

Between Democracy and Revolution: Peasant Support for Insurgency versus Democracy in Nepal*

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The Maoist insurgency in Nepal presents an anomaly for students of civil war and democratic transitions. How was the Maoist wing of the Nepal Communist Party able to mobilize peasants to support their insurgency when they could not mobilize enough peasants to vote for them in elections? The authors address these questions by exploring the ways in which the persistence of traditional clientelist networks in the countryside enabled rural elites to mobilize peasants to vote for parties other than the Maoist party, even though peasants would have benefited from that party's advocacy for land reform. When that same party used insurgent violence against rural elites, peasants were willing and able to support the insurgency and abstain from voting in the 1999 election in locales where the insurgency succeeded in disrupting clientelist ties. The authors test these arguments with district-level data on election turnout and the distribution of households among several land-tenure categories. Findings support the argument that turnout was greater where land-tenure patterns gave landed elite greater influence over peasant political behavior. Where higher levels of insurgent violence disrupted patterns of clientelist dependency, turnout declined. What electoral democracy could not deliver to peasants – land reform and relief from clientelist dependency – the Maoist insurgency promised to bring through political violence.

Introduction

In 1996, the Maoist wing of the Nepal Communist Party (CPN-M) launched a revolutionary insurgency against Nepal's democratically elected government. The inability of the government to subdue the rebellion led King Gyanendra to dismiss the government in October 2002. Eventually, he suspended democracy altogether and assumed autocratic power himself. In 2006, the parties that had been deposed by the king

joined the CPN-M in calling for a boycott of the 2006 municipal elections, confronting the king with an opposition coalition between armed rebels and now-disenfranchised parliamentary parties. Following a series of mass demonstrations, King Gyanendra reluctantly restored the parliament, in April 2006, and agreed to elections for a constituent assembly that would write a new constitution. In November 2006, the Maoist rebels and the restored government signed a peace agreement that for now has ended the civil war and brought the CPN-M back into the democratic fold.

The fact that a peasant-based insurgency emerged in Nepal in the aftermath of that nation's transition to democracy poses several

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puzzles for students of rural insurgencies and democratic transitions: how can a party succeed at mobilizing peasants to support the dangerous enterprise of armed insurgency when it could not persuade them to vote for its candidates in elections? Approximately 82% of Nepal's work force is employed in the agricultural sector, the vast majority of them as smallholders, tenants or landless laborers. The poorest 40% of agricultural households control only 9% of cultivatable land, while the wealthiest 6% of landowners control more than 33% of farm land (UNDP, 1998). Parties that advocated agrarian reform in their campaign platforms (such as CPN-M) should have fared well at the polls among the large landless and land-poor segment of the rural population.

Yet, the results from the two elections that preceded the insurgency were disappointing for those parties. The mainstream communist party, the Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), did win 69 of the 205 seats in the inaugural 1991 elections. In 1994, CPN-UML won a plurality of 88 seats, entitling it to form a government that lasted nine months. However, CPN-UML had only a vague land reform agenda in its election manifesto, and it never even attempted to build a parliamentary coalition behind any significant agrarian reform legislation. Those parties that did advocate redistribution of land ownership performed poorly in the elections. The United People's Front (UPF, a coalition among CPN-Masal, CPN-Mashal and the CPN-Maoist) contested 70 seats in the 1991 election but won only 9. Prior to the 1994 election, the UPF broke into two factions, one led by Baburam Bhattarai and the other by Niranjana Govind Vaidya. Vaidya's faction contested 49 seats but won none. The election commission refused to certify Bhattarai's faction as a legal party, forcing its candidates to contest elections as individuals. Subsequently, Bhattarai's faction rejected the

1994 elections, abandoned electoral politics altogether, and joined the CPN-M to initiate armed insurgency. By 2003, the Government of Nepal estimated that the rebels had 5,500 active combatants, another 8,000 militia, 4,500 full-time cadres, 33,000 hardcore followers, and 200,000 sympathizers (Sharma, 2004). Arguably, the Maoist party was more successful at mobilizing peasants to support its insurgency than to support its candidates for parliament.

In the analysis that follows, we consider the special circumstances of democratization in a nation where such a large proportion of the population is still engaged in subsistence agriculture. We draw on theories of patron-client politics to explain how peasant cultivators can be persuaded to vote for parties other than those that advocate agrarian reform when such reform would benefit them directly. We use district-level data to test hypotheses on the relationship between the distribution of peasants among land-tenure categories and election turnout.

Democratization and Revolution

If, as Goodwin & Skocpol (1989: 495) argue, 'the ballot box ... has proven to be the coffin of revolutionary movements', then Nepal's insurgency poses a puzzle for contemporary research on democratic transitions, especially considering that the very parties that had led previous (failed) insurgencies entered the democratic political arena as peaceful competitors for office in the new democratic order. The domestic democratic peace proposition holds that democracies are less likely than non-democracies to experience civil war, because democratic institutions defuse revolutionary violence by channeling dissent into electoral competition and nonviolent protest (Henderson & Singer, 2000; Hegre et al., 2001). Opposition movements need not resort to organized violence

because they can form legal political parties and run candidates for office. Office holders have an electoral incentive to address popular grievances with remedial reforms and to refrain from repression because of the electoral consequences that could ensue. Citizens are not forced to choose between withdrawing from politics in order to escape state repression and shifting to violent tactics of their own in order to combat it.

While there are reasons to expect democracies to be less susceptible to civil war, there is also evidence that *democratization* can be destabilizing. Hegre et al. (2001) found that *both* democracies and autocracies are less susceptible to civil war than semi-democracies or weak authoritarian regimes. The latter lack both the institutional capacity to defuse opposition with democratic processes and the coercive capacity to repress opposition preemptively. They found that nations undergoing a *change* in the level of democracy – whether more democratic or more authoritarian – were especially susceptible to civil war. When civil war does occur, the inability of a democratic regime to defeat the insurgency can embolden authoritarian recidivists to stage a coup in the name of preserving national security. This is precisely what happened in Nepal, with the dismissal of the elected government in 2002 and the assumption of autocratic power by the king in February 2005.

