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Support for Democracy in South Asia

By

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I. Introduction

The idea and practice of democracy in the post-colonial and economically less developed nations has been marked by shifting moments of hope, despair and aporia, undulating periods of its resurgence, reversal and placidity and alternating phases of breakdown, impasse and consolidation. South Asia is no exception. If we consider democracy not as an embedded idea abstracted from the experience of the English-speaking western nations but as one that is being and need to be reinvented time and again in different parts of the world, not as feature that nations either have it or do not have it but as something that they are having it, and not as a rigid set of political institutions to be introduced in a country at one go but as institutional arrangements that evolve through trial and error, South Asia is one region that should excite interest in any student of democracy.

For any assessment of the condition of democracy in the world today, it is imperative to understand the condition of democracy in the South Asian region, which comprises about one-fifth of the world's population and about one-third of the world population living under democratic or semi-democratic political order. It has been a dynamic region for democracy, a theatre of struggles for democratization and successful resistance against authoritarian regimes that sought to push back the democratic aspirations of the people and undermine or overthrow democratic political institutions.

Political theorists, especially those who are studying democracy, have pointed out that the endurance of democracy in this region, particularly in India, defies the view that democracy cannot be introduced or, when introduced, cannot be sustained in societies characterized by high levels of diversity and low levels of economic development, the two features which the countries of the region possess in ample measure. More than a quarter of the population in the region lives under the

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conditions of poverty. About three–fourths live in rural areas, drawing their sustenance mainly from agriculture or agriculture-dependent occupations. All the five countries rank low on human development indices. The social and cultural diversity is huge not only in the region but within each country. Yet democracy survived. Of course, there are explanations why this pluralism is a source of strength for the flourishing of democracy rather than friction and why this heterogeneity need not necessarily lead to a breakdown of the democratic political order.

Saying so does not mean that all is well with democracy in South Asia, or that the theories of preconditions for the survival are all wrong. Democracy has a chequered history from the time the countries of the region have embarked on the path of democracy in the 1950s. Although people of the region have common historical past and shared social and cultural traits, the trajectory of democracy in different countries has not been the same. In their journey on the path of democracy, these countries traversed several ups and downs and encountered many obstacles. Reversals to democracy are more pronounced and violent in Pakistan and Bangladesh in the form of military coups. For more than a decade, Sri Lanka has been ravaged by an intractable civil war. Assassinations or attempt to assassinate top political leaders or heads of government or heads of the state have shaken all these nations at critical junctures of their political history or changed the course of their political development. Politicized identities on the basis of language, religion, culture and ethnicity have threatened to tear the democratic institutions apart and continue to do. The low levels of economic development coupled with democratic aspirations and demands for welfare put governments under pressure.

Given these socio-economic conditions and political environment, how do the people of South Asia understand the idea of democracy? What extent do they support it as a preferable form of government and suitable to their own countries? How firm and deep is their support for it? How much support do the real-life democratic political institutions enjoy? How support for democracy is related to satisfaction, political participation, satisfaction with democracy and economic well-being? What factors favour and what factors impede support for democracy? There have been studies and writings on the nature and condition of democracy in the countries of the region, covering its failures and successes as well as its limitations and potentialities. Most of these studies, however, are country-specific, based on qualitative or official data or assessments bases on the perceptions of experts in different fields.

This paper addresses these questions by analyzing the empirical data from the cross sectional sample survey of adult citizens on the status of democracy in South Asia covering five major countries of the region – Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.ⁱ The survey was the first of its kind in the region and provides a snapshot of the condition of democracy as understood from the perceptions

of the people. Information was gathered with the help of structured schedules in face-to-face interviews with about 18,270 sampled respondents, selected using rigorous random sampling methodology. The field survey was carried out during August 2004-February 2005.

However, certain caveats apply in using the SDSA data. Firstly, two of the countries at the time of the survey were under non-democratic regimes (Pakistan and Nepal). This might have posed some difficulty for respondents in these countries in relating themselves to some questions, such as 'how satisfied are you with the functioning of democracy in your country?' Secondly, in Sri Lanka, the Northern and Eastern provinces could not be included in the sampling frame due to acute ethnic conflict. Thirdly, the sizes of the countries vary so greatly that pooling the data poses a difficulty and it is sought to be overcome at times by assigning equal weights to all the countries. Fourthly, interviews were conducted in the language of the respondent (altogether in 27 languages were used). It is possible that a few English concepts and terms do not have equivalents in the South Asian languages. Whether the terms actually used in different national/regional languages in these countries carried the same import and effect on all the respondents is debatable. Fifthly, considerable number of respondents could not understand or could not give any response for several key questions (for instance 47 per cent of the respondents could not give any reply to the question on the meaning of democracy). Lastly, this survey provides a snapshot of the condition of democracy; it does not indicate changes, which a barometer is usually about. Since this survey was first of its kind in the region it is not possible to comment on the changes in the condition of democracy or the changes in the level of support for democracy in the region as we do not have any regional level empirical knowledge of the situation in these countries in the earlier times.

II. The Meaning of Democracy:

Over the past 50 years or so, democracy in South Asia, as elsewhere, has become a universal idea and a constitutionally mandated design for political order. But like all ideas, the generic idea of democracy is associated with different meanings and images in the people's mind and expressed through a wide variety of languages in the region. These different meanings and images arise due to the variation in the historical experience that the people of the region have accumulated, the socio-economic environment in which they live, and the necessity as perceived by the citizens. The idea of democracy itself is subject to alteration and modification due to the interplay of these multiple meanings and images and their articulations as well as the flux these countries have been undergoing. Any barometric survey, while recognizing the need to adhere to certain universal norms and standards to measure or assess the particular reality, cannot be oblivious to the conditions and environment in

which the particular exists. After all, the universal is made up of the common features that particular objects possess.

