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## **Unraveling Nepal's Political Turmoil: A Conspiracy Theory Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

Since the election of 2022 in Nepal, the political landscape has witnessed various political parties engaging in intricate alliances, frequent betrayals, and strategic shifts. The House of Representatives reflects a fragmented environment, with the Nepali Congress as the largest party and the CPN-UML following closely behind, highlighting the challenges of coalition-building in a diverse political landscape. Amidst these dynamics, conspiracy theories have gained prominence as alternative lenses through which observers interpret abrupt political manoeuvres and shifts in power. These theories, sceptical of official narratives, propose hidden agendas, secret deals, or external influences behind political decisions.

This article explores the role of conspiracy theories in Nepal's political discourse, analyzing their emergence and impact post-2022 election. It reviews existing literature on conspiracy theories, emphasizing their appeal in offering simplified explanations for complex political scenarios and their amplification through social media and cognitive biases. The study employs content analysis of media reports and scholarly literature to explore how conspiracy theories manifest within Nepal's political context, influencing public perception and challenging democratic processes.

Key findings highlight the prevalence of opportunism and betrayal in shaping political outcomes, as exemplified by the CPN-Maoist Center's pivotal switch in

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alliances from the Nepali Congress to the CPN-UML during government formation. These manoeuvres underscore the pragmatic pursuit of power over ideological consistency, fueling public distrust and raising ethical questions about political conduct. The study calls for enhanced transparency, robust institutional frameworks, and moral leadership to mitigate the negative impact of conspiracy theories on Nepal's democratic stability.

*Keywords:* Nepal, political landscape, election, conspiracy theories, coalition-building, democratic processes

### **Introduction**

Following the 2022 election, Nepal's political landscape has become a stage of intricate alliances, betrayals, and strategic manoeuvres among its diverse political parties. The House of Representatives (HoR) reflects this fragmentation, with Nepali Congress emerging as the largest party, closely followed by CPN-UML, alongside smaller influential parties like CPN (Maoist Centre) and Rashtriya Swatantra Party (RSP) (The Hindu, 2022; Nepali Times, 2022). This diversity presents significant challenges for stable governance, necessitating frequent coalition-building efforts amid shifting dynamics.

Conspiracy theories have emerged as a critical lens through which observers interpret these political dynamics. Rooted in scepticism toward official narratives, these theories suggest hidden agendas, clandestine deals, or external influences shaping political decisions. They resonate with public concerns over power dynamics and the legitimacy of Nepal's democratic processes, offering alternative explanations for sudden political shifts (Ghimire, 2024).

This study seeks to explore the rise and impact of conspiracy theories surrounding Nepal's political landscape post-2022 election. Methodologically, the

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research employs qualitative discourse analysis of news articles from Nepali and Indian publications, focusing on narratives related to conspiracy theories in the aftermath of the election. This approach allows for a systematic exploration of themes and patterns within these theories, providing insights into their construction and dissemination.

The composition of Nepal's HoR post-2022 election underscores a politically varied landscape, with multiple parties vying for influence. Nepali Congress secured 89 seats, CPN-UML 78 seats, and other parties play pivotal roles, complicating coalition-building efforts critical for stable governance amid fluctuating alliances and party dynamics. The scenario of a hung parliament highlights the strategic manoeuvres necessary to achieve consensus and effectively address governance challenges (The Hindu, 2022; Nepali Times, 2022).

Recent political developments since the 2022 election exemplify these challenges, characterized by rapid alliance formations, accusations of betrayal, and the proliferation of conspiracy theories. This article delves into the intricacies of Nepali politics, exploring the phenomenon of political opportunism and its broader implications.

While the article provides a detailed analysis of coalition dynamics, opportunism, and betrayal post-2022 election, it primarily focuses on recent events without delving deeply into historical contexts or broader socio-economic factors influencing political shifts. Additionally, while it discusses conspiracy theories, it doesn't thoroughly explore their origins, prevalence, or societal impacts in shaping public discourse and political outcomes.

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## **Literature Review**

Conspiracy theories, with their narratives of powerful groups secretly manipulating events, have captivated audiences for centuries (Barkun, 2003). These theories often distrust official explanations and cherry-pick evidence to construct alternative narratives (Byford, 2011). Although the term emerged in the early 20th century, the underlying concept of hidden cabals influencing events has a much longer history (Hofstadter, 1964). The social and political upheavals of the 1960s, for instance, fueled a surge in conspiracy theories surrounding events like the Kennedy assassination. Historian Richard Hofstadter observed a connection between conspiracy theories and periods of anxiety, suggesting they offer a way to make sense of a chaotic world by attributing events to deliberate actions by malevolent forces (Hofstadter, 1964).