New democracies are at risk of failing and reverting to non-democratic forms of governance. Among the conditions that increase the probability of a new democracy failing are low levels of income per capita and high rates of inflation (Przeworski et al., 1996). Acemoglu & Robinson (2006) and Boix (2003) suggest that democracy is less likely to emerge and, if it does, less likely to survive where land is the primary source of wealth and land ownership is concentrated in the hands of relatively small landed elites closely allied with the state. Landed elites will resist

democratization in the first place, because a democratically elected government would likely tax their wealth (land) or even redistribute it in order to provide benefits to their constituents (peasants). Unlike industrial, financial, or commercial elites, landed elites cannot move their assets to another country to avoid taxation. Therefore, they are likely to resist pro-democracy popular movements.

The consolidation of democracy is, to some extent, dependent upon newly elected leaders' ability to resolve the economic problems that plague the rural and urban poor. Democracy empowers the poor, at least in the sense that it endows them with the right to vote. Because the poor are far more numerous than their more prosperous fellow citizens (especially landed elites), their votes can be decisive in elections. Reform-minded candidates might see the large number of landless and land-poor peasants as an electoral opportunity: by advocating land reform, candidates can gain far more votes among peasants than they risk losing among the much smaller population of landowners. On the other hand, the clientelist ties that bind peasant cultivators to landed elites make it difficult for populist candidates to persuade risk-averse peasants to vote for them, because landed patrons can coerce peasants into voting against reformist parties by threatening them with a loss of land and other subsistence guarantees (Mason, 1986).

Arguably, this dilemma limited the ability of UDF parties to build a significant electoral base among peasants in 1991 and 1994. Their election manifestos advocated '*jasko jot usko poor*' (land to the tillers), which would have fundamentally altered the structural relationship between peasants and landed elites. However, peasants did not vote for those parties in large numbers. We turn now to a discussion of how the persistence of clientelist politics in the countryside affects the electoral fortunes of reformist parties.

Democracy and Clientelist Politics

Why would a landless or land-poor peasant *not* vote for parties that advocate land reform? In nations where large portions of the population are employed in the agricultural sector – and their productive activity is concentrated in subsistence cultivation rather than commercial production – peasants remain embedded in networks of patron–client dependency that constrain the autonomy of their political behavior. Inequality in patterns of land ownership combines with the economic marginality of peasant producers to compel them to seek the patronage of landed elites. Landed patrons provide them with access to land and other services that amount to a subsistence floor. In return, peasants are bound to that patron through a diffuse set of non-economic and economic obligations (Scott, 1976).

From the peasant's point of view, the legitimacy of the clientelist relationship is a function of the balance of goods and services exchanged between patron and client (the 'terms of trade') and the distribution of the risks of agriculture inherent in the terms of trade (Scott & Kerkvliet, 1977). The terms of the exchange are highly asymmetric: each client is far more dependent upon the benefits provided by the patron than the patron is on the goods and services any one client provides him. The loss of their patron's beneficence could be disastrous for a peasant household, because it would cast them into the pool of landless laborers, devoid of any subsistence security and exposed to the uncertainties of markets for land, labor, and food. By contrast, the defection of one client from a landed patron's domain has little, if any, effect on that patron's well-being because the defector can be replaced from the same pool of landless laborers.

The source of the patron's power is control over land. Where large proportions of the population are sustained through subsistence agriculture and there are few occupational

alternatives to agriculture, demand for land is highly inelastic: increases in its effective price will not diminish peasant demand for land (Scott & Kerkvliet, 1977: 442). In exchange for use of a plot of land and other subsistence guarantees, peasant cultivators are expected to provide their patron with some mix of rent, crop shares, free labor, and other services. They are also expected to support the patron politically by deferring to his instructions on matters such as whom to vote for in elections (Scott, 1976). Patrons dispense justice locally and provide their clients with protection, not only from bandits and other predators, but also from the state and other outside agents who might assert a claim to a share of the peasant's time, labor, or crops. As such, local patrons serve as a buffer between peasants and the state. Likewise, in democracies, they act as a buffer between peasants and candidates for elective office (and their party organizations). Peasant interactions with candidates for elective office are mediated by the patron, and the patron uses his ability to deliver the support of his clients as a bargaining chip in his dealings with external authorities, including the state and (in electoral democracies) parties running candidates for office. Thus, a landlord's control over access to land translates not only into economic wealth but political power as well.

Under these circumstances, withholding one's vote from political parties that advocate agrarian reform – reforms that would break the power of the landed elite over the lives and loyalty of peasant cultivators – can become a rational course of action for a marginalized peasant. By voting for reformist parties, the peasant risks incurring the wrath of the landlord and jeopardizing his family's access to land and other subsistence guarantees. Moreover, peasants have no assurance that pro-reform parties will win or, if they do, successfully enact land reform that will provide peasant households with a more

abundant and secure standard of living. Formal assurances of ballot secrecy are not likely to convince peasants that they can vote against the directive of their patron with impunity, especially in new democracies with no tradition of free and fair elections and where local administration of elections is in the hands of those same landed elites.

We argue that the extent to which landlords can influence the votes of peasants is a function of the terms of trade and distribution of the risks of agriculture that determine the strength of clientelist dependency binding peasant to landlord. These ties vary according to whether peasants are smallholders, sharecroppers, tenants, or landless laborers. Smallholders are not directly dependent upon landed patrons for access to land. However, their marginal economic status usually compels them to seek assistance from landed patrons for credit, seed, tools and equipment, political brokerage, and seasonal wage-labor on the patron's lands. Often all that stands between the smallholder and landlessness is one bad crop that compels him to sell his land or seek loans from the local patron. Tenancy arrangements can be based on fixed rents in cash or in kind, or on crop shares. The terms of the tenancy vary depending on the size of the landless population: the larger that segment of the rural population, the higher the effective rental price of land in crop shares or cash rent. Landless laborers exist outside of the network of patron-client exchanges. Their income is determined by the supply and demand for agricultural labor.