To ascertain how South Asians understand the meaning of democracy an open-ended question was posed to the respondents in the cross-section survey. The question was: “According to you, what is democracy?” The field investigators were advised to enter verbatim the response in the language in which the interview takes place and in whatever way it was articulated. About half of the respondents could not understand the word democracy or could not express a meaning or did not articulate, if they have one. The proportion of those who could articulate any meaning is much lower in Pakistan. It is not difficult to understand this situation because most of these respondents who could not respond have little or no education or are least concerned with the form of government in their country, or they have no knowledge of this word, or could not depict the vague images they have about this word or shied away from saying what their image of democracy is.ⁱⁱ

Among those who gave a response, there is wide variation in the way they understood the meaning of democracy. Initially all the responses, retranslated into English, were grouped under about 100 broad categories going by the proximity of these responses to the more standardized vocabulary of democratic politics. After a thorough discussion on the comprehensive lists of responses the experts have decided to group all the responses once again under six broad categories, namely popular rule, periodical elections, freedom, rule of law, justice and welfare, and peace and security. Responses associating democracy with features that speak ill of democracy or ill-effects of democracy are grouped under negative responses. Some responses could not be categorized under any broad heading and hence grouped under ‘others’.ⁱⁱⁱ

Freedom, popular rule and welfare are the most commonly associated meanings of democracy in the minds of the citizens of the region. In their emphasis on freedom and popular rule, South Asians do not vastly differ from people of other regions. However, the proportions of respondents associating democracy with freedom and popular rule go up with the economic class and educational levels of the respondents. When it comes to welfare, we do not find significant difference among various categories of the respondents. Nearly one in every three persons, regardless of differences in class and educational statuses, associates democracy with some kind of substantial outcome in terms of equality and welfare. Elections and security related themes also occupy a prominent place in imagining the meaning of democracy. Only 5 per cent of the respondents entertain negative associations with democracy. That means nine out of every ten associated democracy with one or the other meanings which we consider positive (Table 1).

Many of those who could not give any reply to the open-ended question on the meaning of democracy could choose one from the answer categories provided for the questions on the essential

element of democracy, and most liked and most disliked aspects of democracy. Emphasis on welfare becomes more pronounced in responses to the question on the most essential element of democracy. For about 30 per cent of the respondents, provision of basic necessities for everyone is the most essential element of democracy (Table 2). The proportion of such responses is more than one-third in Bangladesh, India and Nepal. About 28 per cent chose equal right to all; but more people in Sri Lanka seem to attach greater importance to this element where their proportion goes up to 40 per cent. When asked about the most liked aspect of democracy, a large number chose freedom of expression and dignity for the weak from the structured response categories (Table 3). More than one-third of the respondents felt that corruption increases in democracy and that is the most disliked aspect of democracy (Table 4).

III. General support for democracy as an idea and form of government

We have seen how democracy has different meanings and connotations in the minds of the people. Similarly, democracy as an idea and institution enjoys different levels of support among the people of South Asia. The survey shows that support for democracy is widespread among the people of the region. For 42 per cent of the respondents, democracy is preferable to any other form of government (Table 5). Only 7 per cent preferred dictatorship. About half of the respondents in India and Sri Lanka preferred democracy. However, the proportion of such respondents is low in Pakistan. A large proportion of the respondents are indifferent to the form of government; whether it is democracy or dictatorship made no difference for them. Half of the respondents in Pakistan were in this group. About one-third of the respondents (32 per cent) did not have any thing to say on this crucial question. Either they could not understand the question, or could not give any response. Most of these persons who have 'no opinion' are those who have no knowledge of the word democracy or could not articulate a meaning, as mentioned in the previous section.

A greater proportion agreed to the statement that the country should be governed by leaders elected by people in a fair election. Thus, more than three-fourths have endorsed electoral democracy (Table 6). More significant is the response on the suitability of democracy to their country: about two-thirds of the respondents think that democracy is suitable or very suitable to their country (Table 7). Again, in Pakistan only 47 per cent felt that democracy is suitable. However, uncertainty regarding suitability of democracy arises due to no clear response to this question. Nearly one-third of the persons interviewed in the region, many more in Pakistan and Bangladesh, did not offer any response to this question. A comparison of these findings with responses to these questions from other regions shows that support for democracy in South Asia is not very different from what it is elsewhere, unless we see 'no response' as a sign of ambivalence.

The discussion so far makes it clear that democracy has become a preferred idea for most South Asians, they want a government by elected representatives, and they think that democracy is suitable to their country. The extent of support democracy enjoys as an idea and a practical political order is significant if we keep in mind the difficult circumstances in which some of these countries are situated, especially when the survey was carried out: Pakistan was under military rule, Nepal was under monarchy, and Sri Lanka was reeling under endemic ethnic conflict. But how firm and deep is this widespread general support for democracy? We ask this question because we found that in several cases approval of democracy or democratic government does not necessarily lead to the disapproval of authoritarian alternatives.

IV. Effective support for democracy

The strength or depth of support for democracy is gauged by funneling the respondents according to their responses to the democratic of government as well as to its real life alternative governments, such as rule by army, rule by a king, and approval for a strong leader without democratic restraints. As can be seen from the responses of several persons, support for democracy and non-democracy co-exists in the realm of ideas. What appears to the researchers and academics to be a contradiction or confusion in the mind of the persons who gave such responses need not be a contradiction or confusion for the respondents who entertain such ideas about the complex reality around them. It is possible that when these suggestions are read out to them in a battery one after the other, the respondents might have partially considered each of them by temporarily excluding the others or these different forms of government are not distinguished by juxtaposing them in a set so as to reject some and accept some. It is also possible that they distinguish various forms of government but also apprehend the common components and features of democratic and non-democratic form of government in such a way that the contrariety posited between them by the researchers is overlooked.

In analyzing the data an attempt is made to identify the supporters of democracy and authoritarianism by their consistency in approving or disapproving the democratic and authoritarian forms of government. With a view to identify the strong democrats among the respondents, we have excluded at the first stage all those who have disagreed or strongly disagreed with the suggestion that the country should be governed by elected leaders. From among them, those who entertain the idea of dictatorship or are indifferent to the choice between democracy and dictatorship are excluded at the second stage. At this stage, more than half of the respondents from Pakistan dropped out as compared to one-quarter to one-third for other countries. The fragility of support for democracy became evident as we excluded at the next two stages all those who endorsed the suggestions that the country should be governed by military or a king. Four out of every ten respondents dropped out at

these stages, but they are more in Pakistan and Bangladesh. The extent of support for military rule in Pakistan and Bangladesh is one of the highest recorded in any part of the world. Even in other countries, though who opposed military rule outnumber its supporters, the extent of support for military rule is considerable (Table 8).

