated that the parties 'are the same' as they had never observed any differences while 74 percent – or three out of four – stated that they 'wouldn't know'. There were respondents pointing to the symbols on the ballot paper. NC was 'tree' and UML was 'sun', so they had voted either tree or sun. But they were unable to make a connection between these symbols and other characteristics, which would set the parties apart. This tendency varied by sex and education. Table 4 shows that those, who identified a difference between NC and UML, were typically male and had been to school for some years.

**Table 4 Views About The Difference Between NC and UML By Sex And Education, Pct.**

| | Total | Ideology | Honesty | Delivery | Other | The same | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total** | **100** | **7** | **2** | **3** | **3** | **14** | **74** |
| Female | 100 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 94 |
| Male | 100 | 10 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 19 | 61 |
| 0 years/school | 100 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 14 | 81 |
| 1<5 | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 24 | 71 |
| 5<10 | 100 | 15 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 66 |
| 10+ | 100 | 26 | 9 | 13 | 9 | 17 | 39 |

The main observation may be briefly summarised as follows: 94 pct. of the women as against 61 pct. of the men didn't know about any difference. On the other variable, education, 81 pct. of those, who had not been to school, didn't know, as against 39 pct. of those, who had completed 10 years or more. Knowledge about party differences was positively correlated here with being male and better educated. In these communities where illiteracy rates were souring at around 55-65 pct., in some villages even higher (NPC, 2001), these tendencies created harsh realities for a local party seeking to create a party profile. How would one party set itself apart from the others, when 'party' was not an issue?

To be sure there were a few informants who claimed to be loyal to a particular party. The local teacher, the occassional landlord, or the random retired army officer, who had seen more of the world, would sometimes claim to have voted out of loyalty to a party. The following statements include some of these examples recorded in the selected villages:

'Once you believe in a party, you should stay with it – be loyal. If the party does something wrong you should complain and get them on the right track.'

‘First of all it is the system [that you must choose a party] so you have to follow. I chose RPP because it is the only truly Nepalese party…I will vote RPP again because once you choose, you have to stick with it’.

‘I voted for the party…the person needs a ticket from the party, so if the party is good the person is good. The party would not give the ticket to a bad person’.

‘Even though the person is bad, I will give him a chance – because he is in my party’.

The majority of voters, however, were less loyal. The following statements are typical examples of how respondents, who had voted for a party, would explain their electoral preferences. While voting for a party, many of them had made their electoral decisions based on an expectation of a tangible return, not on a sense of loyalty to that party or its ideas:

‘The NC had collected school fees but when the UML came into power [in the VDC] they returned all the money and stopped collecting fees. So I vote UML’.

‘Party is important when you get sick. They can get you to the hospital. It’s like insurance. Once a neighbor needed blood and couldn’t afford it so the party paid’.

‘The NC workers told us that the UML had split so the [UML] would never be able to form a government. Therefore, “if you want anything from the government you should vote for us”, they said’.

‘There was a paper [ballot] and the RPP, NC and UML were there – so I voted all three. I threw three nets but I didn’t get a catch in all of them [this respondent was a fisherman]’.

There were few indications of party loyalty in these statements. The party that delivered would derive support, whereas the party that failed would soon loose its goodwill. Winning the elections seemed to be a matter of launching candidates that were able to meet the demands of the villagers. The large majority, who assigned greater importance to the person rather than the party, gave comments of which the following are typical examples:

‘The parties are just about competition and they don’t do the work – individuals do. Therefore the person is more important’.

‘I voted for the person expecting him to develop the village, and he did. There are lots of parties but you have to choose the good persons’.

‘In the village you vote for the person because you have to interact and use him afterwards, but at national level I choose party. In local elections, party doesn’t matter.’

In these villages, political parties were facing voters with few ideological convictions. The tendency to vote for the Afno Manche or Thulo Manche rather than to support a party based on the support for a particular ideology, issue, or policy became further evident from a survey on how the voters had made their electoral decisions. Examining this issue we asked the respondents why they had voted for one party or person rather than another in the local elections. The results are presented below. They are shown here because they

serve to further characterise the voters and the nature of the demands that parties and candidates were facing in the elections. How would voters make decision when party matters less?