In districts where land ownership is concentrated in the hands of a relatively small landed elite and a large share of the peasantry work the land in some form of tenancy, we would not expect large votes for parties that favor land reform, because peasants will feel obligated to vote as their landlord instructs them or risk losing access to land and other subsistence guarantees (Mason, 1986).

Land-tenure Patterns in Nepal

Until the rule of the Rana family ended in 1951, Nepal's land-tenure system was one of the most feudal in all of South Asia. British colonialism had dismantled feudal land-tenure patterns in most of India. After independence, indigenous political leaders were able to prevent the return to pre-colonial land-tenure arrangements. Since Nepal was not colonized, feudal arrangements persisted until the downfall of the Rana regime in 1951. Prior to that, land was owned either by the state (*raikar* or state landlordism, which include most of Nepal's farmland) or by ethnic communities (*kipat* or communally owned land). The state lands were allotted to government officials (*jagir* or land given as a salary), religious institutions (*guthi* or land given as state support for religious institutions) or relatives of royal families, Ranas, Brahmins, and Thakuris, as well as military officers and government administrators with close ties to the ruling elite (*birta* or land given in recognition of a family's contribution to the state). Still, these land-tenure forms did not establish a permanent landed aristocracy, because none of these tenure forms involved permanent ownership rights. *Raikar* land reverted to the state when the recipient's service to the state ended. With any change in the alignment of elite factions in the capital, *birta* land could be reassigned to supporters of a newly ascendant faction.

Nonetheless, those who controlled *birta* land in a village at any given point in time were the political authority in that village. They controlled peasant access to land in the sense that they determined who was allowed to rent *birta* land, how much each household was allotted, and what the rental terms would be. As agents of the government in Kathmandu, they had discretionary power to levy taxes on the *raikar* land in their village and to appropriate portions of that revenue for public works projects, to administer

justice, regulate rural markets, and collect fines and other levies for the state. Thus, *birta* landlords benefited twofold: they collected taxes on *raikar* land while their own *birta* land was exempt from state tax, and they received income from the *birta* land they rented out to peasants (Regmi, 1976).

With the downfall of the Rana regime in 1951, the interim constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal included a provision that guaranteed property rights. This made the then-current holders of *birta* and *jagir* land into permanent landowners (Regmi, 1976). The hierarchical relationship between landed elites and peasants became institutionalized by the act, making permanent the unequal distribution of land ownership and creating a permanent landed elite of government officials, military officers, Brahmins, and members of the Rana and royal families. State autonomy from the landed elite was thereafter constrained: while the institutionalization of a highly unequal distribution of land ownership made agrarian reform a persistent issue in Nepalese politics, the state's dependence on the network of now-permanent landed elites to collect taxes and maintain order in the countryside meant that the state would be reluctant to initiate any redistribution of land ownership that might threaten the economic interests and local authority of those landed elites.

Peasant unrest over these developments compelled the government to enact the Tenancy Rights Acquisition Act in 1951. The Act was intended to provide tenants with title to the land on which they paid tax. However, because landlords (not the tenants) routinely reported the taxes they collected from their tenants in their own name, the Tenancy Rights Act had the opposite effect of its intent: it gave landlords claim to permanent legal title to the *raikar* land they had managed in trust for the state (Regmi, 1976). In subsequent years, the government made other modest attempts at land reform through the

Royal Land Reform Commission in 1952, the Land Act of 1957, the Birta Abolition Act of 1959, and the Land Reorganization Act of 1962 (Regmi, 1976). None of these measures had much remedial effect on the inequality in landholdings (see Table I). Indeed, the only significant change was that the Land Reorganization Act of 1962 abolished communal ownership of *kipat* land, thereby converting ethnic communities into collections of marginal smallholders. This exposed them individually to the risks of agriculture, leaving them one bad crop removed from being forced to sell their subsistence plot to pay off debts to local landlords, who remained the major source of credit for peasant cultivators.

Land Tenure, Elections, and Insurgency

The theoretical framework presented earlier allows us to derive some hypotheses concerning how land-tenure patterns in Nepal should affect peasant participation in elections. We will test these hypotheses with district-level data on the distribution of households among various land-tenure categories and election turnout in the three national elections (1991, 1994, and 1999). The 1999 election presents a special case in that it was the one election that occurred while the insurgency was ongoing. As such, election results from that year represent an indicator of the ability of the state, through its local agents (landed patrons), to mobilize a show of support for the state as opposed to the rebels. Where land-tenure patterns create stronger ties of dependency between landlord and tenant, turnout should be higher, and the insurgents should have more difficulty mobilizing peasants against the state; where those ties are weaker, turnout should be lower, and the insurgents should be more successful.