Conspiracy theories are appealing because they provide straightforward explanations for complicated situations. They offer a sense of order and control, fulfilling our desire to understand the world around us (Barkun, 2003). Additionally, cognitive biases can make us more susceptible to these theories. Our brains naturally seek clear causes for major events (proportionality bias) and gravitate towards information that confirms our existing beliefs (confirmation bias) (Uscinski & Parent, 2014). Conspiracy theories capitalize on these tendencies, offering seemingly clear explanations wrapped in a sense of belonging to a community of like-minded believers (Knight, 2000).

While conspiracy theories may spark some critical thinking, their downsides far outweigh any potential benefits (Popper, 1945). The spread of misinformation through social media amplifies its reach, eroding trust in institutions and creating social divisions (Hayek, 1944). Understanding the origins, appeal, and impact of

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conspiracy theories is crucial to mitigating their harmful effects and fostering a more informed society.

Conspiracy theories abound in Nepali politics, offering explanations for abrupt shifts in alliances and decisions that defy conventional wisdom. These theories speculate on clandestine agendas, secretive deals, or external influences shaping party strategies and electoral outcomes, tapping into public anxieties about the power and legitimacy of democratic processes in Nepal.

In the context of the House of Representatives (HoR) election in 2022, opportunism and betrayals played significant roles in shaping political outcomes, particularly during the formation of the government. This dynamic provides fertile ground for exploring conspiracy theories, which often emerge to explain abrupt shifts in political alliances and decisions. Such theories speculate on hidden agendas, secretive deals, or external influences that may have influenced party strategies and electoral outcomes. By examining these dynamics from a conspiracy theory perspective, we can better understand public perceptions and the deeper anxieties about the power and legitimacy of democratic processes in Nepal.

Despite the extensive literature on conspiracy theories, several gaps exist, particularly concerning their application to specific political contexts like Nepal. The existing research lacks a detailed exploration of how conspiracy theories manifest in the political landscape and their influence on political events and public perception in Nepal. Additionally, there is insufficient analysis of the mechanisms through which cognitive biases operate in this context and how political actors exploit these biases. Moreover, the direct effects of conspiracy theories on Nepal's democratic processes, including voter behaviour and electoral outcomes, remain underexplored. There is also a need for empirical data and case studies specifically

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related to Nepal, as well as strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of conspiracy theories in this unique political environment.

Addressing these research gaps can provide a more nuanced and context-specific understanding of the role of conspiracy theories in Nepal's political landscape. Future research should focus on conducting detailed case studies, investigating cognitive biases, examining the impact on democratic processes, developing intervention strategies, and gathering empirical data. By doing so, the research can contribute to more effective strategies for fostering a well-informed and resilient democratic society in Nepal. Conspiracy theories abound in Nepali politics, offering explanations for abrupt shifts in alliances and decisions that defy conventional wisdom. These theories speculate on clandestine agendas, secretive deals, or external influences shaping party strategies and electoral outcomes, tapping into public anxieties about power and legitimacy in Nepal's democratic processes. In the context of Nepal's 2022 House of Representatives (HoR) election, opportunism and betrayals played significant roles in shaping political outcomes, particularly during the formation of the government. This dynamic provides fertile ground for exploring conspiracy theories, which often emerge to explain abrupt shifts in political alliances and decisions. Such theories speculate on hidden agendas, secretive deals, or external influences that may have influenced party strategies and electoral outcomes. By examining these dynamics from a conspiracy theory perspective, we can better understand public perceptions and the deeper anxieties about power and legitimacy in Nepal's democratic processes.

### **Methods and Materials**

The study used qualitative discourse analysis to examine how Nepali and Indian media presented conspiracy theories related to Nepal's political

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developments after the 2022 election. We analyzed news articles published between the election and a specific date in 2024 from sources like Kathmandu Post, Nepali Times, and The Hindu. We created a coding scheme to categorize the identified conspiracy narratives based on their targets, suspected motives, and perceived methods of manipulation. Using thematic analysis, we identified recurring themes within these conspiracy theories, providing insights into how media influenced public perceptions of recent political events in Nepal. It's important to note that media reporting can be biased, and this study focused solely on content analysis without exploring the origins or wider dissemination of these conspiracy theories beyond the selected media sources.

## **Results**

### **Context**

The composition of Nepal's House of Representatives following the 2022 election reflects a politically diverse landscape. The Nepali Congress secured 89 seats, CPN-UML 78, with smaller parties like CPN (Maoist Centre) and Rashtriya Swatantra Party (RSP) also holding significant sway. This diversity complicates coalition-building, crucial for stable governance, amidst shifting alliances and party dynamics. The hung parliament scenario underscores the need for strategic manoeuvres to achieve consensus and effectively address governance challenges. Recent post-2022 political developments have been marked by rapid alliance formations, accusations of betrayal, and the proliferation of conspiracy theories (The Hindu, 2022; Nepali Times, 2022).