## 7 The Voters' Electoral Decision-Making

The voters in the selected villages may be divided into three broad categories, each encompassing two sub-categories. These are listed in table 5 indicating their considerations of party, person, or both. The categories are not waterproof compartments. Some voters, for instance, had arrived at their decisions based both on trust and an evaluation of the candidate's performance. But each represents a type of motivation, which politicians would face in the elections. Below, we shall briefly consider each in turn.

**Table 5 Voters By Categories Of Voting Criteria In The Selected Villages, Pct.**

| | | Focus Of The Voter | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | Party | Person | Both |
| **Total** | **100** | **100** | **100** | **100** |
| 1) Loyalty/trust | 31 | 31 | 33 | 6 |
| 1) Family/friend | 8 | 0 | 13 | 0 |
| 2) Performance | 16 | 12 | 18 | 11 |
| 2) Promises | 13 | 15 | 12 | 17 |
| 3) Following others | 20 | 28 | 14 | 56 |
| 3) Under pressure | 5 | 6 | 4 | 6 |
| Other | 4 | 6 | 3 | 6 |
| Don't know | 3 | 3 | 4 | 0 |

The following observations may be made for each of the three categories:

1) *Loyalty and trust or family and friends* – this category includes, what we may call, Thulo Manche and Afno Manche voters, on the one hand, and voters loyal to a party, on the other. 31 pct. of the respondents stated that they voted out of 'trust' or 'loyalty' to a party or person. 13 pct. of those, who voted for a person, had voted for an Afno Manche.

2) *Performance and promises* – those, who had made a calculated selection among alternatives on the basis of the candidate's or party's previous performance or promises, fall in this category. 16 pct. had evaluated the candidate's performance and 13 pct. had focused on promises.

3) *Followers and voters under pressure* – voters, who were either unable to decide independently which party or candidate to support, or who had been under pressure,

fall in this category. 20 pct. of the voters were 'followers'. These were far more common among responbdents who had voted for the party rather than the person. 5-6 pct. explicitely stated that they had been somehow forced to vote for a certain party or candidate.

In order to describe in more detail these different types of motivation, which parties and candidates had been facing in the elections, we shall now look at examples of how voters in each of the three categories explained their electoral decisions. Who did they vote for, and why?

### 7.1 Loyalty And Trust Or Family And Friends

We have already seen how voters, who trusted a candidate to be a Thulo Manche, would caste their votes accordingly. Three statements, in turn, may illustrate how voters would explain their decision to support their Afno Manche rather than other available candidates:

'The ward chairman is my cousin. If I didn't [vote for him] they [my cousin and his party] wouldn't help me afterwards and they would say that I had made the wrong decision. It's better to vote for your own brother because then he will work for you – he will do anything for you.'

'I had friends in all the parties so I didn't want to choose because then I would loose some of my friends… They would feel offended if I chose a different party'.

'When we need citizenship, and we are from the same community [the Tharus], it's easier because then the VDC chairman knows us. It is important to have a VDC chairman who is "afno" [belonging to our people], from the Tharu community, because then the people can easily go to him for services. During the floods for instance it is important that the Tharus can help the Tharus'.

The logic of Afno Manche entails both an interest and an obligation. On the one hand, voting for a relative or friend may carry with it great advantages in accessing scarce resources afterwards. On the other hand, the obligation may prevent the voter from choosing another candidate and perhaps, as in the second example above, place the voter in a dilemma. The third example shows that Afno Manche may be extended to an entire ethnic community. In this case, the Tharus were living in a community divided into villages of different ethnic affiliation, each with a tendency to serve their own group before the others once in power. These respondents explained how access to the local government would greatly depend on the ethnic affiliation of the members and the chairman.

