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**Demographic Change and Border Security Governance of Nepal:
An Analysis of Perceptions**

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Abstract

Demographic changes in Nepal have significant implications for national security, particularly border security. The shifting populations, internal migration from rural to urban areas, and cross-border movements have given rise to various challenges like illegal border crossings, human trafficking, smuggling, and other activities that jeopardize security and stability. Despite several efforts, border security continues to be a pressing issue, and there is a lack of understanding of how local-level elected representatives perceive the implications of demographic change on border security. This research primarily aims to analyze the perception of threat among locally elected representatives concerning the root causes of demographic change at their respective local levels. It also seeks to examine their perception of how demographic change affects border security governance and identify the security threats perceived due to such changes. Moreover, the study aims to determine the perceived role of responsible authorities or agencies in mitigating the security risks associated with demographic change. To achieve these objectives, the research follows an analytical approach, gathering perceptions from elected representatives of various local governments. It uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze their views on border security issues arising from changing demographics in Nepal. The focus areas are the Nepalese territories connected to neighboring countries China and India. The primary

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data source for the research is local-level government representatives, and the analysis involves thematic exploration of qualitative interviews and quantitative examination of population trends. However, it's important to note that the findings may have limited generalizability, as they are based solely on the perceptions of elected representatives. The study does not include perspectives from security forces or other agencies. The selected areas for the study include regions in Nepal experiencing frequent population decrease, such as Bhotekoshi rural municipality and Jugal rural municipality of Sindhupalchowk district, as well as areas with frequent population increase, including Rajdevi Municipality and Gaur Municipality of Rautahat, Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan City of Banke, and Bhajani Municipality and Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City of Kailali District. The study sheds light on the main drivers of demographic change, such as the pursuit of better health, education, employment, and quality of life, and their long-term impact on national and border security. By engaging local-level elected representatives and employing an analytical approach, this research aims to fill the existing research gap and provide valuable information to policymakers for effectively addressing border security challenges arising from demographic change in Nepal.

Introduction

Demographic change, encompassing shifts in population size, composition, and distribution, profoundly influences various aspects of society (UNFPA, 2017). In the context of Nepal, these demographic dynamics significantly shape border security governance. The challenges associated with border security become more complex when the country experiences demographic shifts, including population expansion, internal rural-to-urban migration, and cross-border movements. It is crucial to comprehend the effects of demographic change on border security in Nepal to effectively address these issues and safeguard the integrity of national borders.

Population growth plays a pivotal role in Nepal's demographic transformation. Factors like high birth rates, improved healthcare, and longer life expectancies have led to steady population growth over time (UNFPA, 2019). Consequently, this population increase places pressure on border security as it leads to heightened demands for resources, services, and opportunities, driving migration patterns within the country and across its borders (Hill et al., 2020). The management and security of borders become imperative in the face of population growth and the associated challenges. Additionally, certain circumstances, such as high mortality, disasters, inadequate healthcare, and pandemic diseases, may cause population declines in specific regions. Internal migration from rural to urban areas is another significant demographic development impacting Nepal's border security. This movement includes refugees, internally displaced individuals, and economic migrants seeking better living conditions due to economic disparities, limited employment opportunities, and improved access to healthcare and education facilities (Mishra et al., 2021). The concentration of populations in metropolitan areas, particularly near major cities and towns, intensifies pressure on border security by straining public services, infrastructure, and leading to an increased likelihood of irregular border crossings (Adhikari & Gurung, 2018). Managing and surveilling border areas become crucial to address the effects of internal migration on

border security.