In the context of Nepal's 2022 House of Representatives (HoR) election, opportunism and betrayals played significant roles in shaping political outcomes,

particularly during the formation of the government. Here's an analysis of these dynamics:

**Opportunism in Politics:** Political parties in Nepal exhibited opportunistic behaviour throughout the HoR election process, frequently shifting alliances based on strategic calculations rather than ideological consistency (The Hindu, 2022; Nepali Times, 2022). For example, the CPN (Maoist Centre) initially aligned with the Nepali Congress in a pre-election alliance but later switched sides to join CPN-UML's coalition led by KP Sharma Oli. This strategic move was pivotal in tipping the balance of power towards CPN-UML during government formation. The pursuit of power and influence was a driving force behind these opportunistic manoeuvres, with parties seeking alliances that could maximize their chances of securing ministerial positions and key roles within the government (DailyO, 2022). This approach often led to the formation of temporary alliances that could swiftly dissolve or realign based on changing political circumstances. Individual leaders also leveraged their positions and influence to negotiate favourable outcomes. Leaders like Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) strategically maneuvered to secure the Prime Ministerial position, despite initial agreements and expectations within their alliances. Moreover, opportunism was evident in parties' policy stances, where ideological principles sometimes took a back seat to electoral pragmatism. Parties adjusted their rhetoric and campaign promises to appeal to a broader base of voters, often compromising ideological purity in favour of electoral gains (DailyO, 2022).

**Betrayal in Politics:** One of the most glaring betrayals in Nepal's political landscape post-HoR election was the CPN (Maoist Centre)'s decision to switch alliances from Nepali Congress to CPN-UML (Online Khabar, 2022). This move was seen as a betrayal of the Nepali Congress-led alliance's trust and expectations, especially considering the earlier commitments and agreements made during the

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electoral campaign. Such betrayals not only affected public trust in political parties and leaders but also raised ethical questions about political conduct and accountability (DailyO, 2022). Voters who supported alliances based on pre-election promises of stability and governance were disillusioned when parties changed allegiances or failed to honour their commitments post-election. This erosion of trust can have long-term consequences for political legitimacy and voter turnout in future elections. Internal party dynamics also contributed to betrayal, with factionalism and power struggles within parties often leading to betrayals of leadership or ideological camps (Nepali Times, 2022). This internal strife further impacted party unity and organizational coherence, complicating efforts to maintain a cohesive political strategy.

The prevalence of opportunism and betrayal in Nepal's 2022 HoR election reflects broader challenges in democratic consolidation. While coalition politics can foster inclusivity and stability, frequent shifts in alliances and betrayals undermine political transparency, credibility, and governance effectiveness. Moving forward, addressing these challenges requires reforms that promote greater transparency, strengthen party discipline, and foster a culture of ethical leadership in Nepal's political landscape (Nepali Times, 2022). Stronger institutional mechanisms are needed to regulate political conduct, enforce ethical standards, and ensure accountability among elected representatives.

In a significant turn of events, Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' reorganized his Cabinet in March 2024, ending a nearly 15-month coalition with the Nepali Congress due to substantial disagreements between the party leaders (Business Standard, 2024). Prachanda then established a new alliance with the CPN-UML party led by former Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, leading to the appointment of three new ministers who took their oaths of office. This

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reshuffle took place amidst significant political manoeuvres aimed at consolidating power and forming a more stable coalition government (Business Standard, 2024).

Political instability in Nepal has undergone a significant transformation with the formation of a new alliance between long-standing rivals, the CPN-UML and the Nepali Congress, aimed at establishing a 'national consensus government.' This alliance, forged after the CPN-UML withdrew support from the CPN-MC-led coalition, has created a crisis for Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda'. Effective July 1, 2024, the alliance secures a combined majority in the House of Representatives, marking a pivotal shift following the CPN-UML's departure from its previous coalition with the CPN-Maoist Center. The agreement outlines a power-sharing arrangement, with Sher Bahadur Deuba and Khadga Prasad Oli slated to alternate as Prime Ministers. Their primary objective is to amend the constitution to enhance stability, although concerns persist regarding underlying motives amidst ongoing corruption scandals (Ramachandran, 2024; The Hindu, 2024).

Nepal's political landscape saw further development as both the Nepali Congress and CPN-UML publicly acknowledged the formation of this new coalition government. Led by CPN-UML Chairman KP Sharma Oli initially, followed by Sher Bahadur Deuba, the coalition distributes ministerial responsibilities, with CPN-UML overseeing nine ministries, including Finance, and Nepali Congress managing ten ministries, including Home Affairs (Nepalnews, 2024). Despite the acknowledgement, details of the agreement remain undisclosed to the public and other parliamentary parties, prompting calls for transparency (Giri, 2024).