Here one might say that in countries with no knowledge of military rule, approval of military rule need not be a well-considered one construed as a desire to replace an elected government with that of the military. This response could be interpreted as support for the institution of the military, for its commitment and for being a symbol of national pride. But what causes concern is the fact that about 60 per cent of respondents in Pakistan and Bangladesh are willing to accept military rule, the two countries which had a record of military rule, where people have successfully struggled against military rule and where the military continues to exercise direct or indirect influence over the functioning of the governments.

Support for monarchy is relatively less in the region, except in Nepal which was under monarchy at the time of the survey. Following the popular upsurge that led to the restoration of Parliament in 2006 and the Constitutional Assembly elections in 2008, support for monarchy in that country might have gone down.

The first four stages involving overt support for democracy and rejection of authoritarian alternatives led to a considerable narrowing of the funnel. India and Sri Lanka, the two long-standing democracies in the region, are some what an exception to this. In these two countries, close to half of the respondents pass through the four filters. But all of them do not pass the remaining stages. Introduction of the fifth filter, approval of the 'rule by a strong leader who does not have to bother about elections', results in a significant attrition of support for a democratic government in the region. Only in India, those who disapprove of such a rule outnumber those who approve it. In the last stage those who agreed with the statement that the country should be ruled by experts rather than politicians are excluded. This final check further reduced the support for democratic government to a single digit in all the countries, except India (Table 9). We can confidently say that this is the unwavering or core support that democracy enjoys in South Asia.

Reasons for this narrow base of core support for democracy could be many. Lack of education, lack of experience with democracy or experience with non-democratic governments, prevalence of non-democratic social institutions and relations, low levels of economic development of the nations, or perceived shortcomings and failings of political parties and party leaders to effectively grapple with the issues and challenges these countries face could be some reasons. However, this narrow base, especially in some countries with intermittent non-democratic governments, probably gives scope for those who get tempted or attempt subversion of democratic governments and democratic

institutions and usurp power. The danger lurks heavily when disquiet is heightened with the way elected representatives and political leaders mismanage the national affairs. This also hampers the ability of nations to find solutions to problems through democratic political means, which are often perceived to be a muddling through process and more cumbersome.

The last two conditions to estimate support for democracy are rather stiff for any democracy in the world. Yearning for a strong leader and a preference for experts over politicians are universal themes in contemporary public opinion. Preference in South Asia for strong leaders unrestrained by democratic checks and balances could be due to the long tradition of strong leaders like Indira Gandhi, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and Sheik Mujib-ur Rahman at the helm, who exercised untrammelled power and mass popularity. It could be due to a perception that the country needs a strong leader to bail it out of the problems it is facing or to effectively implement policies or to withstand the pressures and counter pressures of powerful social and economic interests. They might be also seeing such a strong leader as an antidote to the political strife and divisions rife in the polity. Similarly, it is also possible that some respondents approved rule by experts by understanding it as a rule by those who have expertise in managing the affairs of the government. So, support for strong leaders and expert rule need not always reflect a non-democratic orientation. It could be due to a desire for effective and wise rulers within a democratic political framework. On this line of reasoning we can stop at stage four and whatever support for democracy remaining at this stage can be considered as effective support for democratic form of government.

V. Democrats and Non-democrats

So, another way to measure effective support for democracy is to relax a few conditions mentioned in the democracy funnel in identifying the supporters of democracy, supporters of authoritarian forms of government, and a third category of those who are not and those who are neither in the sphere of democracy nor in the sphere of authoritarianism. This third category would include those who take contradictory positions, who are ambivalent in their views and fluid in their support for democracy and authoritarianism. Probably, the attitudes of persons included in the third category can be located at different points of a continuum between supporters of democracy and supporters of authoritarian forms of government.

In this analysis a person is considered a strong democrat if he/she (a) supports rule by elected representatives, and (b) prefers it to any other form of government, and (c) is opposed to the rule by military or a king. Thus strong democrats are consistent in their support of democracy and rejecting authoritarian forms of government. In contrast to this category, non-democrats are those who are consistent in their preference for an authoritarian form of government. They are those who (a) prefer

dictatorship or are indifferent to democracy and dictatorship, and (b) disapprove rule by elected representatives, and (c) support either army rule or monarchy. The rest are treated as weak democrats. They are democrats because they support at least one of the key attributes of a democratic government. But their support is weak because (a) they do not reject the non-democratic governments (nearly half in this third category), or (b) support both democracy and its alternatives or support neither (one-third of respondents), or (c) support non-democracy options without quite negating the democracy options (the remainder). The weak democrats are the vacillating ones, who can move in either direction depending on the situation, sometimes leaning towards democracy and on other times towards non-democracy. Because they do not strictly belong to the two spheres of democracy and authoritarianism, they have the potential of becoming allies with any of the first two categories of people.

The distribution of respondents classified in this way for each country as well as the region is given Table 10. A little over a quarter of the respondents come in the category of strong democrats. They outnumber non-democrats. However, the situation varies across countries. Compared to the regional average, their proportion is higher in India and Sri Lanka, and substantially lower in Pakistan. A little less than a quarter of the respondents fall under the category of non-democrats. Here again the situation is relatively better in India and Sri Lanka with a lower proportion of non-democrats. The proportion of non-democrats in Pakistan is twice as high as in the rest of the region.

The effective support for democracy in the region and in various countries can be made further clear by comparing the proportions of strong democrats and non-democrats. Thus, Support for Democracy Ratio (SDR) is calculated as a ratio of strong democrats to non-democrats. SDR of 1.0 would indicate a condition of equipoise between these opposite categories. A higher SDR indicates greater support for democracy. Thus, an SDR of 1.17 for the region indicates that over all strong democrats outnumber non-democrats. An SDR of 2.67 for India and 2.48 for Sri Lanka indicates the robustness of democratic sentiment in these countries. It appears that a precarious balance between democrats and non-democrats prevails in Bangladesh and Nepal. With a low SDR of 0.24, the situation in Pakistan does not appear to be favourable for democracy. However, the number of strong and weak democrats in Pakistan put together outnumbers non-democrats. But as we mentioned earlier, the weak democrats can swing in either direction. Probably, this condition is one contributing factor in the see-saw movement of democracy and authoritarianism in Pakistan.

VI. Mapping support for democracy: What factors matter?

Besides the variation in the support for democracy across the countries in the region, we also notice that the levels and the depth of support for democracy vary across social sections within each

country. Who are the supporters for democracy and who are the supporters of authoritarianism? What factors contribute to shape such attitudes?