Despite research on the impact of demography change and border security governance in Nepal, the topic has not been adequately addressed yet. This study seeks to fill a critical gap in the analysis of perceptions regarding the changing demography and the impact of border security in Nepal. The possible impact of cross-border migration on Nepal's border security has been theoretically discussed. Cross-border migrations, along with internal migration, present challenges to Nepal's border security due to its proximity to China and India. The country is vulnerable to various transnational activities, including unlawful trade, human trafficking, and drug smuggling (Bhattarai, 2020). Demographic changes, such as population growth and internal migration, create vulnerabilities that criminal networks exploit for illicit activities (UNODC, 2020). Strengthening border surveillance, enhancing intelligence sharing with neighboring countries, and implementing efficient border control measures are essential to mitigate risks associated with cross-border movements. Addressing the impact of demographic change on border security requires a comprehensive approach. This entails addressing the root causes of population changes, promoting economic development, reducing inequalities, and ensuring political stability in Nepal to minimize the push factors that drive migration, thereby alleviating pressures on border security. Effectively managing migration pressures and ensuring the integrity of Nepal's borders necessitates efficient border control procedures, increased monitoring, and cooperation with neighboring countries. Addressing the underlying causes of demographic change, such as economic disparities and political instability, is vital in managing migration pressures and maintaining Nepal's border security. The research endeavors to explore the perspectives of locally elected representatives concerning border security challenges arising from shifting demographics. Numerous research studies have examined the relationship between changing demographics and border security. While various approaches and viewpoints can be utilized to analyze these perceptions, there has been no research conducted in Nepal specifically focusing on the perception of local-level elected representatives regarding border security. As representatives of local governments, these elected officials play a vital role in addressing the complex issues at the border, including border governance, management, demographic changes, and urbanization in border regions. Therefore, conducting a perception analysis is crucial, as it serves as the foundational step in understanding these multifaceted phenomena.

Specifically, the research questions focus on the causes of demographic change, its impacts, the security threats it raises, and the responsible authorities for mitigating such risks. The study concentrates on local-level areas in Nepal with significantly decreasing and increasing demographic trends, linked to neighboring countries China and India. The research scope includes threat perception analysis of locally elected representatives from Bhotekoshi rural municipality and Jugal rural municipality of Sindhupalchok, Rajdevi Municipality and Gaur Municipality of Rautahat, Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan City of Banke, and Bhajani Municipality and Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City of Kailali District of Nepal. The analysis is based on comparing demographic change trends between the latest two censuses of Nepal. To ensure precision in the analysis, this

research focuses solely on the perception analysis of elected representatives of local-level government. The study excludes perception analysis from security forces or other concerned agencies regarding the issue.

The research adopts a mixed-method design, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data sources. It analyzes how locally elected representatives in Nepal perceive border security challenges due to changing demographics. Findings may have limited generalizability and exclude perspectives from security forces or other agencies. Local-level government representatives (Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Chairperson of Rural Municipality, Vice Chairperson of Rural Municipality, and Ward Chairpersons) are chosen as primary data sources. Data is collected through interviews using a structured questionnaire designed to understand the respondents' perceptions on the causes and impacts of demographic change on border security, as well as the identified security threats. Local-level government is selected as the data source since the major challenges faced in the realm of border security directly impact the local level. Primary data is collected through interviews with selected local level representatives using a carefully designed questionnaire. The research measures the population trends in areas frequently experiencing decreasing demographics connected to China and increasing demographics linked to India. The selected local levels for analysis are Bhotekoshi Rural Municipality and Jugal Rural Municipality of Sindhupalchowk District, which connect to China, and Rajdevi Municipality and Gaur Municipality of Rautahat, Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan City of Banke, and Bhajani Municipality and Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City of Kailali District, which connect to India.

The key focus of this research lies in examining the threat perception of the elected representatives. Respondents were asked to prioritize their concerns among fourteen potential threats, and their perceptions of the causes of demographic change leading to rapid migration were also explored. The study identified the respondents' threat perceptions on border security, primarily linked to demographic change, which encompassed economic instability, illegal residence, social and cultural conflicts, ethnic and regional conflicts, organized crime, terrorism, conflicts in border residents, incidents of law violations, development inequalities, religious conflicts, food crises, informal border trade (smuggling), energy crises, and economic inequality. The analysis includes a comparison of demographic change trends between the latest two censuses of Nepal to measure the population shifts in the selected areas. Qualitative data from interviews is analyzed thematically to identify the key causes, impacts, and security threats related to demographic change. The research focuses solely on the perception analysis of elected representatives of local-level government, excluding perception analysis from security forces or other concerned agencies.