Chief Whip of the Nepali Congress, Ramesh Lekhak, emphasized that the agreement aims to stabilize Nepal politically. Signed on July 1, 2024, the agreement

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focuses on promoting good governance, accelerating development, and addressing constitutional weaknesses through timely amendments. Lekhak affirmed the Nepali Congress's support for the agreement, including their decision to oppose Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's motion for a vote of confidence (The Rising Nepal, 2024). In addition to the political developments, it has been disclosed on social media that the agreement includes the establishment of a committee led by former Chief Justice Kalyan Shrestha. This committee is tasked with proposing constitutional amendments and electoral reforms aimed at stabilizing Nepal's political environment. However, specific details about the signing parties involved in this aspect of the agreement have not been publicly disclosed. This revelation adds a layer of transparency to the process, albeit with some aspects of the agreement remaining undisclosed to the public.

The ongoing dynamics surrounding confidence votes reflect the volatility of Nepal's political climate. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's failure to secure a parliamentary majority, amidst shifting alliances and criticisms of his leadership, underscores the challenges facing the current political landscape (Himal Khabar, 2024a; 2024b). As Nepal navigates these political changes, stakeholders are keenly observing the unfolding developments and their implications for the country's governance and stability.

On July 12, 2024, Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal was ousted following a parliamentary vote of no confidence. This came after the largest party in his coalition withdrew its support. Dahal received just 63 votes in his favor, while 194 members voted against him, leading to his resignation after 19 months in office. The vote was triggered by the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) pulling its support and forming an alliance with the Nepali Congress. Khadga Prasad Oli, the leader of the Communist Party, is set to become the new prime

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minister. Dahal, who had been heading a tenuous coalition since December 2022, faced a confidence vote five times due to internal conflicts. This was Dahal's third term as prime minister since his Maoist group transitioned to mainstream politics in 2006 (Voice of America, 2024).

The prevalence of opportunism and betrayal in Nepal's political landscape after the election of 2022 reflects broader challenges in democratic consolidation. While coalition politics can foster inclusivity and stability, frequent shifts in alliances and betrayals undermine political transparency, credibility, and governance effectiveness. Moving forward, addressing these challenges requires reforms that promote greater transparency, strengthen party discipline, and foster a culture of ethical leadership in Nepal's political landscape (Nepali Times, 2022). Stronger institutional mechanisms are needed to regulate political conduct, enforce ethical standards, and ensure accountability among elected representatives.

### ***Opinions on Coalition Changes***

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, known as Prachanda, faced a resounding defeat in Nepal's parliament when his motion of confidence garnered only 63 votes against 194, leading to his resignation (Ghimire, 2024). During a heated three-hour debate in the House of Representatives, Prachanda blamed his loss on external political pressures. Following the vote, he promptly submitted his resignation to President Ram Chandra Poudel.

The loss stemmed from the withdrawal of support by the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (UML), his coalition partner for the past four months. UML instead aligned with the Nepali Congress (NC). As per an agreement signed on July 2, UML Chairman KP Oli is poised to become the next Prime Minister, with NC joining as a coalition partner (Ghimire, 2024). This arrangement

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includes a provision for NC Chief Sher Bahadur Deuba to take over from Oli after roughly 22 months.

President Poudel, acting within constitutional provisions, called on political parties to form a new government by Sunday. However, demonstrating their swift action, Oli and Deuba met the President on July 12, 2024, and presented proof of their majority support (Ghimire, 2024). The newly formed government is mandated to seek a confidence vote within 30 days of its establishment.

Prachanda's resignation contradicted his earlier assertion that his removal wouldn't be easy due to the hung parliament's dynamic. Despite having only 32 seats, he previously managed to gain support alternately from UML and NC. In his pre-resignation speech, Prachanda expressed concerns about potential threats to democratic progress. He cautioned against hasty constitutional amendments that could undermine achievements in empowering marginalized groups (Ghimire, 2024).

Yogesh Bhattarai from UML assured that any constitutional amendments would align with the current Constitution's progressive vision. Similarly, NC leader Ramesh Lekhak emphasized preserving the Constitution's integrity (Ghimire, 2024). Prachanda urged the incoming government to maintain the progressive gains and advocated for significant representation of women in public offices, reflecting ongoing political dynamics and priorities in Nepal.

According to Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, the collaboration between the Nepali Congress and the Nepal Communist Party (UML) did not materialize as expected. He expressed concern over their alliance, suggesting a lack of transparency in their actions to form a national consensus government. He criticized their failure to engage openly with the public and avoid a proper

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parliamentary discussion on national consensus. Prime Minister Dahal emphasized the importance of transparent and consensus-based governance to uphold democracy and public trust. He expressed apprehension that the current alliances might undermine these principles (Kantipur, 2024a).

Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Ravi Lamichhane, also the chairman of the National Independent Party, alleged that the government was toppled when he initiated the investigation into corruption. In the July 12th House of Representatives meeting, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal claimed the government's fall occurred within 24 hours of opening the file. Lamichhane pointed out that the government was toppled just as he was about to begin working on the case. "Standing in this House, an honourable person said he would open the file," Lamichhane said. "He elaborated on what he would do if the file opened. He said he had opened it [file" refers to investigative documents or evidence related to corruption], and within 24 hours, the government was overthrown. How can a file be opened in this manner?" Ravi Lamichhane further mentioned that the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (UML) have not publicly disclosed the reasons behind their agreement. He stated that besides some leaders, other Members of Parliament from both parties were not informed about the agreement. Lamichhane emphasized that this agreement doesn't benefit the nation or the agreeing parties' MPs. He questioned the nature of this agreement, implying it shouldn't have been made in secrecy (Kantipur, 2024b).

The political analyst Bhojraj Pokharel commented that the current coalition between Congress and UML has unsettled the country's political scenario. He noted that the coalition's formation indicates a unique composition, complicating constitutional amendments and governance. Despite initial hopes, the government formation on the first day did not fully meet expectations due to economic

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challenges and public disillusionment. Political analyst Jhalak Subedi commented on the alliance between Oli and Deuba, highlighting that Nepal's major political parties, Congress and CPN-UML, are grappling with challenges related to constitutional amendments while simultaneously focusing on forming a new coalition government. Discussions are centred on electoral reforms, provincial autonomy, and constitutional reviews, with plans to establish a commission for these tasks. However, uncertainty persists regarding achieving parliamentary consensus on the proposed amendments. Analysts also observe the influence of China's Belt and Road Initiative and ongoing leadership dynamics, raising questions about Prime Minister Oli's commitment to governance reform and transparency (Kantipur, 2024c).

Public and political reactions to these abrupt changes vary, with some questioning the motives behind such swift political realignments. Jiba Raj Pokharel's opinion piece underscores the implications of these shifts, debating whether they serve national interests or are driven by self-serving political agendas (Pokharel, 2024).

A commentary by Santu Gaha Magar in *Rastriya Samachar Samiti* emphasizes that the agreement between the Nepali Congress and CPN-UML should be viewed as an opportunity to honour the public mandate and not merely a power-sharing deal. Magar suggests that the main political parties should prioritize addressing national issues rather than engaging in self-serving political manoeuvres (Magar, 2024).

Furthermore, a recent article by Ramesh Kumar in *Himal Khabar* highlights the challenges faced by the newly formed government under K P Sharma Oli. The article questions whether Oli's administration can navigate the path of reform and

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good governance amidst deepening economic issues and institutional decay. It also scrutinizes the new government's initial criticisms for its perceived lack of inclusivity and its handling of key ministries (Kumar, 2024).

In a commentary from Himal Khabar, the downfall of Pushpa Kamal Dahal is dissected, analyzing his political manoeuvring and its consequences. The central theme revolves around Dahal's tendency to switch alliances, earning him the nickname "Palturām" (Flip-Flop), which ultimately led to his ouster as Prime Minister and a significant erosion of trust (Himal Khabar, 2024b).

On July 13, 2024, the Office of the President of Nepal announced the failure of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' to secure a vote of confidence in the House of Representatives on July 13, 2024. As per the constitution (Article 76.2), the President has called for any member of the House of Representatives, who can secure the majority support of two or more parties, to present their claim for the position of Prime Minister by 5:00 PM on July 15, 2024 (Office of the President of Nepal, 2024a). An official announcement from the Office of the President of Nepal, dated July 14, 2024. It informs the public that K P Sharma Oli has been appointed as the new Prime Minister of Nepal (Office of the President of Nepal, 2024b).

On July 1, 2024, the Nepali Congress and CPN-UML agreed to form a government with KP Sharma Oli as Prime Minister, based on Article 76(2) of the Constitution of Nepal. The Maoist Centre, led by outgoing Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, argued that the new government should be formed under Article 76(3), which would allow the largest party's leader to become Prime Minister. On July 3, the UML withdrew support from Dahal's government, prompting Dahal to seek a vote of confidence rather than resign. Despite losing the vote, President

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Ramchandra Paudel called for a new government under Article 76(2), citing constitutional expert advice. The Maoist Centre expressed dissatisfaction with this decision and suggested that lawyers close to the party might challenge it in court, advocating for the application of Article 76(3) (The Kathmandu Post, 2024).

On July 16, 2024, President Ramchandra Paudel swore in a 22-member Cabinet of Ministers led by CPN-UML chair KP Sharma Oli, who became Prime Minister for the fourth time. The Cabinet faced criticism for its lack of inclusion, with only two women, five Madhesis, and no Muslim or Dalit representation. The ministers include ten from the Congress, nine from the UML, and three from smaller parties. Despite constitutional requirements for inclusiveness, the Cabinet was predominantly composed of members from the Khas Arya community. Experts and social media commentators criticized the exclusion of Dalits and the overall lack of diversity in the new government (Poudel, 2024). Based on the detailed political developments and dynamics in Nepal's recent history, several conspiracy theories can be applied to interpret these events.