### 7.2 Performance And Promises

In the second category respondents often informed that they had followed the candidate while in office and been content with his performance. Others had listened to the campaign promises. In this category, some respondents had also considered a more specific criterion likely to affect the candidate's actual capability to deliver on his promises. In Nepal that often depends on the extent to which a politician is well connected

at higher levels. As the resources are concentrated in ministries in Kathmandu and distributed through line agencies in the district towns, electing a candidate with good connections 'higher-up' could make the difference between gaining and loosing access to scarce resources. This concern stood out among a group of voters from statements such as these:

'I vote for those who have the "Jack" – and the VDC chairman has very good connections to the MP and ministers. He even knows the officers in Singh Durbar [Central Administration]'

'We hoped that the VDC chairman could go to higher levels and maybe become minister'.

'In the local elections our ward chairman didn't think the NC's candidate would be as good as the UML's candidate. The UML's candidate had very strong connections higher up. Therefore he told us to vote UML, so we did… although the ward chairman is NC and we usually vote NC'.

Electing the well-connected candidate – and showing him support – may serve a village better than sticking to the party. Voters, who evaluated the candidates, would tend to be pragmatic. They may be defined as 'swing voters'. The local party chairmen were keenly aware of this tendency in the villages. One statement illustrate how they described its implications:

'Therefore, party doesn't matter… People vote for a party for instance if they see one party getting a person out of trouble… If someone is caught by the police or facing a court trial… When a person is facing a lawsuit and cannot get support from his party, another party could step in and solve the problem to show their strength and then they would become popular. In that way they win votes'.

### 7.3 Followers And Voters Under Pressure

In the third category, finally there was nothing of the cunning voter, who would pragmatically alternate between parties and candidates according to the prospects of material gain or other advantages. The 'followers' were under the influence of other villagers. The wife would vote like her husband, 'who knows better', or the illiterate would listen to the advice of the teacher or the local politician for the same reason. The following statements are examples of how these followers explained their electoral decisions:

'All the villagers voted RPP so I just followed. The teachers and the ward chairman recommended RPP… Whatever the ward chairman says, we follow, because he is the one looking after the village'.

'They showed us the paper and said that if we voted "tree" [the symbol of NC] the village would develop. I went with many in a big group. We were all told the same'.

'Whoever they asked us to vote for we did. I am iliterate – I don't know about the parties'.

'Whoever stands up, people will follow. People are not literate enough to know what is NC or UML, so they just follow whoever stands up. If they say, "let's go NC" they will vote NC. The learned people said, "let's vote NC". Moreover, the ward chairman is a bit literate'.

‘When everybody voted for that person, I had to – I couldn’t be alone. Everybody knows, who you vote for’.

‘They come to us and say Namaste. Whomever my leader tells me to vote for, I vote. When you have a leader, you follow… The main leader is the ward chairman – so I follow him’.

There was an element of pressure involved here, as voting was rarely an entirely individual matter. In one village, respondents informed that their old leader had recently passed away, so now they wouldn’t know whom to vote for anymore. The following statements illustrate how a local leader such as the ward chairman had sometimes made the electoral decisions on behalf of the voters by instructing everybody in a village meeting:

‘Before the elections there was a meeting. There were maybe 50 people. Everybody discussed for whom to vote and the ward chairman said NC so we decided to do that’.

‘We had a meeting and decided that if everybody spits a river will flow, so let’s all vote for the VDC chairman. There were many participating in the village meeting, including women and children. When Bikram came [a new MP candidate] we thought it’s a new party so let’s give him a chance’.

‘We held a meeting in ward 1 and discussed for whom to vote. The ward chairman suggested the UML because he is also UML. So we did’.

‘In the meeting we discussed for whom to vote. There were three candidates and the ward chairman said “tree”. Everybody agreed but maybe a few voted for others. I voted tree’.

Pressure constitutes a final specific source of motivation. There was an aspect of pressure involved when people followed a local leader, too. Few would vote in defiance of his advice. Yet in some cases the pressure had taken the form of physical force. As one respondent explained, ‘I wanted to vote for a person, but they threatened me. They said they would beat me up if I didn’t vote for the right party’. Similarly, another respondent recalled how ‘The Kumal brothers…came and told me to tear down the [MP’s] calendar and raise the “sun” [UML’s banner] or they would come back later. We were afraid so we removed the calendar’. The use of coercion and physical means of force will become evident in our examination of how the parties and candidates, in turn, responded to the voters.