Theoretical Discussion

This research is grounded in the theoretical framework of cognitive study of international relations, which emphasizes the importance of both objective reality and actors' understanding in comprehending threats and peace. It acknowledges that security is influenced by how various actors perceive each other, considering multidimensional

factors such as historical facts, relationships, economic conditions, and even global warming's impact on mutual understanding. Specifically, this study centers on the perception of local government officials, delving into how they believe and perceive security issues. The focus lies in understanding the connection between changing demographics in their areas and the subsequent shifts in threats and border security. By doing so, the research bridges the cognitive study of international relations with the constructivist perspective, which places significance on perceptions and their role in shaping security dynamics. The perception of security concerning a specific border is influenced by its symbolic significance, historical traditions, overall image, and contemporary discussions. A notable example is Finland, where the boundary with Sweden is viewed positively despite past conflicts, while the border with Russia is associated with concerns about illegal migration, crime, pollutants, and other threats. Another instance can be observed in the relationship between Russia and Kazakhstan, where mutual perceptions of security act as a significant barrier to cross-border cooperation. Russia tends to view the boundary with Kazakhstan as a source of various threats to national and regional security, such as drug trafficking, Muslim fundamentalism, terrorism, and illegal immigration from Afghanistan and Central Asia. Conversely, Kazakhstan fears potential Russian irredentism in regions north of Russia's territory, which is a shared concern among the political elite and the local population.

The fundamental determinant of demographic change lies in fertility patterns and reproductive behavior (Bongaarts & Casterline, 2013). This critical aspect highlights the significance of individual choices regarding family size, contraceptive use, and desired fertility, which greatly influence population growth or decline. The work of Jones (2017) underscores the complex interplay of various variables, such as educational attainment, access to reproductive healthcare, cultural norms, and gender equality, in shaping fertility rates. Policymakers and researchers must understand these intricate dynamics to devise effective population management strategies.

Mortality rates and life expectancy are equally pivotal determinants of population change (Preston et al., 2018). Improvements in sanitation, nutrition, and healthcare have led to declining mortality rates worldwide, significantly impacting population structures. Bongaarts (2017) emphasizes that the rise in life expectancy has far-reaching implications for workforce dynamics, healthcare systems, and social welfare programs. These critical issues necessitate urgent attention from policymakers to address the challenges of an aging population. Population change is extensively influenced by socio-economic variables and development (Lutz et al., 2018). The critical role of education, income levels, employment opportunities, and social policies in shaping demographic transitions cannot be underestimated. Cohen (2019) highlights the correlation between higher levels of education, particularly among women, and lower fertility rates with delayed childbearing. Understanding these intricacies is crucial for policymakers and stakeholders in crafting effective strategies for sustainable development.

Economic development and urbanization significantly impact migration patterns, reshaping population distributions across regions (Bilsborrow, 2013). This critical aspect underscores the need to comprehend population dynamics and implement

sustainable development strategies, considering the ever-changing socio-economic landscape. The emerging determinants of population change are environmental pressures and climate change (Hunter et al., 2018). The critical work of Crescenzi et al. (2017) highlights how natural disasters, resource scarcity, and environmental degradation can lead to population displacement and migration. Rising sea levels and extreme weather events pose particularly significant challenges to coastal populations, as emphasized by Wadsworth (2020). These pressing environmental issues require immediate attention to mitigate their adverse effects on global populations.