A cursory examination of the distribution of strong and non-democrats according to gender, location, education, economic class, social strata and media exposure shows that all these attributes matter in determining the proportions of the three categories of the respondents (Table 10). More of those who are relatively high on education, income and media exposure tend to be strong democrats than those who are low on these indicators. Urbanity is also a factor, as we see a greater proportion of urban dwellers in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan supporting democracy as compared to rural people. But we do not find such a pattern in Nepal and India. More men support democracy than women, particularly in Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan. Elites are more supportive of democracy than the mass publics^{iv}.

Formal education is the strongest factor that determines the firmness of support for democracy: the higher the educational attainment of a respondent the greater the support for democracy. In this respect, completing school with matriculation degree or its equivalent is a crucial stage that leads to a leap in support for democracy. Someone with a graduate degree is seven times more likely to support democracy than a non-literate person. This relationship holds with varying degrees of strength in all the five countries of the region. The relation is strongest in Nepal, the country with the lowest literacy rate in the region. The effect of education is reinforced by exposure to media: the higher the exposure the greater the support for democracy.

In their support for democracy, there is no difference between urban and rural residents with equal education, as educated villagers support democracy as much as the equally educated urban people. Likewise, the relationship between economic class and support for democracy for respondents with equal education is weak. The relationship disappears if we look only at those who have completed schooling. Gender matters much less than it initially appeared to: men and women with equal education and media exposure tend to support democratic government in equal measure. Thus, once the effect of formal education and media exposure is taken into account, other factors become less important in influencing the attitudes towards democracy and authoritarianism.

While formal education explains a good deal of the difference in the level of support for democracy in the region as a whole, it does not quite explain the difference among the social groups in different countries. For instance, it does not explain why a non-literate person in India is twice as likely to support democracy as a graduate in Pakistan. For this we need to turn our attention to another factor, namely the learning one receives about democracy through living in a democracy.

The overall ratio of support for democracy in these five countries roughly follows the span of their experience with democratic regimes: India and Sri Lanka at the top, followed by Bangladesh and then

Nepal and Pakistan. This line of reasoning is confirmed by an analysis of the relation between the extent of one's adult life that one has spent under a democratic regime and support for democracy. For those who have never or briefly experienced democracy, the SDR is 0.27. The ratio steadily goes up with an increase in the proportion of adult life spent under democracy and turns favourable (more democrats than non-democrats) at about the 75 percent mark. For those who have never lived under non-democratic regime, the SDR is 2.39. This explanation that democracy is conducive to support for democracy may sound tautological, but this seems to be true. What appears to be the difference between countries and social groups in their support for democracy can be partly explained by the difference in exposure to democracy, i.e. the political learning democracy provides.

The lowest support for democracy (SDR of 0.1) is seen among non-literate people who have never or rarely experienced democracy. The level of support for the same extent of exposure goes up four times among those who have completed matriculation. It goes up 11 times for those who have always lived under democracy but are non-literate. The highest level of support for democracy (SDR of 3.81) is seen among those who have completed school education and have always lived in a democracy. The data also show that elites are much more supportive of democracy than the mass publics: 47 per cent of the elites are strong democrats compared to 25 per cent among the mass publics. The strong democrats among the elites outnumber non-democrats by more than two times (SDR of 2.61). The data do not support the view that the level of support for democracy in these countries is inversely related to social status and wealth, where poor support democracy more than the elites, who are disillusioned with democracy. At the same time, the data also do not support the counter proposition that masses do not support democracy because they do not have stakes as the state apparatus and benefits that accrue from state had been captured by the elites.

We also find some other factors contributing to greater or lesser support for democracy in the region. Support for democracy is higher among those who participate more in political activity. Political participation is measured by taking summated mean scores, on 1 to 100 scale, for activities such as participation in voting, election campaigns and the activities of political parties and trade unions (Table 11). We also find a positive association between satisfaction with the working of democracy in a country and support for democracy. The relation is weaker in Nepal and does not exist in Pakistan (Table 11). Probably, the respondents in these two countries found it difficult to relate themselves with this question on 'how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in our country' because of their limited experience with democratic government, and also because of the fact that they were under non-democratic regimes at the time of the survey. Support for democracy is positively associated with the feeling of political efficacy. Those who believed that their vote makes an effect on how things are run in a country are more likely to be democrats than those who believe that their vote makes no difference.

What extent does support for democracy depends on citizens' evaluation of economic well-being? Taking the region as a whole, there does not seem to any significant association between the two, as the proportions of democrats and non-democrats among those who are satisfied or dissatisfied with one's own household economic condition do not greatly differ (Table 11). We find a similar distribution among those who are satisfied with their country's economic condition. But when we look at the figures for different countries separately we do not find any pattern. In India, citizens' favourable evaluation of economic conditions is positively associated with support for democracy. In Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan we do find a positive association between satisfaction with household economic condition and support for democracy, but it is weak. We do not find such an association in Sri Lanka. In fact, more non-democrats expressed satisfaction with the household and country's economic condition. However, we do find a pattern in the relationship between expectations about economic conditions in future and support for democracy: those who are optimistic that their household and national economic condition is going to improve tend to support democracy more than the non-democrats (Table 11).

VII. Support for political institutions

Although a large proportion of citizens of South Asia approve the idea of democracy and endorse its suitability to their respective countries, the same cannot be said when it comes to their support for actual political institutions that are vital for the working of democracy. Questions were asked with a five-point grid about how much trust the citizens have in 11 major formal and informal political institutions. The trust index,^v which takes into account the level of trust in each of the political institutions, shows that over all these institutions enjoy the confidence of a majority of the population. It is high in Bangladesh and low in Pakistan (Table 12), and other countries fall in between. Once again, education and media exposure, the two factors that we talked about earlier, appear to be crucial in explaining the variation in the levels of trust exhibited by different social sections: the more the education and media exposure the greater the trust in political institutions. It goes against the general belief that distrust of democratic institutions grows with education, which makes them critical towards the functioning of actual democracies.

If we examine the trust enjoyed by different institutions, army enjoys a very high level of trust. As mentioned earlier, this could be because the army stands as a symbol of national pride and strength, it is seen as more professional and disciplined and also it is far removed from the public gaze. Generally, institutions which have a strong interface with the public seem to score lower on trust than those which are more remote.