The rebels rejected electoral democracy and sought to overthrow the incumbent

Table I. Distribution of Household (HH) and Area Owned by Size of Land Holding (in %)

Size of holding	1961		1971		1981		1991		2001	
	HH	Area	HH	Area	HH	Area	HH	Area	HH	Area
Holdings with no land	1.43	0.00	0.80	0.00	0.37	0.00	1.17	0.00	0.85	0.00
Less than 1.0 ha	73.89	24.03	76.77	27.2	66.32	17.33	68.63	30.50	74.15	38.88
1–4 ha	19.56	35.68	18.39	39.29	28.05	46.13	27.68	50.80	23.70	50.45
More than 4 ha	5.13	41.42	4.03	33.74	5.35	36.54	2.51	18.70	1.30	10.67
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Agriculture Census of Nepal (1961, 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001).

regime. Therefore, their goal with respect to elections was to depress turnout as much as possible. Pathak (2005: 180) argues that peasants supported the insurgents in the hope of receiving 'adequate foods, housing, clothing, basic education, primary healthcare' and other tangible benefits. Alternatively, some have argued that peasant support for the insurgency was largely coerced, with insurgents threatening peasants with retribution for non-support. Whether induced by carrots or sticks, support for the insurgents should be stronger where land-tenure patterns involve weaker ties of dependency between landlord and peasant. The level of political violence in a district (as indicated by deaths from political violence) is an indicator of rebel strength: the larger the number of casualties in a district, the larger the rebel presence. Thus,

H1: The higher the level of political violence in a district, the lower the voter turnout for the 1999 election.

The land-tenure system in Nepal includes several different types of land-tenure arrangements: sharecropping, rent for fixed cash payment, rent for fixed product, rent for mortgage, and rent for service. These arrangements involve varying degrees of peasant subordination to landed elites. As such, election results should vary with the distribution of peasants among these categories.

Sharecropping

Sharecropping households get the use of a plot of land and other services that provide subsistence security. In return, they are obliged to share at least 50% of the harvest with the landlord and to provide the landlord with a certain amount of free labor. Given the strength of dependency ties between sharecropper and landlord, we expect sharecroppers to vote the way their landlord instructs them. Since landlords in Nepal act as agents of the state at the local level, they have an interest in turning out a large vote to indicate to state authorities that they are in control of their clients and that support for the insurgency is weak in their domain.

H2: The greater the share of families farming under sharecropping arrangements, the higher the turnout in elections.

Rent for Service

Under this arrangement, a peasant household gets use of a plot of land by assuming a debt to the landlord, with the amount of the debt and the interest rate negotiated between landlord and tenant. While in debt to the landlord, the peasant has to present himself or a member of his family when the landlord demands it to work on the landlord's land or to perform household labor. In some cases, the peasant household offers a member of the

family to work for the landlord until the family stops cultivating that land or pays off the original debt plus interest. Since the plot of land is essential to the family's subsistence but is rarely large enough to produce a consistent surplus, the peasant household often cannot pay off the debt, and the family member assigned to work for the landlord might continue to do so, without wages, until he or she dies. This practice of bonded labor (*kamayia*) was widespread in western Nepal. We would expect peasants living under these arrangements to be compelled by their landlord to vote as the landlord instructs.

H3: The higher the proportion of families farming under rent-for-service tenancy, the higher the voter turnout will be.

On May Day of 2000, the issue of bonded labor became more intense, when 19 bonded laborers of a former government minister lodged complaints demanding freedom and minimum wage for their work. Support from human rights NGOs and INGOs forced the government to declare emancipation of all bonded laborers in July 2000, freeing about 15,000 households (83,000 people) from this form of debt servitude. After gaining their freedom, they demanded subsistence security from the government, and the government responded by offering to distribute about 0.6 hectare of land to each household. When the government delayed implementing this plan, some of the bonded laborers were forced to return to their former landlords. Some of the younger ones joined the Maoist insurgency (World Organization Against Torture, 2005).

Fixed-Product/Fixed-Rent Tenancy

Under fixed-product tenancy, the landlord receives a fixed amount of the harvest at the end of the year, and the peasant household does not receive any services from the landlord. The peasant household is compelled to

plant the type of crop the landlord dictates, but they can devote a portion of their land to subsistence crops for their own consumption. Under a fixed-cash rent arrangement, a peasant household pays a certain amount of cash to a landlord for the right to cultivate a plot of land. Peasants are free to allocate land between cash crops and subsistence crops as they see fit, so long as they can earn enough cash to pay the rent at the end of the harvest. These two types of rental systems usually involve absentee landlords who live in the city and leave the peasant household to assume full responsibility for production with a minimum of supervision by the landlord. Fixed-product or fixed-cash tenants have incentives to maximize output, because they keep all output beyond what is required for rent payment. For this reason, they are likely to participate in elections even without being compelled by landlords. Furthermore, when the insurgents enter a village to break the ties of dependency between peasant and landlord, these peasants have less incentive to support the insurgency and more incentive to preserve the status quo than other classes of tenants.

H4: The greater the number of households engaged in fixed-product or fixed-cash rental arrangements, the higher the voter turnout.

Smallholders

Smallholders own their own land and, therefore, are less subordinated to the political will of landed patrons. However, they usually do not own enough land to engage in commercial production beyond their household's subsistence requirements. Often, they find it necessary to turn to landed patrons for production credit or emergency loans. For this reason, they are sometimes only one bad crop removed from being forced to sell their land to pay off their debts. Nonetheless, as long as they own their own land, we would expect

them to be less supportive of the insurgency and less subject to political manipulation by landed elites than are sharecroppers or tenants.

H5: The larger the share of smallholders in a district, the higher the voter turnout.

Landlessness

Finally, the size of the landless population should be inversely related to turnout. Landless peasants exist outside of the network of patron–client ties. Their interactions with the landed elite are more nearly impersonal and contractual, involving the exchange of cash wages for temporary labor services. Landlords are not obligated to provide them with any other services to enhance their subsistence security. As such, landless peasants are less subject to manipulation by landed elites. They have little incentive to vote, and landlords have little leverage to compel them to vote. Once the insurgency erupted, landless peasants had more to gain from supporting the rebels than casting a vote that represented a statement of preference for the incumbent regime over the rebels. Where landlords were expelled from villages by the insurgency, landless peasants had the opportunity to gain access to land ‘liberated’ from the landlords.

H6: The larger the size of the landless population, the lower the voter turnout.