## 8 Winning The Elections

How do parties and candidates win elections when most voters cannot tell a difference between the political parties? Moreover, how might votes be won when many are followers, and when some voters are ‘locked-in’ by local leaders accessible only through them? We identified three overall strategies that parties and candidates had used in the selected villages. These became evident from stories that villagers told about the most recent general elections in 1999 and from the statements of local politicians and MPs. They are representative of three different ways of responding to the voters and are as follows:

1) *Accommodation* – this category encompasses action, which is oriented to meet the villager's demands for goods such as schools, roads, water, or electricity, on the one hand, and personal services like jobs or credit, on the other. The use of accommodation may signal that the response mechanism intended to come in place through democratic elections are functioning, as the candidate seeks to meet local demands.

2) *Vote buying* – at or immediately prior to the elections, parties and candidates were found to make use of various forms of vote buying. Votes were bought either in cash or kind, sometimes in bulk by paying off local leaders, who would hold the key to 'locked in' voters. In this category there is a response to an immediate demand of voters for a reward in exchange of their support, yet of a different nature than in the first category.

3) *Coercion* – finally, parties or candidates had made use of force to deter candidates and voters belonging to the opponent parties, and to attain support among a majority of the voters. The use of coercive measures at or immediately prior to the elections would signal a lack of responsiveness of the sort otherwise envisaged to occur in a democracy.

Accommodation, vote buying, and coercion may be seen as three alternative paths that parties and candidates may choose when trying to negotiate the demands and loyalty patterns in the villages. Most had adobted a combination, accommodating some villages, buying votes in others, and coercing the voters in a third. Below we shall examine the specific use of these strategies and the various means and tactics that each would encompass.

### 8.1 Accommodation

The success of an MP candidate in one constituency provides a typical example of the terms of accommodation in the selected villages. A review of his use of this strategy shows both the strengths and weaknesses of accommodation as a way of winning a constituency. We shall, therefore, bring some of the details from his campaign. The candidate in question had doubled the votes for his party, RPP, in the general elections. Local politicians explained that the candidate, known as Bikram, had succeeded where others had failed: he could deliver. One of Nepal's 'noveau riches' and an A-level contractor with offices in Kathmandu and two district towns, Bikram commanded a fleet of trucks and dozers and was able to fund large construction projects. He used this capacity to deliver small-scale infrastructure to the villages in pursuit of his second ambition: to become minister. We met Bikram and he proclaimed that he would continue as a 'social worker' until he had achieved his goal. There were many examples of less ambitious accommodating politicians, but examining Bikrams tactics illustrates this strategy well.

At the time of our visit, Bikram's name was on the lips of most villagers. He had recently distributed several hundred colourful calendars showing his portrait and party symbol. They were found hanging outside the entrances of almost every house in the villages. Although he had, in fact, lost in the recent elections, he had continued to deliver

services in the area. In many villages there was only praise to hear for Bikram and his efforts:

'The last MP promised he would give us 500,000 rupees [for the school] but he didn't. But Bikram is sincere. He built wells, toilet and bridges here. He is the best. What can we do? We have to follow him.'

'But I think if he gets the chance he will do something for the people. He will not forget about us. I spoke to him too. During the flood nine months ago he gave money to the victims. Anyway he is like a god to us'.

'Bikram often asked for the key – he said he had the locker, but if we gave him the key he would open many doors'. 'Why did Bikram build the dyke out here?' 'To help us because we are poor and a remote village… He said that the other parties misuse the money'.

There were many stories describing how Bikram had delivered to the villagers what neither NC, nor UML, could provide: roads, electricity, bridges, land registration, dykes to protect their fields, and much more. NC and UML party workers in the villages were worried as they were witnessing the loss of supporters to Bikram's party, RPP. While visiting, the local leaders of two villages, known as the 'Kumar Brothers', took membership in the RPP. Bikram had built a dyke and protected their villages against the annual flood. This meant, UML and NC party workers explained, that most voters in these villages 'had been lost', because the two leaders were 'clever people' whom other villagers would follow. The examples were many. Bikram would deliver a project to a village and in return obtain the support of the majority of the village, sometimes up to twenty or more households at a time. Two villagers described how accommodation had worked:

'When somebody gives you something, you should give something in return… The UML [party workers] came here and said, "we cannot do anything before the elections – we have to come to power first, then we will do". But then Bikram came and delivered electricity in a few days. So we voted RPP'.