Political parties enjoy very low trust. Such a condition exists despite the fact that party-people linkages are strong in the region. The Survey shows that nearly every seventh adult citizen is a party member. About 40 per cent of people feel close to one political party or the other. A contradictory situation of high affiliation with parties and low trust in them seem to coexist. The low level of trust in parties could be due to the perception of the people that parties have degenerated over time or that party leaders are more interested in maximizing their personal power and wealth than serving the public interest. It could be also due to the citizens' perceptions about the inability of the political leaders to deliver on their poll promises or insincerity in implementing pro-people policies.

It is more surprising to see that Parliaments also command low level of trust, although it is a shade higher than the political parties. It could be due to the perception that Parliaments have become forums for fighting among law-makers to maximize their personal interests or settle personal scores, rather than deliberating and enacting laws for the country. This could also be due to the political process in which the representative and legislative institutions were undermined and the political executive has usurped much of the powers of policy making. The low levels of support for political parties and the legislatures, the two vital pillars of democracy do not augur well for the consolidation of democracy in the region.

VIII. Conclusion

For people of South Asia, freedom, popular rule and welfare are among the most commonly associated meanings of democracy. Similarly, a large number of them associate the concept with some kind of substantial outcome in terms of welfare and fulfillment of the basic necessities of life. They see this as an essential element of democracy. They are unhappy with democracy because they see certain negative features in it too, and corruption is top on their mind when they think of negative features.

Democracy has become an object of desire for an overwhelming majority of South Asians – they prefer democracy as an ideal, prefer electoral democracy, and think that it is suitable for their countries. Thus, support for democracy is widespread. But the support is not very deep and unwavering, as many of them are ambivalent towards authoritarian governments, or support both the democratic and non-democratic forms of governments. Those who are consistent in their support for non-democratic form of governments are also in considerable number, especially in Pakistan and Bangladesh. The non-democratic dispositions are evident among large proportions of citizens in their approval of army rule and rule by strong leader who does not need to bother about elections. The threat of authoritarianism very much stalks the countries of the region. However, one reassuring

feature of the condition of democracy in the region is that the democrats outnumber the non-democrats, as evident from the SDR. In Pakistan, the strong and weak democrats put together outnumber the non-democrats.

Education, media exposure and experience with democracy accounts for much of the difference in support for democracy across social groups. These three factors appear to contribute not only in apprehending what democracy is about or the articulation of its meaning, but also increases commitment to the democratic norm as persons with these attributes tend to be firm in their support for democracy and rejection of authoritarian alternatives. From the analysis made in this paper, we can expect that with increase in formal education, media exposure and experience with democracy in the countries of the region the current levels of support for democracy are likely to increase.

The analysis attenuates the belief that the elites and the masses in these countries inhabit different worlds of cognition and disposition towards democracy. It is not true that elites do not support democracy, while masses want it. Actually, there is more support for democracy among the elites than the masses, but this disparity is mostly explained more by education than anything else. This situation augurs well for the survival and consolidation of democracy in the region because an ambivalent, divided and indifferent elite towards democracy would impede, if not undermine and defeat, democratic development as well as development of democracy.

We do not find any significant relation between support for democracy and citizens' evaluations of individual household or the nation's economic well-being. However, satisfaction with the way democracy works in a country has a positive association with the support for democracy. That would mean that citizens' satisfaction with the working of democracy is based upon multiple factors such as freedom, dignity, and provision of welfare benefits. Corruption is the major worry for the largest number of citizens. Therefore, we can surmise that one of the challenges the countries of the region face is to bring out reforms so as to provide a cleaner government that can deliver on the promise of democracy.

Politics continue to be a vibrant force shaping contemporary South Asia. Unlike in the western democracies, citizens' participation in political activity, including membership or affiliation with political parties, is high, and this political participation is positively associated with support for democratic governments. However, a high level of political participation does not seem to translate into greater legitimacy of political institutions that are vital for democracy such as political parties and legislatures. This is another challenge that the leaders of parties and the governments must address in the region, so as to make support for democracy more stable and robust.

Tables

Table 1: Meaning of Democracy

Meaning	South Asia	BGD	IND	NPL	PAK	SLK
Popular rule	23	21	36	17	34	14
Elections	12	20	22	10	0	4
Rule of law	2	3	4	2	4	1
Freedom	40	27	22	52	41	54
Justice and welfare	29	23	50	25	15	28
Peace and security	11	12	8	8	5	18
Negative meanings	5	2	8	9	8	1
Others	13	26	11	14	4	10
N	8671	1256	2372	1506	954	2563

Note: All figures are in percentages. Acronyms: BGD – Bangladesh; IND – India; NPL – Nepal; PAK – Pakistan; and SLK – Sri Lanka.

Table 2: Most essential element of democracy (Percentage of respondents)

Essential element	South Asia	BGD	IND	NPL	PAK	SLK
Opportunity to change government	14	11	20	9	11	19
Freedom to criticize	5	3	4	4	6	6
Equal rights	28	27	20	21	33	40
Basic necessities to all	30	44	37	35	19	17
No opinion	2.3	15	19	31	31	18

Note: All figures are in percentages.

Table 3: Most liked aspect of democracy

Liked aspect	South Asia	BGD	IND	NPL	PAK	SLK
Every one is free to speak and act	38	26	39	41	31	54
People have control over rulers	8	6	12	4	7	13
Weak are treated with dignity	25	54	27	11	26	7
Interests of minorities are protected	6	3	7	4	5	12
Others	7	11	13	1	11	1
No opinion	16	0	2	39	20	13

Note: Note: All figures are in percentages. 0 means the percentage of respondents is nil or negligible.

Table 4: Most disliked aspect of democracy

Disliked aspect	South Asia	BGD	IND	NPL	PAK	SLK
Too many parties divide people	14	8	19	14	14	18
Rulers keep changing	10	13	9	6	14	10
Corruption increases	35	29	43	36	22	49
Those who have more dominate others	16	23	13	8	20	12
Any other	10	27	13	1	10	0
No opinion	15	0	3	35	20	11

Note: All figures are in percentages. 0 means the percentage of respondents is nil or negligible.

Table 5: Preference for democracy/dictatorship

Preference	South Asia	BGD	IND	NPL	PAK	SLK
Democracy preferable	42	41	49	42	24	53
Dictatorship preferable	7	4	6	6	9	9
Makes no difference	19	15	14	19	32	13
No opinion	32	40	30	33	35	25
N	18275	2504	5204	3249	2681	4632

Note: All figures are in percentages.

