

Does Revolution Work? Evidence from the Birth of Nepal's Federal Democracy

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Abstract.

The political consequences of revolution are among the most important, but least understood, of all war impacts. Using a census of 3.68 million Nepalis (2.56 million of whom are of voting age) covering eleven districts, party nomination lists, electoral data, and party candidate selection committee surveys, we report five key findings. First, the historically disadvantaged social group of Janajatis – who formed the backbone of the Maoist insurgent group - gained representation proportional to their population share. Second, all parties – including the Maoist party – positively select candidates on education. Third, educated and Janajati party selection committee members demonstrate less bias against Janajati candidates. Fourth, the Maoist party - which has the most diverse party selection committees and the most Janajati nominees - provided the most Janajati tickets. Finally, using a close-election regression discontinuity design, we find that electing more educated leaders causally improves earthquake reconstruction for all constituents. By contrast, electing lower caste politicians marginally increases benefits for co-caste members, but does not have broader impacts. Taken together, our results provide a nuanced picture of how rebel groups enabled an inclusive federal democracy in Nepal: they created a cadre of positively selected leaders from historically disadvantaged castes during the revolution. This broadening of the pool of qualified candidates for post-conflict politics, in turn, leads to improved policy outcomes.