'We used to vote for NC, but they didn't do much and then Bikram came. Well, the ward chairman [who is NC] was able to get a budget, so I voted for him... The ward chairman asked Bikram to bring poles and cables – [if Bikram delivered] then he would consider voting for RPP…That was how we got electricity. The ward chairman then gathered all the villagers, and we decided to vote for Bikram'.

A party worker, who had shifted from UML to RPP, described in similar terms how his village had turned to support Bikram from one day to the next. Bikram had been the chairman of a district land reform commission and in this village, most were squatters lacking deeds to their land. Requesting the local leaders to help had not been effective, as they belonged to a different party. Bikram, on the other hand, had been quick to lend support. He had brought the papers in order in a few months. Until then, most villagers had supported a landlord in a neighboring ward, where they worked as day laborers. He was UML. But once they had achieved deeds to their own land, they shifted to vote for RPP. The party worker explained, that 'Bikram did not discriminate. He promised to help us regardless of party. He never asked us to vote RPP, but it was an un-spoken understanding that the villagers should return his favour'. In this manner, Bikram had won

support across the constituency. Few had been able to deliver goods at the scale of his campaign.

### 8.2 Vote Buying

While various degrees of accommodation were witnessed across the selected villages, another strategy was also common. Some informants among the politicians, including Bikram, believed it to be even more effective. Bikram had been on a campaign for three years investing large sums in projects. The amounts were not available but judged from the preponderance of Bikram projects of which some were known to have cost several million rupees such as a large dyke, which we inspected, they were considerable. Despite these investments, however, Bikram lost the elections. RPP party workers suggested an explanation. On the day of the elections only few RPP party workers were at hand to remind people of his services. UML and NC, on the other hand, commanded many workers, who did the opposite. They explained that most villagers would quickly forget about the land deeds, the electricity, or other goods provided to them if offered a quick reward in return of their vote. Vote buying was described as a more effective strategy in some cases.

Other local politicians expressed a similar view. Votes were bought. The following types of vote buying had allegedly occurred in the selected villages both in local and general elections. When accommodation failed or was not an option, candidates could do the following:

*Vote buying in cash* – villagers claimed that some of the candidates had bought votes in cash. In one village, a landowner reported that a candidate bought votes 'house by house at 100 rupees. It was a massive campaign. Nobody protested – it just happened. In the next elections, NC won using the same method'. A UML village party chairman explained why NC had won: 'The NC always attracts the support of the businessmen and therefore has more money. The NC held the spoon to feed the people – UML didn't have that'.

*Vote buying in kind* – there were many stories about candidates throwing parties and handing out alcohol to win votes. An MP explained: 'there is no proper system for running in the elections. If you slaughter a few buffalos and throw some parties maybe people will vote for you. If you pay them 1 lakh rupees [100,000] maybe they will vote 'sun' [UML]. There has to be made a system for all that'. Party workers informing about their campaigns stated that all the parties used this method, notably in the poorest villages. A tea or a snack or perhaps a bag of rice could be a sufficient inducement in winning the votes.

*Vote buying in bulk* – in all the selected villages, the MPs were reported to have bought votes in 'bulk' by providing material inducement to local leaders whom villagers, in turn, would follow. An MP explained that 'sometimes a villager [who commands authority in the local community] will say: I have 500 voters in my hand. If you give me 10,000 rupees, I will give you 500 votes. Then a candidate has to think twice. Anyhow, I have to win the elections…' A former party worker and landowner gave his account of the local elections. 'To win an election, you choose one or more villages and find the leaders. Then you give them money in return of their support, so that they will campaign for you. This is

how UML won here… Had they not come to the community leader first, NC would have won. You have to invest. Without spending money your chances are very slim. It's because of illiteracy – illiterate people don't look ahead. They only look at the immediate benefit'.