Table 6: Those who want a government by elected representatives

<i>Agreement/ Disagreement</i>	South Asia	BGD	IND	NPL	PAK	SLK
Strongly agree	48	56	52	48	35	43
Agree	29	25	26	22	28	45
Agree	77	81	78	70	63	88
Disagree	4	2	3	3	8	2
Strongly disagree	2	1	1	2	5	1
Disagree	6	3	4	5	13	3
No opinion	17	16	18	25	23	9

Note: All figures are in percentages.

Table 7: Suitability of democracy

<i>Suitability</i>	South Asia	BGD	IND	NPL	PAK	SLK
Very suitable	21	20	19	11	26	26
Suitable	40	39	50	44	21	47
Suitable	61	59	69	55	47	73
Not suitable	5	3	4	12	4	5
Not at all suitable	2	1	1	3	5	1
Not suitable	7	4	5	15	9	6
No opinion	32	37	26	30	44	21

Note: All figures are in percentages.

Table 8: Support for army rule (Percentage of positive responses)

Region/ Country	% of support
South Asia	42
BGD	59
IND	23
NPL	35
PAK	60
SLK	27

Note: All figures are in percentages.

Table 9: The funnel of democracy in South Asia

Stages excluding those who	South Asia	BGD	IND	NPL	PAK	SLK
1. Disagree with a government by elected leaders	93	97	95	95	83	97
2. Prefer dictatorship or indifferent	67	78	73	68	45	74
3. Approve military rule	45	35	59	52	19	57
4. Approve monarchy	36	27	56	34	13	48
5. Approve strong leader without constraints	17	14	40	9	10	17
6. Approve rule by experts	9	8	19	6	7	8

Note: All figures are in percentages. Percentages calculated from merged dataset with equal weights for each country.

Table 10: Support for democracy by gender, locality, education, social strata, economic class and media exposure

SOUTH ASIA		Strong democrats	Weak democrats	Non-democrats	SDR	N
Gender	Female	20	57	23	0.87	7194
	Male	32	47	21	1.52	7889
Locality	Rural	25	54	21	1.19	11344
	Urban	30	45	25	1.20	3739
Education	Non-literate	10	61	29	0.34	4364
	Primary	22	56	22	1.00	1974
	Middle	31	51	18	1.72	5276
	Secondary	39	40	21	1.86	2637
	Graduate+	49	31	20	2.45	832
Social strata	Mass	25	52	23	1.07	14315
	Elite	47	35	18	2.61	767
Economic Class	Lowest	18	57	25	0.72	2646
	Lower	22	56	22	1.00	2603
	Middle	25	52	23	1.09	3164
	Upper	30	49	21	1.43	2663
	Highest	35	44	21	1.67	2187
Media exposure	None	10	63	27	0.37	2524
	Low	17	58	25	0.68	4190
	Medium	32	48	20	1.60	4438
	High	40	40	20	2.00	3825
South Asia aggregate		26	52	22	1.17	15083
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BANGLADESH		Strong democrats	Weak democrats	Non-democrats	SDR	N
Gender	Female	12	67	21	0.57	951
	Male	26	58	16	1.63	1063
Locality	Rural	15	64	21	0.71	1659
	Urban	36	52	12	3.00	355
Education	Non-literate	6	69	25	0.24	788
	Primary	11	65	24	0.46	286
	Middle	22	67	11	2.00	606
	Secondary	49	40	11	4.45	220
	Graduate+	55	29	16	3.44	114
Social strata	Mass	17	64	19	0.90	1919
	Elite	53	33	14	3.79	95
Economic Class	Lowest	14	69	17	0.82	412
	Lower	12	64	24	0.50	413
	Middle	14	67	19	0.74	470
	Upper	25	58	17	1.47	365
	Highest	35	49	16	2.19	346
Media exposure	None	5	72	23	0.22	539
	Low	15	63	22	0.68	800
	Medium	32	58	10	3.20	390
	High	40	46	14	2.86	281
Bangladesh aggregate		19	62	19	1.03	2014
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INDIA		Strong democrats	Weak democrats	Non-democrats	SDR	N
Gender	Female	36	49	15	2.40	1862

	Male	46	37	17	2.71	2470
Locality	Rural	40	46	14	2.86	3139
	Urban	47	34	19	2.47	1193
Education	Non-literate	26	56	18	1.44	1307
	Primary	41	44	15	2.73	463
	Middle	44	40	16	2.75	1299
	Secondary	53	33	14	3.79	853
	Graduate+	62	24	14	4.43	412
Social strata	Mass	40	44	16	2.50	4019
	Elite	63	23	14	4.50	313
Economic Class	Lowest	32	49	20	1.60	1159
	Lower	39	48	13	3.00	1151
	Middle	47	36	17	2.76	837
	Upper	54	31	15	3.60	845
	Highest	43	44	13	3.31	339
Media exposure	None	23	60	17	1.35	1055
	Low	33	50	17	1.94	946
	Medium	50	37	13	3.85	1160
	High	60	26	14	4.29	1153
India aggregate		41	42	17	2.71	4332

NEPAL		Strong democrats	Weak democrats	Non-democrats	SDR	N
Gender	Female	12	61	27	0.44	1250
	Male	31	48	21	1.48	1306
Locality	Rural	22	55	23	0.96	2003
	Urban	22	52	26	0.85	553
Education	Non-literate	9	64	27	0.33	946
	Primary	20	54	26	0.77	568
	Middle	30	49	21	1.43	592
	Secondary	40	41	19	2.11	390
	Graduate+	55	33	12	4.58	60
Social strata	Mass	21	55	24	0.88	2433
	Elite	38	46	16	2.38	123
Economic Class	Lowest	15	58	27	0.56	507
	Lower	19	57	24	0.79	296
	Middle	20	54	26	0.77	582
	Upper	22	53	25	0.88	488
	Highest	31	47	22	1.41	457
Media exposure	None	9	68	23	0.39	330
	Low	14	58	28	0.50	899
	Medium	32	48	20	1.60	858
	High	30	43	27	1.11	406
Nepal aggregate		22	54	24	0.92	2556