### **Controversy and Implications of the Nepali Congress-UML Seven-Point Agreement**

The seven-point agreement between the Nepali Congress (NC) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (UML) has generated significant controversy, largely due to its lack of transparency and the implications it has for Nepal's political landscape.

#### ***Secrecy and Transparency Concerns***

The agreement, which has not been publicly disclosed even weeks after its formation, has sparked criticism from various quarters. Gagan Thapa, General Secretary of the Nepali Congress, has vocally criticized the secrecy surrounding the

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agreement. He has called for its immediate release, arguing that transparency is crucial for assessing the agreement's implementation and legitimacy (Anand Nepal, 2024). Thapa's demand highlights broader concerns about the agreement's content and the potential for political maneuvering behind closed doors.

The secrecy has also been criticized by members within the ruling parties and opposition groups. Vishnu Rimal, a political advisor to the Prime Minister, has assured that the agreement will be made public following a confidence vote for the Prime Minister. He emphasized that the agreement's opaque nature would not last indefinitely (Neupane, 2024). Similarly, Shankar Pokhrel, a senior UML leader, has indicated that details will be disclosed once KP Sharma Oli officially assumes office as Prime Minister (Neupane, 2024).

### ***Political and Ideological Implications***

Lilamani Pokharel, Secretary of the Maoist Center, has suggested that the agreement reflects a strategic effort to consolidate power among the top leaders of the Nepali Congress and UML. This view is supported by the timing of the agreement, which followed significant political turbulence, including anti-corruption efforts that implicated figures from both parties. High-profile cases such as the Bhutanese conspiracy and gold smuggling scandal have threatened the interests of the Nepali Congress and UML, possibly motivating the coalition as a means to protect their positions and avoid further scrutiny (Pokharel, 2024).

The agreement also appears to address ideological differences between the parties, particularly regarding federalism, republicanism, secularism, and inclusivity. However, the extent to which these principles are genuinely contested or merely symbolic in the agreement remains debated. The differing stances on international initiatives such as the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and the Belt and

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Road Initiative (BRI) further complicate the political dynamics, with the Nepali Congress and UML supporting MCC and Dahal's government favoring BRI projects (Pokharel, 2024).

**Details of the Agreement:** The summary of the seven-point agreement presented by Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli on July 21, 2024, includes several key provisions:

1. **National Interest and Governance:** The agreement aims to establish a national consensus government to safeguard national interests, combat corruption, and ensure good governance. It seeks to involve other political parties to enhance stability and development (BBC News, 2024).
2. **Constitutional Amendments:** The agreement prioritizes reviewing and amending the Constitution to address its weaknesses and improve political stability (Bhattarai, 2024).
3. **Economic Revitalization:** It emphasizes creating a favorable business environment, boosting economic activities, and attracting investment to address economic stagnation (BBC News, 2024).
4. **Leadership Distribution:** KP Sharma Oli is set to serve as Prime Minister for the first two years, followed by Sher Bahadur Deuba for the remaining term until the 2027 elections (Neupane, 2024).
5. **Government Operation:** The government will focus on a minimal common program, including anti-corruption measures and development (BBC News, 2024).
6. **Inclusive Participation:** The agreement outlines equal participation for the major parties while including others to ensure a broad-based government (Bhattarai, 2024).

- 7. Provincial and Local Governance:** It addresses the formation and functioning of provincial governments and emphasizes speeding up development at local levels (BBC News, 2024).

*Criticism and Future Implications:* The secrecy surrounding the agreement has not only led to calls for greater transparency but also fueled skepticism about its true intentions. Critics like Professor Lokraj Baral argue that the agreement might be more about political bargaining than addressing substantive national issues such as border disputes or constitutional amendments (Neupane, 2024). The Socialist Front, including the Maoist party, has criticized the agreement as problematic and opaque, questioning its implications for Nepal's constitutional framework and electoral system (Pokharel, 2024).

In summary, the seven-point agreement between the Nepali Congress and UML is shrouded in secrecy, leading to significant controversy and criticism. The agreement's implications for Nepal's political stability, governance, and transparency remain subjects of intense scrutiny and debate.

### **Discussion**

Conspiracy theories have flourished in Nepal since 2022, driven by perceptions of irregularities, hidden motives, and manipulations by powerful entities. These narratives offer alternative explanations for complex political events, providing a lens through which to interpret Nepal's evolving political landscape.

#### **Perceived Irregularities in Coalition Politics**

Conspiracy theories posit that coalition formations in Nepal go beyond pragmatic political alliances, alleging orchestrated manoeuvres aimed at consolidating power. Shifts like the CPN (Maoist Centre)'s move from Nepali

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Congress to CPN-UML are evidence of behind-the-scenes deals and undisclosed agendas. This perspective suggests that domestic elites and international actors manipulate political factions to maintain influence over Nepal's governance, exploiting its strategic location and resources (The Hindu, 2022; Nepali Times, 2022).