Large amounts had allegedly been invested in buying not only votes but also party workers to campaign for the candidate. An MP commented, 'Money is a necessity – without money, you cannot walk. It depends on how much the opponent spends – if my opponent spends a lot, I have to spend a lot as well. The types of expenditures are unlimited'. Those parties, who controlled the government, in turn, could resort to a third strategy.

### 8.3 Coercion

Where parties and candidates did not accommodate the demands of the voters or provide immediate, tangible inducements through vote buying, another method was sometimes used: 'booth capture'. In the selected villages, there were several stories about the use of force at the hands of the party, which controlled the government. Access to the booth, which would typically be at a central place in the village, would be blocked as party workers surrounded it to keep the opponent's voters away. Once the police or election officers were under their command, a party could easily control the outcome of the elections. Local politicians explained how both the police and rowdies were often involved. We shall not bring the stories in detail here but mainly give a few examples of how politicians would describe the role of the police and rowdies at the elections in their areas:

'In the local elections in 1997 UML used the police… The Home Minister was UML at the time. It is a public secret that he had asked the Inspector General of Police [who was also UML] to help UML win the elections… In Nepal, whichever party controls the Ministry of Home [which commands the police force] is the party that wins the elections'.

'During the elections it makes a big difference which party is in government. Even a single policeman makes a big difference. In the 1997 local elections, the Home Minister was UML and massacred the NC [in my constituency]…The UML scared the people. Scattering the voters, they filled in the ballots themselve'.

'To understand the elections, look at the party in government – the party in power will rigg the elections… The police would watch the booth standing with their sticks, and only those with a party badge on their chests would be allowed to vote'.

Coercion had also involved the use of so-called 'rowdies', who would be brought to the villages from the outside. Rowdies were sometimes recruited from the carate clubs to deter and prevent villagers supporting the opposite party from casting their votes. We recorded stories told by local politicians of the use of rowdies in all but two of the selected villages. There had been physical fighting, moreover, between the UML and NC supporters. In one village, the police had allegedly deterred a local candidate of the opposition party at gunpoint and allowed only voters wearing the mark of NC on their arms – distributed the day before – to approach the booth. One example will illustrate

what could happen. Prior to the electionday, a fistfight had occurred in a village between an NC party worker and the chairman of the UML-led VDC. The UML had soon retaliated:

'The VDC chairman got small wounds. So UML now had a reason to suppress NC and to show the people that they are the most powerful party – in other words, to turn people into power worshippers. So right after the fight…3 or 4 trucks of UML rowdies came from the outside in order to beat the NC guy. They even surrounded my house and broke the windows, and we had a kerosene drum out in front, which they tried to ignite. That was when my wife had to jump from the house, which could have turned into a disaster. Many NC workers had to flea… this is how UML created terror in order to act powerfully. The NC workers did not dare to campaign after that'.

A few additional statements will illustrate:

'The voting is never peaceful – people vote in fear. This means that many voters never make it to the booth. There is police and sometimes election commission people but they are too few to prevent anything'.

'Security matters a lot during elections. For instance in my village, many people went to the booth because a policeman was present [to protect them]. Otherwise they would be afraid. In the elections the political workers and rowdies often scare away the voters'.

In the latter example, the informant, who was a ward chairman, explained that since he knew the policeman, he had been able to persuade him to allow the voters access to the booth. We asked VDC members, teachers, MPs, and other informants why the elections were occurring in this manner. Those, who had suggestions, pointed to various aspects. A teacher stated that the weakness of the voters and the fact that all resources are concentrated in the state created a situation in which politicians were highly motivated, on the one hand, and the voters could be easily manipulated or forced to support them, on the other:

'In the towns people have political consciousness but in the rural areas they don't know anything, so anything can happen. During elections there is a lot of booth capture, also in Meghauli. There is no democracy at the time of elections. Our politicians are greatly influenced by Bihar politics [in Northern India, a state known for its violent politics] – it's rough politics. In a democracy you have to respect the other party, but here everybody is selfish… All the resources are in the central administration. There are so many resources in the center and so many hands trying to get it. Their motive is to get into a position from where they can manipulate and use power and money to their own, personal benefit. Booth capture also takes place because noone can resist. Most people are poor and iliterate and the young are restless and desperate to get a job. So the parties can easily capture them'.