PAKISTAN		Strong democrats	Weak democrats	Non-democrats	SDR	N
Gender	Female	5	54	41	0.12	971
	Male	14	44	42	0.33	1123
Locality	Rural	8	50	42	0.19	1153
	Urban	13	47	40	0.33	941
Education	Non-literate	4	53	43	0.09	854
	Primary	13	50	37	0.35	38

	Middle	9	48	43	0.21	530
	Secondary	16	45	39	0.41	526
	Graduate+	25	42	33	0.76	146
Social strata	Mass	9	49	42	0.21	2021
	Elite	25	42	33	0.76	73
Economic Class	Lowest	5	46	49	0.10	388
	Lower	8	56	36	0.22	354
	Middle	10	47	43	0.23	460
	Upper	11	52	37	0.30	331
	Highest	18	45	37	0.49	337
Media exposure	None	2	51	47	0.04	458
	Low	8	56	36	0.22	684
	Medium	12	46	42	0.29	610
	High	21	37	42	0.50	342
Pakistan aggregate		10	49	41	0.24	2094

SRI LANKA		Strong democrats	Weak democrats	Non-democrats	SDR	N
Gender	Female	33	52	15	2.20	2116
	Male	38	48	14	2.71	2024
Locality	Rural	33	52	15	2.20	3550
	Urban	47	38	14	3.36	591
Education	Non-literate	17	73	10	1.70	126
	Primary	22	62	16	1.38	670
	Middle	36	50	14	2.57	2576
	Secondary	48	39	14	3.43	642
	Graduate+	54	29	17	3.18	127
Social strata	Mass	35	51	14	2.50	3946
	Elite	48	33	19	2.53	194
Economic Class	Lowest	27	59	16	1.69	578
	Lower	27	57	16	1.69	584
	Middle	34	51	15	2.27	550
	Upper	39	47	14	2.79	648
	Highest	46	38	16	2.88	375
Media exposure	None	23	71	6	3.83	75
	Low	19	68	13	1.46	491
	Medium	34	50	16	2.13	1510
	High	40	45	14	2.86	2060
Sri Lanka aggregate		35	50	15	2.52	4140

Note: Computation of the index for support for democracy followed a funnel method by taking into consideration responses to four questions. Three of them are: Q29b – The country should be governed by the army; Q29c – The country should be governed by a king; and Q29d – The country should be governed by those chosen by people in fair election. Responses to these questions are measured on a four-point scale, ranging from “Strongly agree” to “Strongly disagree”. The fourth variable is a question eliciting agreement with one of the three statements provided: (1) Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government; (2) In certain situations, a dictatorial government is preferable to a democratic one; and (3) It does not matter to people like me whether we have democratic or non-democratic government. Strong democrats are one who opted for (1) in Question 41, and those who strongly disagreed or disagreed to Q29b and Q29c and those who strongly agreed to Q29d. Non-democrats are the ones who opted for (2) in Q41, strongly agreed or agreed with statements Q29b and Q29c, and strongly disagreed or disagreed with Q29d. The rest are counted as non-democrats, who include a large number of who have no opinion on these questions. Figures in the table for three categories are in percentages.

Table 11: SDR for participation, satisfaction with democracy, efficacy, and economic well-being

	South Asia	BGD	IND	NPL	PAK	SLK
Mean score for political participation						
Democrats	46	58	43	47	41	45
Non-democrats	36	49	38	32	30	43
SDR	1.28	1.18	1.18	1.47	1.37	1.05
Satisfaction with the working of democracy						
Democrats	65	75	76	37	38	51
Non-democrats	61	56	60	32	44	47
SDR	1.07	1.34	1.27	1.16	0.86	1.09
Efficacy: Vote makes a difference						
Democrats	80	80	83	94	66	75
Non-democrats	66	66	66	83	56	67
SDR	1.21	1.21	1.26	1.13	1.18	1.12
Satisfied with personal economic condition						
Democrats	53	56	61	64	70	36
Non-democrats	55	52	49	61	62	38
SDR	0.96	1.08	1.25	1.05	1.13	0.95
Satisfied with country's economic condition						
Democrats	35	38	56	25	44	17
Non-democrats	37	43	37	29	45	22
SDR	0.95	0.88	1.51	0.86	0.98	0.77
Personal economic condition will improve						
Democrats	55	55	69	60	60	40
Non-democrats	50	50	57	45	55	38
SDR	1.10	1.10	1.21	1.33	1.09	1.05
Country's economic condition will improve						
Democrats	45	44	68	35	47	31
Non-democrats	37	44	54	21	39	37
SDR	1.22	1.00	1.26	1.67	1.21	0.84

Table 12: Support for political institutions

Political institution	South Asia	BGD	IND	NPL	PAK	SLK
National government	56	81	62	48	31	58
Provincial government	36	--	60	--	33	50
Local government	58	76	64	64	33	52
Parliament	42	64	43	41	19	38
Civil Service	51	61	47	48	31	58
Police	47	59	42	57	19	52
Army	72	87	74	62	64	72
Courts	60	75	58	60	33	70
Election Commission	49	52	51	54	21	63
Political Parties	38	57	36	41	24	32
Trust index	60	71	64	60	44	56

Note: Bangladesh and Nepal do not have a provincial government. Figures against each institution represent the percentage of citizens who have 'great deal' or 'some' trust in that institution.

Survey questions

1. Meaning of democracy

Democracy is understood differently by different people. According to you what is democracy?

People often differ in their views on the characteristic that is essential to democracy. If you have to choose only one of the things that I am going to read, which one would you choose as the most essential element of democracy?

1. Opportunity to change government through elections
2. Freedom to criticize those in power
3. Equal rights to everyone
4. Basic necessities like food, clothes and shelter, etc for everyone
8. No opinion.

Different people give different answers about what they like about democracy. I will read out a few of these. Tell me which one of these do you like most about democracy?

1. Every one is free to speak and act
2. People have control over rulers
3. The weak are treated with dignity
4. Interest of minorities are protected
5. Any other
8. No opinion

Now let me talk about anxieties that many people have about democracy. Tell me which one of these do you dislike most about democracy?

1. Too many parties divide people
2. Rulers keep changing
3. Corruption increases
4. Those who have more votes dominate over others
5. Any other
8. No opinion

2. Support for democracy

Which one of the following three statements you agree most?

- (1) Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government
- (2) In certain situations, a dictatorial government is preferable to a democratic one
- (3) It does not matter to people like me whether we have democratic or non-democratic government

How suitable is democracy to our country?

