

# Does Revolution Work? Evidence from the Birth of Nepal’s Federal Democracy \*

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## Abstract

By what means representative democracy is built after a revolution remains among the most important but least understood of revolutionary processes. Following a ten-year People’s War, Nepal – a country with a 240 year history of monarchic rule - inaugurated a federal democratic republic in 2015. In this paper, we argue that there was a strong link between disadvantaged groups gaining representation within political parties and inclusive democratic outcomes. Using a census of 2.56 million voting age Nepalis spanning eleven districts merged with electoral data we first show that the historically disadvantaged social group Janajatis – who formed the backbone of the Maoist insurgent group - achieved representation in local leadership positions proportional to their population share in the 2017 election. Second, using complete data on party candidate pools we show representative selection on Janajati status *and* positive selection on education by the three main Nepali parties at candidate nomination and selection stages. Third, we show that descriptive representation on party selection committees affects descriptive representation for candidates. For both the Maoist and mainstream, center-right party, Janajati candidates are more likely to be fielded when the selection committee is majority Janajati. Implicit Association tests administered with over 700 selection committee members show that member caste is predictive of implicit bias regarding leadership ability across castes. Fourth, descriptive representation of Janajatis begets substantive representation in policy outcomes. Finally, using individual-level data on earthquake reconstruction benefits delivered by local governments, we provide evidence that Janajati leaders provide greater earthquake benefits for all constituents,

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but mostly from the mainstream, center-right party. Taken together, our results provide a nuanced picture of how revolution enabled an inclusive federal democracy in Nepal: it led to the entry of a political party that explicitly supported representation of historically disadvantaged groups and was associated with mainstream parties increasing descriptive representation of Janajatis in critical party institutions. This created a cadre of positively selected leaders from historically disadvantaged castes who, in turn, improved policy outcomes.