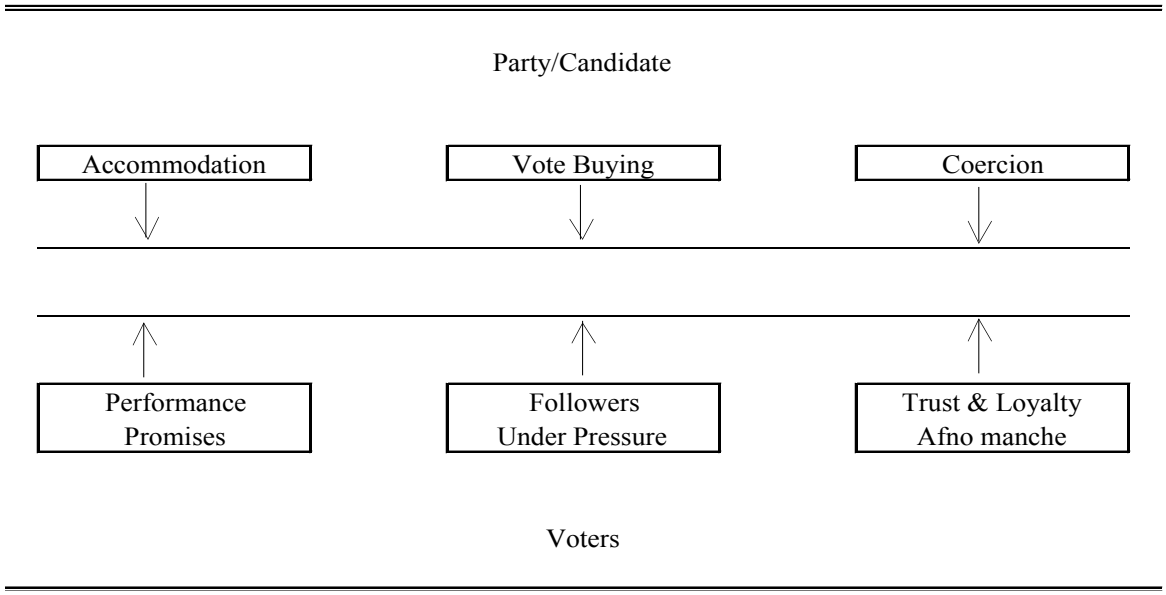
## 9 The Electoral Interface

The evidence above would indicate that part of the political instability in Nepal might have to do with the way in which parties and candidates connect with voters, and vice versa. In the selected villages we found few, if any, ideologies, issues, or policies that would have brought larger groups of voters together around a set of 'common interests'.

As most villagers were unable to distinguish between even the two major parties, NC and UML, there was little ideological or issue-related sentiment in the population that the politicians could 'target' in their campaigns. Politicians, instead, would appeal to a number of narrow demands for instance focused on a school in one village, a road in another, and a job for a village leader in a third. The party or candidate that delivered would possibly be considered 'Thulo Manche' and perhaps even gain status of 'Afno Manche' – a big man and a friend at the same time – whereas those, who did not, could loose the elections. With little ideological sentiment in the population, the parties, too, featured a lack of ideological content aside from that on paper. As a party chairman commented, the only difference between the parties was the party program, which is formulated by the central party committee and given to them during the elections. At the village level, the parties were quite similar. 'It's not that NC is doing something else than UML. In a way we are promising the same things. But the UML always exaggerates promising that they will turn "your huts into palaces" or turn the river around to bring water to the village. They promise too much, but that is how they win votes'. Similar accussation were, as is often the case in party politics, thrown in the other direction by UML.

Only few voters, then, would respond to ideology. Instead the parties were left to struggle for the three main categories of voters: the 'Thulo Manche' and 'Afno Manche' voters; the opportunists pragmatically calculating which party or candidate would hold a promise for greater benefits in the future; and the followers who would sway in the electoral winds. Apart from accommodation, only two strategic options were available to win: vote buying and coercion. Sometimes, these would be more effective and efficient under the prevailing conditions than accommodation. The interface between the electoral strategies of the politicians, on the one hand, and the voters, on the other, is shown in figure 2.