Fertility, Mortality and Border Security

Birth and death rates have significant implications for border security, as they directly influence population growth, demographic composition, and internal migration patterns. Understanding these demographic dynamics is crucial for formulating effective border security policies and strategies. High birth rates contribute to population expansion, placing increased pressure on border regions in terms of resource demands and services (UNFPA, 2019). Rapid population growth can lead to overcrowding in urban areas, straining infrastructure and public services, which may inadvertently exacerbate migration patterns within the country and across its borders (Hill et al., 2020). This migration, driven by population pressures, can potentially impact border security as authorities grapple with the management of cross-border movements and unauthorized border crossings.

On the other hand, death rates and life expectancy are also pivotal factors shaping population dynamics. Improvements in healthcare, nutrition, and sanitation have led to declining mortality rates globally (Preston et al., 2018). Longer life expectancies can alter population structures and contribute to an aging population. An aging population can pose unique security challenges, such as changes in workforce dynamics, strain on healthcare systems, and increased demand for social welfare programs (Bongaarts, 2017). The interplay of birth and death rates, along with other demographic variables, can lead to complex internal migration patterns. The movement of people from rural to urban areas in search of better opportunities can concentrate populations in specific regions, affecting border security by creating potential vulnerabilities in metropolitan areas near major cities and towns (Adhikari & Gurung, 2018). These migration patterns also contribute to social and cultural conflicts and economic disparities, impacting the overall stability of border regions.

Migration and Border Security

Migration and border security are intricately connected, especially when facing the increasing threats associated with migration. Demographic changes such as population growth, internal migration from rural to urban areas, and cross-border movements have a profound impact on border security in Nepal (UNFPA, 2017; UNFPA, 2019; Mishra et al., 2021; Bhattarai, 2020). It becomes difficult to maintain efficient border security procedures when migratory flows increase. The hazards to national security and sovereignty increase as unauthorized border crossings become more prevalent (Hill et al., 2020). This necessitates additional border control measures, such as the use of

advanced technology, enhanced monitoring, and the construction of border outposts (Kafle, 2018).

Moreover, the rise in smuggling and human trafficking activities poses a grave concern. Criminal networks exploit demographic changes, taking advantage of population growth and internal migration, thus threatening security and stability (UNODC, 2020). To combat such transnational crimes effectively, concerted efforts must be made to strengthen border control mechanisms (Adhikari & Gurung, 2018). The increasing migration pressures also strain existing resources and infrastructure. The demands for resources, services, and opportunities associated with population growth can drive migration patterns within the country and across its borders (Hill et al., 2020). To address these challenges, Nepal recognizes the importance of strengthening border control personnel and improving infrastructure along the borders (Shrestha, 2020).

As a result of population shift, border security challenges must also be managed through international cooperation and coordination with adjacent nations. Nepal actively participates in bilateral and multilateral actions to improve information sharing, information exchange, and coordinated action against transnational crimes (Ministry of Home Affairs, Nepal, 2021; Pokharel, 2017). Instances of these initiatives include cooperative border talks and involvement and active participation of Nepal in regional organizations like BIMSTEC and SAARC. It is crucial to remember that border security and migration also have wider social and political implications. Migration and demographic shifts have an effect on a country's identity, culture, and economic resources, which can result in social conflicts, public debates, and even social instability (Bhandari et al., 2022). Reducing migratory pressures and boosting border security depend on addressing the root causes of the demographic shift, such as economic inequality and political instability (Bhandari et al., 2022).

Border security and migration are intertwined, and the threats brought on by migration make it more difficult to maintain efficient border control measures. Unauthorized border crossings, human trafficking, smuggling, resource depletion, and social and political ramifications all call for comprehensive strategies that include innovative technologies, elevated surveillance, collaboration with neighboring nations, and addressing the underlying causes of demographic change. Understanding and strongly addressing these issues will enable Nepal to safeguard its national interests, advance regional stability, and efficiently manage its borders.