Institutionalized Credit

Access to institutionalized credit (as opposed to credit offered by landed patrons) is imperative for peasant autonomy, because such loans are typically offered at lower interest rates than loans offered by landlords, and the loan can be paid back after the harvest. However, access to institutionalized credit requires a guarantee from the local landed elites as well as collateral to compensate the lender if the farmer defaults on the loan. Because of loan security requirements, many

peasants do not have access to institutional credit. Instead, they are compelled to borrow from landlords at terms dictated by those landlords. Often, peasants are not able to pay back principal and interest, leaving them in a condition of debt servitude to the landlord. In these circumstances, peasants can be compelled to offer unconditional support to their patrons, such as voting in elections and voting for the parties preferred by the landlord.

H7: The less access to institutional credit in a district, the higher the turnout in elections.

We have outlined several hypotheses on the relationships between patterns of land tenure, the level of political violence, and participation in elections. The underlying logic is that the strength of the landed elites’ control over peasants at the local level varies with land-tenure patterns. Where the predominant land-tenure arrangements subordinate peasants to landlords, those landlords can mobilize large turnouts at the polls as an indicator of popular support for the incumbent regime. Where the rebel presence is stronger and ties of subordination to landlords are weaker, turnout should be lower. We turn now to the research design that spells out how these hypotheses will be tested.

Data and Research Design

To test the hypotheses, we analyze district-level data ($N = 75$) on the relationship between land tenure and voter turnout in the three rounds of parliamentary elections held since the restoration of democracy in 1990. We estimate an OLS regression model for each election, with turnout as the dependent variable. The independent variables include the proportion of households in each of several land-tenure categories, as well as several control variables. Only the 1999 election took place while the insurgency was

Table II. Descriptive Statistics

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Obs.</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>St. dev.</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
Turnout 1991 (%)	75	64.429	8.194	36.728	85.800
Turnout 1994 (%)	75	61.359	8.455	42.132	83.853
Turnout 1999 (%)	75	63.938	10.919	0.000	80.839
Landless households (1,000s)	75	11.854	22.962	0.171	181.763
% Smallholder households	75	18.184	12.976	0.162	63.641
% Sharecropping households	75	6.602	5.418	0.000	24.527
% Renting for service households	75	0.319	0.607	0.000	3.741
% Rent for fixed cash households	75	0.833	0.972	0.000	5.430
% Rent for fixed product households	75	1.704	3.406	0.000	23.843
% Households without access to institutional credit	75	77.801	15.951	31.32	100.000
Caste and ethnic fractionalization	75	0.795	0.101	0.543	0.942
Level of political violence	75	0.172	0.161	0.000	0.951
HDI 1996 (index 0 to 1)	75	0.321	0.073	0.147	0.603
Population 2001 (logged)	75	12.359	0.871	9.168	13.894
Candidates contesting elections 1991	75	17.933	13.993	2.000	69.000
Candidates contesting elections 1994	75	19.227	15.302	3.000	94.000
Candidates contesting elections 1999	75	29.84	26.544	1.000	159.000

ongoing. Therefore, turnout in 1999 has special political significance, because both the government and the rebels treated that election as a referendum on the insurgency: the government wanted a large turnout to indicate opposition to the insurgency, while the rebels sought to depress turnout to support their claim that the government lacked legitimacy. Given that, a second model for the 1999 election adds a variable for the level of political violence in a district, measured as the number of deaths from political violence. Descriptive statistics for all variables are in Table II.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is *election turnout*, measured as the percentage of registered voters who voted in each national parliamentary election. Turnout data are from publications of the Election Commission of Nepal (1991, 1994, 1999).¹

¹ In the 1999 election, in one constituency, Managn, the candidate was unopposed, and therefore there was no election.

Independent Variables

The independent variables of interest are measures of the proportion of households cultivating land under each of the land-tenure arrangements specified in the hypotheses. *Sharecropping households* is operationalized as the percentage of households cultivating land under both single and mixed-tenure sharecropping. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics of the Government of Nepal (CBS-Nepal), about 19% of cultivatable land is farmed by sharecroppers. There are 256,452 sharecropping households (7.60% of agriculture households). In 32 of 75 districts, the percentage of sharecropping households is above the national average of 6.60%. According to the Agriculture Census (2001), about 0.34% of agriculture households farm under *rent-for-service* arrangements. In 18 districts, the percentage of households in this tenancy arrangement exceeds the national average of 0.32%. About 2% of households cultivate land under *fixed-product tenancy*, and in 18 districts the proportion is higher than the

Table III. Hectare of Lands Cultivated in Different Tenancy Arrangements

Variables	Obs.	Mean	St. dev.	Min.	Max.
Share cropping	75	2,120.377	3,889.921	0.000	19,850.900
Renting for service	75	34.384	69.000	0.000	364.700
Renting for fixed cash	75	470.224	1,259.764	0.000	9,253.100
Renting for fixed product	75	152.519	240.417	0.000	1,277.800

Source: Agriculture Census, 2001.

national average of 1.70%. About 0.84% of households cultivate land under *fixed-cash tenancy*, and in 29 districts the proportion is above the national average of 0.84%. A total of 208,313 hectares of land are cultivated under all of these tenancy arrangements (see Table III). The same Agricultural Census (2001) indicates that 21.34% of households are smallholders who own land below one parcel. (A parcel is a contiguous piece of land owned or rented.) The average size of a parcel of land is 0.24 hectares. In 32 districts, the proportion of *smallholder households* exceeds the national average of 18.18%. Because the 2001 Population Census does not provide the number of landless peasant households, we estimated their numbers by using the difference between the total households reported in the Population Census of 2001 and the total agriculture households from the Agriculture Census of 2001.² CBS-Nepal used a combination of complete enumeration and sampling to estimate the number of *landless households*, and these data were used in the UN's *Human Development Report* for Nepal (2004). We also hypothesized that peasant access to institutional credit is inversely related to peasant subordination to landlords. The average percentage of households with access to institutional credit is 22.20% and 37 districts fall below this average. Data for this

variable are from the UN Human Development Report (UNDP, 2004).