**Figure 2 The Interface Between Electoral Strategies Of Parties & Candidates And Voters**



The more parties and candidates seek to accommodate their voters, on the one hand, and the more voters evaluate the performance and promises of the politicians, on the other, the more representative democracy would be functioning according to its ideal type. Yet studying the interface between politicians and voters it has become evident here that winning the elections in the selected villages would often require far more acute or harsh methods.

## 10 The Findings In Perspective

Six villages in Nepal are a small sample. The evidence seems to provide some basis, however, for 'telling a tale' about democratisation in Nepal. This is especially so when we link up with similar studies on this issue. The terms of 'Afno Manche' and 'Thulo Manche' are unique to Nepal, but their contents refer to common phenomena found in other rural societies. The 'Thulo Manche' may be equaled to a 'patron', and the villagers returning his favor by working on his land or casting their vote in his favor may be identified as his 'clients'. Bailey noted about elections in India in the 1950s that the 'peasant obligation does not go beyond family, village, and caste'. He found that albeit periods of some joint alignment and agitation in times of crisis, 'no unified and self-conscious peasant class emerged. Once the immediate crisis was over and the heat of the agitation had died away, the peasants again divided into countless small groups of families, castes, and villages (Bailey, 1963, p. 140)'. These groups could resemble the Afno Manche circles in Nepal. Under such circumstances, parties were facing the challenge of gathering electorates, not around ideologies or policies, but by providing tangible inducements to each particular 'islands of demand', which families, castes, and villages constituted. Ideologies and policies did not matter to most voters. Instead, Bailey found:

'This…is what the voters want: their MLA [MP] is not the representative of a party with a policy which commends itself to them, not even a representative who will watch over their interests when policies are being framed, but rather a man who will intervene in the implementation of policy, and in the ordinary day-to-day administration. He is there to divert the benefits in the direction of his constituents, to help and to give them a hand when they get into trouble with officials. This is the meaning, which the ordinary villager…attach to the phrase "serving the people" (Bailey, 1963, p. 25)'.

'Voters demand', Bailey adds, 'that their MLA should be wholeheartedly and exclusively interested in the welfare of his constituents (Bailey, 1963, p. 25)'. We see the logic of the Thulo Manche *cum* Afno Manche reappearing in these observations of voters' electoral preferences in India. Politicians, in turn, organised into parties focused to respond to these demands – or to deter them (Bailey, 1963, p. 141ff). The observations made in the selected villages seem to bear resemblance to some of these observations made in the 1950s in India. James C. Scott (Scott, 1972) is a proliferic writer on patron-client relations, corruption, and the state in developing countries in comparative perspective. He has proposed about the type of relationship that we observed between parties and voters in Nepal – and Bailey in India – that such are quite typical of poor rural communities. Parties are often unable to assemble voters around ideologies under such socio-economic circumstances, because voters demand services of a much more tangible nature. Scott notes that 'parties that need supporters are more apt to respond to the incentives that

motivate their clientele than to transform the nature of those incentives (Scott, 1997, p. 280ff)'. Within the logic, parties in a poor rural society are unlikely to emerge as mass parties.

Without an ideology or a mass base, parties tend to rely on patronage. In a society of scarcity, like Nepal, such parties are prone to organisational incoherence and instability as clients search for patrons, and patrons, in turn, seek to control resources for their clients. We introduced this paper with reference to the political instability and the notion of 'bad politicians', which marked Nepalese politics from the initiation of the transition to democracy in 1990 to the King's coup in 2002. Indeed, political infighting, corruption, and instability were the main reason – or a pretext – when the King reintroduced authoritarian rule. Studying six villages in Nepal, and relating our findings to those made by others, as briefly attempted above, we may at least raise a proposition: problems of democratisation in Nepal may have something to do – less with ill-intended and corrupt politicians *by nature* – and more with weak relations between the parties and a vast majority of rural voters. Without strengthening this relationship, democracy may remain weak, too.

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