Issues and Challenges in Border Security of Nepal

Nepal, nestled in the heart of the Himalayas, shares borders with two regional powers, India and China. Given its geopolitical position and the potential implications of cross-border operations, Nepal lays utmost significance on maintaining its national borders. Nepal recognizes the significance of robust border management and surveillance systems in maintaining security. It has implemented various measures, including the deployment of security forces and the establishment of border outposts (Kafle, 2018). These initiatives aim to facilitate lawful cross-border trade and human movement while discouraging transnational crimes including human trafficking, smuggling, and illegal

border crossings (Government of Nepal, 2019). By addressing socioeconomic disparities and promoting inclusive development, Nepal aims to enhance border security and reduce vulnerabilities that can be exploited by illicit actors.

However, Nepal faces unique challenges in maintaining its border security. The rugged Himalayan terrain creates geographical constraints, hindering infrastructure development and effective surveillance (Pant, 2022). Potential invaders are able to take advantage of the geographic obstacles since the difficult terrain hinders access and reduces the effectiveness of patrolling efforts (Pant, 2019). Porous and open borders with India pose a significant challenge, as insufficient infrastructure and border management tools contribute to the porosity, allowing illegal activities to thrive (Poudyal, 2019). The absence of fencing, checkpoints, and surveillance systems contributes to the porosity of the border, making it challenging to monitor and control illegal activities (Poudyal, 2015). Cultural and ritual exchanges among the population surrounding both sides of the border, known as the Roti-beti relation, can also trigger border security issues, as incidents like the 2015 protest in Birgunj demonstrate (The Kathmandu Post, November 2, 2015). Nepal's open borders facilitate various transnational criminal activities, including drug trafficking, human trafficking, and the smuggling of illegal products (Acharya, 2022). The lack of stringent border control measures and the presence of unofficial crossing points make it easier for criminal groups to engage in these illicit activities (Acharya, 2017).

Additionally, due to Nepal's open borders with India, there is a substantial amount of cross-border movement involving both legal and illegal travel, creating difficulties for managing and controlling immigration of undocumented migrants (Bhargava & Kumar, 2016). Unrestricted border crossings put a strain on available resources and raise security issues (Bhargava & Kumar, 2016). The border regions of Nepal are home to various ethnic and cultural groups, adding complexity to border security efforts. The efficiency of border control measures can be impacted by political and ethnic tensions in these areas, requiring a nuanced approach to address security challenges (Bhargava & Kumar, 2016). Nepal's border security agencies struggle with limited resources, hindering their ability to maintain efficient border management. Challenges such as inadequate personnel, training, and modern technology make it difficult for the authorities to monitor operations, perform thorough border surveillance, and effectively address security risks (Pant, 2019).

Internal Migration Trends in Nepal

Internal migration trends in Nepal, particularly from the highlands and countryside to the Terai and cities, have significant implications for population distribution and national security. The movement of people from rural to urban areas is driven by various factors, including the desire for better economic prospects, improved infrastructure, and access to services (Cleweet, 2015). This internal migration trend is reshaping the demographic landscape, with cities experiencing rapid expansion while rural areas face population decrease, creating challenges for resource allocation and service provision (Bilsborrow, 2013).

The Nepal Migration Report 2020 highlights the increasing trend of internal migration, with young people between the ages of 15 and 29 constituting the majority of migrants, seeking employment opportunities and education in urban centers (IOM, 2020). Economic factors, such as wage disparities, employment opportunities, and changes in the agriculture industry, play a central role in influencing internal migration in Nepal (Kandel & Massey, 2002). As the population gravitates towards urban areas, pressure mounts on urban infrastructure and public services, leading to heightened demands for housing, healthcare, and education facilities. Social networks and familial ties also influence migration patterns, with people settling in places where they have relatives or connections, establishing social support systems that can aid their integration into urban communities (Kandel & Massey, 2002). However, this phenomenon can also create challenges in terms of urban planning and service provision, as urban areas must accommodate the influx of migrants and address the needs of both long-term residents and newcomers.