### **Hidden Motives Behind Opportunism and Betrayal**

Opportunism and betrayals within Nepal's political arena fuel conspiracy theories regarding hidden motives behind leadership changes and coalition collapse. Political manoeuvres are often driven by personal gain and external incentives rather than genuine democratic principles. The theories imply that shifts in alliances and betrayals are strategic moves orchestrated to destabilize governance and perpetuate control through puppet leadership (DailyO, 2022; Nepali Times, 2022).

### **Manipulations by External Forces**

Conspiracy theories abound in Nepal, alleging that international actors manipulate domestic politics for their strategic benefit (Voice of America, 2024; Ghimire, 2024). These theories suspect economic pressure, diplomatic manoeuvring, and even covert operations as tools of influence (Ghimire, 2024), raising concerns that such interference could undermine Nepal's sovereignty and democratic processes.

However, a more nuanced perspective emerges when considering alternative explanations. Nepal's complex domestic political landscape, marked by shifting alliances such as between the CPN-UML and Nepali Congress under KP Sharma Oli, is often misinterpreted as foreign manipulation (Voice of America, 2024; Ghimire, 2024). Additionally, Nepal's pursuit of a multipolar foreign policy, seeking partnerships beyond India and China, might explain its evolving alliances (Khanal, 2024).

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From the conspiracy theory perspective, Nepal's political landscape can be characterized as fertile ground for suspicions of covert foreign influence and orchestrated manipulation. Allegations of foreign meddling during periods of instability, highlighted by educated citizens and political activists (Adhikari, 2023), serve as catalysts for conspiracy theories suggesting hidden agendas behind political actions. The scrutiny of frequent political realignments within parties, attributed to internal divisions and external pressures from India and China (Shrestha, 2024), fuels narratives of orchestrated changes designed to serve foreign interests or obscure domestic goals. These constant power struggles not only raise doubts about the sincerity of political motives but also perpetuate uncertainty regarding Nepal's developmental trajectory, reinforcing beliefs in conspiracies aimed at controlling or destabilizing the country for geopolitical advantage. The significant involvement of external forces during government changes (Shrestha, 2016) further amplifies these theories, depicting Nepal as a battleground where foreign powers vie for influence through political manoeuvring and strategic interventions. Conspiracy theorists would likely interpret these dynamics as evidence of a covert geopolitical game where Nepal's sovereignty and internal stability are compromised by external actors seeking to assert dominance in the region.

### **Media Manipulation and Public Perception**

Conspiracy theories emphasize the role of media in shaping public opinion and disseminating narratives that align with vested interests. Biased reporting, sensationalism, and misinformation campaigns are portrayed as tools to sway public perception and discredit political rivals. The media's role in amplifying conspiracy theories surrounding issues like political assassinations, security incidents, and electoral fraud contributes to public distrust in official narratives and institutional

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credibility. This manipulation of information fosters polarization and hinders efforts towards transparent governance and accountable leadership (Knight, 2000).

### **Security Incidents and Covert Operations**

Conspiracy theories surrounding security incidents in Nepal often attribute such events to internal power struggles or covert operations orchestrated by external actors. The lack of transparency in investigations and official disclosures fuels suspicions of hidden agendas, suggesting that incidents like political assassinations serve broader strategic purposes beyond official explanations. These narratives foster public unease and undermine confidence in state institutions, complicating efforts to maintain stability and uphold democratic norms (Nepali Times, 2024).

### **Impact on Democratic Stability**

The proliferation of conspiracy theories poses significant challenges to Nepal's democratic stability by eroding trust in political institutions, leadership integrity, and electoral processes. Public disillusionment with perceived irregularities and hidden manipulations undermines efforts to foster inclusive governance and transparent decision-making. Addressing these challenges requires strengthening democratic institutions, enhancing transparency in political processes, and promoting civic education to combat misinformation and conspiracy narratives (Popper, 1945).

Conspiracy theories provide alternative perspectives on Nepal's political dynamics, highlighting perceived irregularities, hidden motives, and manipulations by influential entities. While speculative and often lacking empirical evidence, these theories reflect broader societal anxieties and uncertainties. Analyzing Nepal's political landscape through the lens of conspiracy theories underscores the imperative for transparency, accountability, and ethical leadership to safeguard democratic principles and foster informed public discourse amid complex geopolitical realities.

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Addressing these challenges is crucial for building resilient democratic institutions capable of withstanding external pressures and internal manipulations, thereby upholding Nepal's democratic aspirations amidst evolving political dynamics.