Because our hypotheses are based on the degree of peasant dependency on landlords, we transform the land-tenure variables for each district to the difference between that district's value and the national average for that variable, a technique used by Murshed & Gates (2005). For a given category, districts with the proportion of households above the national average will have negative scores, and those below the national average will have positive scores. For the *access to institutional credit* variable, we use the percentage of households deprived of such access.

We also expect that higher levels of political violence will reduce turnout for the 1999 election. The level of political violence is measured as deaths from political violence, regardless of whether the insurgents or the state was the perpetrator. Data on casualties from political violence are available until November 2005 from Informal Sector Service Center (INSEC). INSEC is a human rights NGO based in Kathmandu with representatives in each district to monitor and report human rights violations by both the government and the rebels.

Control Variables

The modernization thesis suggests that support for democracy (and, therefore, turnout) should increase with the general level of economic development (Lipset, 1959; Huntington, 1991). Conversely, the probability of civil war in a nation is inversely related to the level of economic development

² In correspondence with the Deputy Director of CBS-Nepal regarding the validity of our estimate of peasant households, he informed us that 'agriculture holdings' and 'households' used in the agriculture census and the population census of 2001, respectively, are practically the same.

(Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). For these reasons, we employed the Human Development Index (HDI) as a control for the level of economic well-being. HDI measures income level, literacy rate, school enrollment, and life expectancy and is available from the UN Development Report (UNDP, 1998). The national average of HDI is 0.32, and 37 districts are below this average. Murshed & Gates (2005) also use HDI as a predictor of the level of violent political conflict in Nepal.

The insurgency in Nepal has also been characterized as having an ethnic and caste component: the state bureaucracy, the national parliament, and the military are dominated by upper castes, while ethnic minorities and indigenous groups are largely excluded from representation in mainstream political institutions (UNDP, 1998; Nepali & Subba, 2005; Lawati, 2005). Therefore, we control for caste and ethnic fractionalization.³ The data for *caste and ethnic fractionalization* come from the Population Census (2001). Since electoral turnout is also influenced by the number of candidates contesting the election, we also control for the *number of candidates on the ballot* with data from the Election Commission of Nepal. Finally, we control for *population* (logged) in each district.

Empirical Findings and Analysis

We estimated separate OLS regression models for each of the three national elections, with *turnout* as the dependent variable (Table IV). We estimated two models for the

³ As indicated by the population census of 2001, there are 65 caste and ethnic groups in Nepal. The ethnic and caste fractionalization index is calculated with the formula, $1 - \sum_{i=1}^M \left(\frac{n_i}{N} \right)^2$ where N is the total population and n_i is the number of people belonging to the i th group. M is the total number of ethnic and caste groups. The formula captures the probability that two randomly selected people belong to different groups. The index takes values between 0 (for a perfectly homogeneous district) and 1 (for a perfectly heterogeneous district).

1999 election: one with the level of political violence variable and one without that variable. F-tests ($p < 0.005$) reveal that all four models are statistically significant: at least one variable explains a significant proportion of the variance in turnout for each election. The models explain between 34% (1994) and 52% (1999) of the variance in turnout. Partial correlation results further support our regression results.⁴ Tests reveal no problems of heteroscedasticity, except for the 1991 and 1999 elections. For those two models, we used robust standard errors.⁵ Tests reveal no problems of multicollinearity.⁶

Our first hypothesis was that political violence should lower turnout for the 1999 election (H1). The second model for the 1999 election reveals a statistically significant negative relationship between level of political violence and voter turnout for that election. A one unit increase in the level of political violence in a district (measured in terms of insurgency-related deaths in thousands) decreases turnout by 17.48%, *ceteris paribus*.⁷ Had insurgency-related deaths reached 1,000 in a district, we would expect turnout to decrease by 17.48% in that district. In districts such as Rukum and Rolpa, with the highest number of people killed during the insurgency, the electoral turnout for the 1999 parliamentary election was dramatically below the national average. The

⁴ All variables that were significant in the regression models are statistically significant in the partial correlation tests we performed for each model.

⁵ We used the Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg heteroskedasticity test for the null hypothesis of constant variance for all models. We find heteroskedasticity problems for the 1991 and 1999 election models. For the 1994 election, we fail to reject the null of constant variance.

⁶ One method to test for multicollinearity is to test whether the Variable Inflation Factor (VIF) for each variable exceeds 10. If R^2 exceeds 0.90, the variable is highly collinear. For more discussion on multicollinearity and alternative tests (such as tolerance $[1/VIF]$ where the greater the distance from zero, the more the variable is independent from another explanatory variable), see Gujarati (2003).

⁷ All p -values are at least 0.05 unless otherwise stated. The effect of political violence on turnout is significant at 0.10 levels (two-tailed test).