1. Very suitable
2. Suitable
3. Not suitable
4. Not at all suitable
8. No opinion

There are different ways in which a country may be governed. I will read out some suggestions. For each of these would you say that you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree?

Suggestion	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion	Could not understand
a. We should have a strong leader who does not have to bother about elections	1	2	3	4	0	8
b. The country should be governed by the army	1	2	3	4	0	8
c. The country should be governed by the a king	1	2	3	4	0	8
d. The country should be governed by those chosen by the people in a fair election	1	2	3	4	0	8
e. All major decisions about the country should be taken by experts rather than politicians	1	2	3	4	0	8

Political participation

Thinking of whether you voted or not since you became eligible for voting, how would describe yourself – have you voted in every election, voted in most elections, voted in some elections, or hardly ever voted?

1. Voted in every election
2. Voted in most elections
3. Voted in some elections
4. Hardly ever voted
8. No opinion
9. Not applicable (Not eligible or eligible only once)
0. Could not understand

Now I will ask you about some political activities that you may have ever taken part in. Tell me have you ever in your life taken part in

	Yes	No	Don't remember	Could not understand	No opinion
a. Any protest or demonstration or struggle	1	2	7	0	8
b. Campaign in elections or referendum	1	2	7	0	8

Satisfaction with democracy

On the whole how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in our country? Are you very satisfied, satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, dissatisfied, or totally dissatisfied?

1. Very satisfied 2. Satisfied 3. Somewhat dissatisfied 4. Totally dissatisfied
8. No opinion 9. Could not understand

Efficacy

Do you think your vote has effect on how things are run in our country or do you think your vote makes no difference?

1. Has effect 2. Makes no difference 8. No opinion 0. Could not understand

Economic well-being

How satisfied are you with the economic condition of your household today? Are you very satisfied, satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?

1. Very satisfied 2. Satisfied 3. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 4. Dissatisfied 5. Very dissatisfied

What do you think will be the economic condition of your household in the coming few years? Would you say that it will become much better, better, remain the same, become worse or much worse?

1. Much better 2. Better 3. Remain the same 4. Worse
5. Much worse 8. No opinion 9. No opinion

How satisfied are you with the economic condition of India today? Are you very satisfied, satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?

1. Very satisfied 2. Satisfied 3. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 4. Dissatisfied 5. Very dissatisfied

What do you think will be the economic condition of India in the coming few years? Would you say that it will become much better, better, remain the same, become worse or much worse?

1. Much better 2. Better 3. Remain the same 4. Worse
5. Much worse 8. No opinion 9. No opinion

4. Support for political institutions

I am going to name a number of political institutions. For each one, could you tell me how much trust you have in them. Is it a great deal of trust, some trust, not very much trust, or none at all?

Political institution	Great deal	Some	Not very much	None at all	No opinion	Could not understand
National government	1	2	3	4	8	9
Provincial government	1	2	3	4	8	9
Local government	1	2	3	4	8	9
Parliament	1	2	3	4	8	9
Civil Service	1	2	3	4	8	9
Police	1	2	3	4	8	9
Army	1	2	3	4	8	9
Courts	1	2	3	4	8	9
Election Commission	1	2	3	4	8	9
Political Parties	1	2	3	4	8	9

Notes:

- ⁱ The cross-sectional survey, called the State of Democracy of South Asia (SDSA), was undertaken by the Lokniti programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi. Peter R. DeSouza, Suhas Palshikar and Yogendra Yadav were the principal investigators. A Report on the basis of this study was published under the title, *State of Democracy in South Asia* (Oxford University Press, New Dehi, 2008). Some of the findings are also reported by in Peter R. DeSouza, Suhas Palshikar and Yogendra Yadav, “Surveying South Asia”, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.19, No.1, January 2008, The Democracy Barometers (Part II), pp.84-96. This paper draws on the Report as well as the article in addressing the questions raised here.
- ⁱⁱ 42 per cent of the respondents could not understand the word, and about 10 per cent of the respondents said they cannot give any meaning. 78 per cent of the non-literates could not give any response, whereas more than 70 per cent respondents with matriculation and above gave a response, and it is more than 80 per cent among graduates. Similarly, no response or no knowledge is high among the masses (53 per cent) compared to that of elites (17 per cent).
- ⁱⁱⁱ Response categories grouped under these broad headings are:
1. Popular rule: includes responses such as ‘government of people’, ‘people’s power’, ‘people’s participation’, ‘sovereignty of people’, ‘public opinion’, ‘people’s empowerment’, etc.
 2. Elections: such as ‘periodic elections’, ‘party competition’, ‘government by elected representatives’, ‘right to vote’, etc.
 3. Rule of law: such as ‘rule of law’, ‘parliament’, ‘separation of powers’, etc.
 4. Freedom: such as ‘fundamental rights’, ‘right to live’, ‘right to freedom’ like property, speech, movement, association, ‘secularism’, etc.
 5. Justice and welfare: such as providing basic needs like food, cloth and house, schools, health, drinking water, roads and bridges, electricity and communications, provision of employment, equality of opportunity, poverty reduction, gender equality, treating all people as equal, etc.
 6. Peace and security: such as ‘peaceful living’, ‘security’, ‘giving up violence and arms’, ‘stability’, ‘able to live without fear of being attacked by others’, no exploitation, etc.
 7. Negative responses: such as poor governance, corruption, chaos, insecurity, quarrels, conflicts, injustice to ordinary people, benefits to big people, incompetent parties and leaders, etc.
 8. Others: Responses that cannot be included in any of the above groups are included in others.
- ^{iv} Elites include all those persons who belong to the upper strata of these societies, whose socio-economic status is high due to occupation, education, income and assets or in who belong to the upper strata of these societies. The rest are treated as mass publics.
- ^v The survey included a 10-item battery on the extent of citizens’ trust in different political institutions. Responses are ordered on a 4-point scale, ranging from ‘A great deal’ to ‘Not at all’. The public institutions included are: Central/national government, Provincial government, Local government, Parliament, Civil Service, Police, Army, Courts, Election Commission, and Political Parties. Index of general institutional trust has been calculated by adding the responses to all the 10 institutions (nine in the case of Nepal and Bangladesh that do not have a provincial government) and presenting it on a 1 to 100 scale. No responses have been placed in the middle for the purposes of indexing. Higher scores indicate a higher level of trust.