The asymmetric lifestyle between the Terai and highland regions is a fundamental factor leading to migration from the highlands to the Terai region (Kandel & Massey, 2002). Economic disparities between the regions and the availability of employment opportunities in the Terai region act as pull factors for migration. However, this migration pattern also poses challenges for the equitable development of both regions and may exacerbate existing economic disparities. Understanding these internal migration trends is critical for formulating effective border security policies and strategies. As population distribution shifts, border regions may face demographic changes that impact resources, services, and security (Bilsborrow, 2013). Moreover, internal migration patterns can influence vulnerabilities and security concerns related to border regions. For instance, increased migration to urban centers may strain available resources, leading to heightened demand for cross-border trade and potential illicit activities (Clewee, 2015).

In light of these challenges, a critical analysis of internal migration trends and their impact on border security is essential for safeguarding national interests and ensuring the effective management of Nepal's borders. Policymakers must address the socio-economic factors driving migration, promote balanced regional development, and establish comprehensive border control measures that account for changing population dynamics (Gurung & Khanal, 2021). By proactively addressing the implications of internal migration on border security, Nepal can enhance its capacity to manage cross-border movements, mitigate security risks, and foster sustainable development across the country.

Table 1

Population of Nepal According to Geographical Regions in Different Years

Census Year	Mountain	Hill	Terai
1991	1,443,130	8,419,889	8,628,078
2001	1,687,859	10,251,111	11,938,970

2011	1,781,792	11,394,007	13,318,705
2021	1,772,948	11,757,624	15,634,006

Note. CBS (2021).

The data provided in the table above represents the population distribution in different regions of Nepal over four census years: 1991, 2001, 2011, and 2021. Notably, the population in all three regions- the Mountain, Hill, and Terai- has consistently increased during this period. The Terai region consistently exhibits the highest population count, indicating a greater rate of urbanization and migration towards the plains. This aligns with internal migration trends where people from the highlands and hills migrate to urban areas in the Terai for better economic prospects and access to services. The changing population distribution has implications for resource allocation, infrastructure development, and urban planning, and it also impacts border security governance, as regions experiencing rapid population growth may face increased pressure on border management and security measures.

The research investigates the root causes of population change, and its impact on border security and also figures out the concerned authorities responsible for mitigating the risks created by frequently decreasing populations around the border connected to China (Bhotekoshi rural municipality and Jugal rural municipality of Sindhupalchowk District of Nepal). Likewise, this research also tends to investigate the root causes, its impact on border security governance and responsible authority to mitigate the security risks created by the rapidly growing demography of Rajdevi Municipality and Gaur Municipality of Rautahat, the Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan City of Banke and Bhajani Municipality and Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City of Kailali District of Nepal around the border linked with India. The following table represents the changing demographic trends of above mentioned local levels through the time span of latest two decades.

Table 2

Change in Population of Different Local Levels in 2011 and 2021

S.No.	District	Local Levels	Population in 2011	Population in 2021	% Change (per year)	Border Linked with
1	Sindhupalchowk	Bhotekoshi Rural Municipality	16631	14318	-1.44 %	China
		Jugal Rural Municipality	19231	18303	-0.47 %	
2	Rautahat	Rajdevi Municipality	30569	35658	1.48 %	India
		Gaur Municipality	34937	39846	1.26 %	
3	Banke	Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan City	138951	164444	1.62 %	India
4	Kailali	Bhajani Municipality	51845	53494	0.30%	India
		Dhangadhi Municipality	147741	198792	2.85%	

Note. CBS (2021).

Research Methodology

This research adopts a mixed-method design, combining both qualitative and quantitative data sources to comprehensively analyze the threat perceptions of locally elected representatives on border security issues arising from changing demography in Nepal. The study focuses on local-level areas in Nepal with significantly decreasing and increasing demographic trends, particularly those connected to neighboring countries China and India.