Table IV. Election Turnout as a Function of Land-Tenure Patterns

Variables	1991 Election		1994 Election		1999 Election (1)		1999 Election (2)	
	Coeff.	St. error	Coeff.	St. error	Coeff.	St. error	Coeff.	St. error
Landless households (in 1,000s) gap	-0.010	0.055	-0.239**	0.103	-0.297***	0.102	-0.299***	0.095
% Smallholder households gap	0.145**	0.068	0.050	0.079	0.070	0.076	0.092	0.077
% Sharecropping households gap	0.410**	0.182	0.079	0.219	0.120	0.188	0.306	0.241
% Rent for service households gap	-1.868	2.047	-2.536	2.457	-11.020***	3.891	-11.509***	4.0800
% Fixed cash rent households gap	0.161	1.315	-1.113	1.492	-2.298	2.129	-1.895	2.130
% Fixed product rent households gap	0.909***	0.270	1.278***	0.371	1.770***	0.508	1.648***	0.537
% Households with no access to credit	0.112**	0.055	0.061	0.057	-0.064	0.065	-0.034	0.056
Deaths from political violence	-	-	-	-	-	-	-17.480*	9.894
HDI 1996 (index 0 to 1) gap	-13.740	16,976	-	-	-4.670	19,302	-20.778	20,713
Population 2001 (logged)	-5.500***	1.894	-7.870***	2.034	-4.774*	2.514	-2.911	2.405
Candidates contesting elections	0.205***	0.103	0.592***	0.206	0.369***	0.105	0.345***	0.106
Caste and ethnic fractionalization (index 0 to 1)	21,369*	12,515	17,398	12,822	16,333	17,036	9,062	13,792
Constant	103,128***	20,327	128,654***	24,299	103,944***	27,437	88,071***	26,072
R ²	36.99		34.08		47.40		51.95	
Sample size	75		75		75		75	

For 1991 and 1999, robust standard errors are used. For 1994, standard errors are used.
 * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$; **** $p < 0.000$ (two-tailed tests).

highest death total in any one district was 951, which occurred in a Rukum district. While more than 63% of voters in that district participated in the 1991 election, the turnout declined to about 44% for the 1999 election. Where the insurgency was stronger, people were less likely to vote, whether out of fear of rebel retribution or because rebel violence weakened local patrons' control over peasants. Indeed, part of the rebel strategy was to drive landlords from a district, redistribute their land, and install 'people's governments' to rule in place of the state. Thus, where the insurgency was stronger, peasants could abstain from voting with less fear of incurring the wrath of their landlord.

The findings on land-tenure patterns and turnout provide some support for our theoretical arguments. We expect that higher proportions of families farming under sharecropping arrangements would be associated with higher turnout (H2), because sharecroppers are bound to landlords through ties of debt and obligation to a greater degree than other categories of peasants. The coefficient for this variable is positive and significant only for the 1991 election. Even for that election, the magnitude of the effect is not very large: a one percentage point increase in the proportion of sharecropper households increases turnout by 0.41%. Nonetheless, in the initial round of elections, there is support for the proposition that landed elites were able to mobilize turnout among those who were most dependent on them for subsistence security. In districts such as Sunsari, Terhathum, Banke, and Dang, where the proportion of sharecropping households is two standard deviations above the national average, turnout was the highest for all three parliamentary elections. By the 1999 election, the arrival of the insurgency may have weakened the ability of landlords to mobilize turnout even among sharecroppers, and this might account for the weaker relationship for that election cycle. The absence of a significant

relationship for the 1994 election may be related to factional divisions emerging within the ruling Nepali Congress (NC) party, which had a strong support base in rural and western Nepal.

We expected a positive relationship between the turnout and the share of smallholders in a district (H5). The findings for the proportion of smallholders are similar to the findings for sharecroppers. There is a significant positive relationship only for the 1991 elections, and the magnitude of that relationship is also small: a one percentage point increase in the share of smallholders is associated with an increase in voter turnout of only 0.15%. Turnout was above the national average in all but 5 of the 32 districts where the share of smallholder households was above the national average. The weakening of the relationship in later rounds is related to the factional splits within the NC and the fact that the 1994 election was not a regularly scheduled election and, therefore, did not create enough motivation for landlords to mobilize peasants.

We also expected that higher proportions of families farming under rent-for-service tenancy would be associated with higher voter turnout (H3), because this category of peasants is most strongly subordinated to their landlords. Instead, we find a significant negative relationship for the 1999 elections (after the insurgency had begun) and no relationship for 1994 and 1991 elections. In terms of the magnitude of the relationships, a one percentage point increase in households farming under rent-for-service reduces voter turnout by 11.51% for the 1999 election. The large and statistically significant coefficient for the 1999 election can be attributed to the impact of the insurgency. Compared to other tenancy arrangements, rent-for-service households are much more subject to manipulation by landlords. For the same reasons, we would expect support for the insurgency to be especially strong among those in this land-tenure

category, because in many ways they have the most to gain from the insurgency driving out landlords and destroying records of peasant debt. Therefore, the strong negative effect for 1999 may indicate the insurgency's weakening of landlord control over this class of peasants.

The proportion of households renting land for fixed cash payment is not significantly related to turnout in any of the three elections (two-tailed test) whereas rent for fixed product is positive and statistically significant for all three elections (H4). The fixed-product tenancy arrangement is the most lucrative for peasant cultivators and involves the weakest degree of landlord supervision of peasant behavior among all the tenancy arrangements. Landlords here are typically absentee landlords, and peasants can keep all production above the fixed amount promised to the landlord as rent. Since payment is in kind, not in cash, peasant welfare is less subject to fluctuations in the market price of their crops: the landlord gets the same fixed amount of crop regardless of its price. By contrast, those who rent for fixed cash payment also get to keep all surplus above what is required to pay the rent, but the amount they get to keep can decline if the market price for the crop declines. As such, they are more dependent on the landlord's beneficence than are those who rent for fixed product. There are 18 districts where the share of fixed-product rent households is above the national average and, except for Kathmandu and Panchathar districts, the turnout for the 1999 election in those districts was higher than the national average.

We argued that the size of the landless population should be negatively related to turnouts (H6). We find that increases in the size of the landless population are indeed associated with lower voter turnout for all three elections, but the relationship is statistically significant only for the 1994 and 1999 elections. In terms of the magnitude of the effect, an increase of 1,000 landless households is

associated with a decrease of 0.30% in election turnout for 1999, *ceteris paribus*. The significantly large decline in turnout for the 1999 election did not take place in districts where there was a larger percentage of landless peasants. Rather, turnout declined in districts where the share of landless peasants was below the national average. Perhaps the rebels might have appealed to landless peasants to join the insurgency or boycott the election where they are fewer in number, but their appeal was less successful where there were large numbers of landless peasants. The districts with low electoral turnout were in the western part of Nepal, where smaller proportions of households are landless and the insurgency was relatively intense.