### **Impact of Recent Political Events on Nepal's Political Landscape**

#### ***Eroding Trust and Public Disillusionment in Nepal's Political Landscape***

Nepal's political landscape has been significantly impacted by a decline in public trust towards political parties and leaders. This erosion of trust stems from two key factors: frequent shifts in alliances and instances of party betrayal.

Voters feel disillusioned when parties they support switch allegiances after elections, often forming alliances with former rivals. This opportunistic maneuvering creates a sense that pre-election promises and commitments hold little weight. Additionally, instances where parties betray their coalition partners further undermine public faith in leadership and the political process as a whole (DailyO, 2022; Nepali Times, 2022).

The consequences of this declining trust are far-reaching. Disillusioned voters may become less engaged in the political process, hindering democratic participation. Furthermore, a lack of trust in leadership weakens the legitimacy of government actions and policies.

#### ***Political Instability and Challenges to Democratic Consolidation***

Another key impact on Nepal's political landscape is the prevalence of political instability. The lack of commitment to alliances and opportunistic maneuvering by political leaders make it difficult to form stable governments. The text details the collapse of multiple coalitions in recent months, highlighting the fragility of these partnerships (Business Standard, 2024; The Kathmandu Post, 2024).

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This instability poses a significant challenge to democratic consolidation in Nepal. Frequent changes in government make it difficult to implement long-term policies and achieve national goals. Furthermore, the lack of transparency and ethical conduct within political parties weakens democratic institutions and raises questions about the legitimacy of the democratic process itself (Nepali Times, 2022).

### ***The Uncertain Promise of Coalition Politics***

Coalition politics, while offering the potential for inclusivity by bringing diverse voices into government, has yet to deliver on this promise in Nepal. The recent formation of a two-party coalition raises concerns about the lack of representation for women, minorities, and marginalized groups (Kantipur, 2024c; Poudel, 2024).

The success of coalition politics in fostering inclusivity hinges on genuine cooperation and a commitment to representing the broader Nepali population.

### ***The Role of Conspiracy Theories and the Need for Reform***

The prevalence of conspiracy theories surrounding political events in Nepal fuels public anxiety and distrust. These theories often allege hidden agendas, external manipulation, and irregularities in political processes (The Hindu, 2022; Nepali Times, 2022). While these theories may lack concrete evidence, they highlight a deeper public unease with the current political climate.

The pervasiveness of conspiracy theories underscores the need for reforms that promote transparency and hold political leaders accountable. Stronger institutions are crucial to prevent manipulation and ensure that political processes are conducted openly and fairly (Nepali Times, 2022; Knight, 2000). Only through such reforms can Nepal begin to rebuild public trust in its political landscape.

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## **Conclusion**

The aftermath of Nepal's 2022 House of Representatives election illuminates a complex political landscape shaped by intricate coalition dynamics, opportunism, strategic alliances, and ideological fluidity. Despite the Nepali Congress and CPN-UML emerging as leading parties, the fragmented multi-party system necessitated pragmatic coalition formations, often prioritizing electoral gains over ideological consistency.

This environment of political volatility has posed significant governance challenges, requiring frequent coalition adjustments to secure majority support and navigate power dynamics. The pivotal role of the CPN (Maoist Center) in shaping alliances underscores the fragile nature of political commitments and the ethical dilemmas inherent in coalition governance.

Conspiracy theories have dominated public discourse, reflecting broader societal anxieties about hidden agendas and eroding trust in democratic institutions. Allegations of external interference or internal manipulation further complicate efforts to foster transparent governance and accountable leadership, undermining democratic stability.

Addressing these multifaceted challenges demands robust institutional reforms to enhance political transparency, strengthen ethical standards, and promote civic engagement. Upholding democratic principles amid geopolitical complexities necessitates resilient governance structures capable of withstanding external pressures and internal uncertainties.

Looking ahead, Nepal's journey towards stable governance hinges on fostering inclusive dialogue, reinforcing democratic institutions, and empowering citizens through media literacy. By prioritizing integrity, transparency, and a steadfast commitment to democratic values, Nepal can navigate its political evolution towards a more resilient and

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prosperous future where public trust in democratic processes prevails over conspiracy theories.

Specific examples of potential reforms that could enhance transparency and strengthen ethical standards include implementing stricter regulations on campaign financing to reduce the influence of money in politics and promote a more level playing field. Requiring political leaders to publicly disclose their assets and liabilities can help deter corruption and promote accountability. Empowering institutions like the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) with greater resources and autonomy can enhance their ability to investigate corruption and hold officials accountable. Establishing legal frameworks that protect whistleblowers who report corruption or unethical practices can encourage transparency and expose wrongdoing. Additionally, promoting media independence and fostering a culture of investigative journalism can help hold political leaders accountable and provide citizens with accurate information.

By implementing these and other reforms, Nepal can rebuild public trust in its political institutions and ensure a more stable and prosperous future.

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