The research aims to explore how locally elected representatives perceive border security challenges related to changing demographics. While several studies have looked at the connection between demographics and border security, no research has been done in Nepal specifically focusing on the perceptions of local-level elected representatives on this matter. As these officials are directly involved in addressing border governance, management, demographic changes, and urbanization in border areas, analyzing their perceptions is crucial for understanding these complex issues. The research focuses solely on the perception analysis of elected representatives of local-level government to ensure precision in the analysis. The selected local levels for analysis are Bhotekoshi Rural Municipality and Jugal Rural Municipality of Sindhupalchowk District, which connect to China and has frequently decreasing demography trend, and Rajdevi Municipality and Gaur Municipality of Rautahat, Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan City of Banke, and Bhajani Municipality and Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City of Kailali District, which connect to India which has the frequently increasing demography trend. The primary data sources for this research are local-level government representatives, including Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Chairperson of Rural Municipality, Vice Chairperson of Rural Municipality, and Ward Chairpersons. Data is collected through interviews using a structured questionnaire specifically designed to understand the respondents' perceptions on the causes and impacts of demographic change on border security, as well as the identified security threats. The selected areas for analysis are strategically chosen based on their specific demographic trends and proximity to neighboring countries.

The analysis of data involves two main approaches. Firstly, the qualitative data from interviews is analyzed thematically to identify the key causes, impacts, and security threats related to demographic change as perceived by the elected representatives. Secondly, quantitative data, such as population trends in the selected areas, is analyzed to measure the shifts in population demographics. A comparison is made between the latest two censuses of Nepal to understand the changes in population dynamics. The research's scope is limited to selected areas of Nepal, and the findings may not be fully generalizable to other regions of the country. Additionally, the research relies on the accuracy and honesty of the respondents in providing their perceptions and may be subject to potential biases. The study excludes perception analysis from security forces or other concerned agencies, which might have provided additional perspectives on the subject.

Findings

The research is grounded in theoretical frameworks that include Demographic Transition Theory, Security Studies, Border Governance, and Perception Theory. These theoretical foundations allow for a comprehensive examination of the complex relationship between demographic changes and border security governance in Nepal. The research delves into the demographic dynamics of Nepal, including population growth, internal migration, and cross-border movements, and their profound implications for border security. The Demographic Transition Theory helps in understanding the patterns of population change over time, while Security Studies and Border Governance provide insights into how these demographic shifts impact border security challenges, such as human trafficking, smuggling, and transnational crimes. Moreover, Perception Theory forms a critical component, enabling the analysis of the perceptions of locally elected representatives regarding the causes, impacts, and security threats associated with demographic change.

Perception analysis assumes paramount importance as it offers valuable insights into how key stakeholders, particularly locally elected representatives, interpret and comprehend demographic changes and their effects on border security. By uncovering these perceptions, the research can identify priority areas, potential gaps in understanding, and specific threats that resonate at the local governance level. The significance of interviews with elected representatives lies in their ability to provide firsthand perspectives on border security issues, especially at the local level where these challenges directly impact communities. Engaging in interviews offers a personalized approach, enabling researchers to capture nuanced insights, comprehend the local context, and understand the complexities of managing border security amidst demographic changes.

Out of forty-one key informant interviewees, five were the Mayors of respective municipalities and two were the Chairpersons of rural municipalities. Also, one deputy mayor and two vice chairpersons of respective local governments were interviewed. Thirty-one ward chairpersons were taken into account to collect primary data regarding the topic.

Table 3

Causes of Demographic Change

Causes		Extremely influenced	Highly influenced	Moderately influenced	Less influenced	Very less influenced	Total
Shifts from Agricultural Sector	Frequency	9	14	7	11	0	41
	Percent	21.95	34.15	17.07	26.83	0.00	100.00
Opportunities for Employment	Frequency	33	7	1	0	0	41
	Percent	80.50	17.10	2.40	0.00	0.00	100.00
Growth of Income	Frequency	1	14	18	8	0	41
	Percent	2.40	34.10	43.90	19.50	0.00	100.00