We hypothesized that the fewer households that have less access to institutional credit, the higher the turnout should be (H7). We find a positive and significant relationship between the lack of access to institutional credit and turnout in the 1991 election, but the relationship is not significant for either of the other two elections. For the 1991 election, an increase of one percentage point in the share of households with no access to institutional credit leads to a 0.11% increase in voter turnout. There are 37 districts where lack of access to institutional credit is above the national average. Households in districts such as Humla have no access to institutional credit, leaving them completely dependent on local landlords for their credit needs. In these districts, turnout in 1991 was above the national average, and for 1999 it was the highest of all. Dadeldhura district has the highest proportion of households with access to institutional credit, and turnout was about 49% for the 1991 and 1994 elections and about 59% for the 1999 election, all below the national average.

The number of candidates running for election is positively related to turnout for all three elections. In the 1991 election, an increase of one candidate in a district increased

turnout by 0.21%, by 0.59% for the 1994 election, and by 0.37% for the 1999 election. The log of population is inversely related to electoral turnout for all elections, suggesting that landlords face a coordination problem: the more peasants there are in a district, the more difficult it is to detect and sanction abstention. But when the variable for the level of political violence is included in the 1999 election model, the log of population is not significant. We did not find a significant relationship between HDI and electoral turnout for the 1991 and 1999 elections. The HDI variable caused an endogeneity problem for the 1994 model and therefore dropped out of the model. Though the level of economic well-being per se affects peasant participation for the 1994 election, clientelist dependency may be a stronger influence on participation than the general level of well-being for the 1991 and 1994 elections. The caste and ethnic fractionalization index is positive and significant for the 1991 and 1994 elections but not significant for the 1999 election. This indicates that the more the district is fractionalized by caste and ethnicity, the higher the electoral participation for the 1991 election. A unit change in the fractionalization index increased the electoral turnout by 2.14% for the 1991 election.⁸ At a glance, ethnicity and caste affect landlords' ability to coerce participation in elections. Given the findings that caste and ethnicity are not related to turnout for the 1999 election, it may be that the insurgency was more appealing to marginalized castes and ethnic groups, and where the insurgency was strongest, the rebels were more able to depress turnout among these groups.

Discussion and Conclusion

We find strong support for the proposition that the insurgency affected peasant participation in elections. Where insurgent activity

was greater, turnout was lower in the 1999 election. This could be a function of insurgents intimidating peasants into staying at home. Or it could be a matter of insurgents weakening landlord control over peasants, including their ability to compel peasants to vote for parties favored by the landlord. We also found some support for the claim that turnout varies with land-tenure patterns. Turnout was higher where land-tenure patterns involved stronger ties of clientelist dependency between peasant and landlord, indicating that landlords were more able to compel peasants to vote as a sign of support for the new democracy. Some of these effects changed with the inception of insurgency, indicating that the insurgency weakened the ties that bound peasant to landlord and diminished landlords' ability to mobilize peasant voters. Since the Maoists boycotted the 1999 election, the weakening of the relationship between land tenure and turnout for this election can be seen as an indicator of the extent of peasant support for the insurgency or the insurgents' ability to weaken landlords' control over peasant behavior. The Maoists have sought radical land reform in Nepal, and where they are stronger, we would expect peasants to be more inclined to support the insurgents by joining the boycott with less fear of retribution at the hands of their landlord.

Why would a Maoist insurgency arise and thrive after a nation made the transition to democracy? How can Maoist insurgents mobilize peasants for armed insurgency when they could not mobilize them to vote for them in democratic elections? After the 1990 transition, new political parties emerging from the middle class gave peasants hope for land reform and emancipation from the debts and other obligations to local landlords that historically had reduced them to conditions of debt servitude. However, elected parliaments failed to deliver on the promise of agrarian reform. In order to gain electoral

⁸ These effects are significant only at the 0.10 level.

support, centrist parties invited local landlords to run for seats in the national parliament. To persuade them to join their party, party leaders had to soften their stand on land reform, because they knew the landed elite could mobilize large blocs of votes among those peasants who depended upon them for subsistence security. As a consequence, Khadka (1993: 52) reports that rural elites controlled about 90% of the seats in the first parliament, a condition which effectively precluded land reform. After 1995, peasants and ethnic minorities began supporting the Maoist insurgency. What electoral democracy could not deliver to peasants – land reform and relief from clientelist dependency – the Maoist insurgency promised to bring through political violence. We find empirical support for this argument in the tests we performed.

The empirical findings of this study have some policy relevance, especially in the present context of Nepal's struggle to restore political democracy after a relapse into authoritarianism. The findings suggest that building a sustainable democracy in Nepal is contingent upon the state achieving some degree of autonomy from rural elites and establishing a more direct relationship with peasant voters, one that is not mediated by landed elites. As Skocpol (1979) argued, the lack of state autonomy from the class of landed elites makes such states vulnerable to revolutionary insurrection. As long as peasants remain subject to the bonds of clientelist dependency, it is unlikely that a parliament will be elected that is sufficiently autonomous from rural elites to consider agrarian reforms that might provide peasants with the opportunity for improved economic well-being. As long as that is the case, Maoist rebels will find fertile ground for their appeal for revolutionary insurgency as an alternative to a democracy that is little more than electoral democracy. Our findings indicate that where the insurgency is strong, turnout declines. For now, the Maoist rebels are abiding by a

peace agreement as they await elections for a constituent assembly that will write a new constitution. Given what is at stake with the constituent assembly, international support in the form of robust election monitoring – to ensure free and fair elections and to prevent the use of violence by the Maoists and intimidation by landed elites – may be critical to the success of the one process that could bring the Maoists back into the democratic fold and end the decade of insurgency.

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