Threat of Conflict	Frequency	11	3	9	16	2	41
	Percent	26.80	7.30	22.00	39.00	4.90	100.00
Social Conflict	Frequency	0	0	8	33	0	41
	Percent	0.00	0.00	19.50	80.50	0.00	100.00
Child Education	Frequency	30	9	0	2	0	41
	Percent	73.20	22.00	0.00	4.90	0.00	100.00
Search for a Better Life	Frequency	35	6	0	0	0	41
	Percent	85.40	14.60	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
Attraction of Opportunities	Frequency	21	3	5	12	0	41
	Percent	51.20	7.30	12.20	29.30	0.00	100.00
Others	Frequency	18	8	8	7	0	41
	Percent	43.90	19.50	19.50	17.10	0.00	100.00

Note. Interview taken from local level respondents (2023).

Analyzing the above table, no. 3, it is observed that the perception of the majority of interviewees regarding the cause of demographic change lies successively in the search for a better life (85.40%), opportunities for employment (80.50%), and education of children (73.20%). Other causes include the attraction of opportunity and the shift from the agricultural sector. While the less influencing factors of demographic change as per the majority of key informants are social conflict and the threat of other conflicts.

Many of the informants from frequently decreasing demographic regions- Bhotekoshi Rural Municipality and Jugal Rural Municipality of Sindhupalchowk district argued that the earthquake of 2015 resulted in massive destruction of geological places that led to the unsuitability of the places for living thus, forcing people to shift towards geographically safer zones. Informants of the same location perceived that people with fiscal purposes migrated to other places from there after the Tatopani and Kodari border got locked down by the government of China. Having less chance of being employed, the ones who has to earn money for their family went abroad for foreign employment while the dependent members of the same family shifted towards town and city areas for better education of their children.

Informants from frequently increasing demographic regions that are Rajdevi Municipality and Gaur Municipality of Rautahat, Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan City of Banke and Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City and Bhajani Municipality of Kailali- perceived cause of changing demography to be ritual and religious beliefs of people in the Muslim community where the use of contraceptives is prohibited and the myth of giving birth to more number of babies believing children as god's gift is prevalent in Islam religion.

Table 4*Impacts of Changing Demography in Border Security*

Factors		Extremely influencing	Highly influenced	Moderately influencing	Less influenced	Very less influenced	Total
Economic Instability	Frequency	18	11	8	4	0	41
	Percent	43.90	26.80	19.50	9.80	0.00	100.00
Illegal Residence	Frequency	5	15	7	12	2	41
	Percent	12.20	36.60	17.10	29.30	4.90	100.00
Social and Cultural Conflict	Frequency	5	7	12	14	3	41
	Percent	12.20	17.10	29.30	34.10	7.30	100.00
Ethnic and Regional Conflict	Frequency	1.0	3.0	14.0	14.0	9.0	41.0
	Percent	2.40	7.30	34.10	34.10	22.00	100.00
Organized Crime	Frequency	1	8	9	18	5	41
	Percent	2.40	19.50	22.00	43.90	12.20	100.00
Threat of Terrorism	Frequency	0	3	9	18	11	41
	Percent	0.00	7.30	22.00	43.90	26.80	100.00
Energy Crisis	Frequency	0	2	14	23	2	41
	Percent	0.00	4.90	34.10	56.10	4.90	100.00
Conflict in border resident	Frequency	1	9	8	21	2	41
	Percent	2.40	22.00	19.50	51.20	4.90	100.00
Economic Inequality	Frequency	13	13	10	5	0	41
	Percent	31.70	31.70	24.40	12.20	0.00	100.00
Incidence of violation of law	Frequency	16	5	13	4	3	41
	Percent	39.02	12.20	31.70	9.75	7.30	100.00
Inequality in Development	Frequency	10	13	9	9	0	41
	Percent	24.40	31.70	22.00	22.00	0.00	100.00
Religious Conflict	Frequency	1	4	9	17	10	41
	Percent	2.40	9.80	22.00	41.50	24.40	100.00
Food Crisis	Frequency	3	13	10	6	9	41
	Percent	7.30	31.70	24.40	14.60	22.00	100.00
Informal Trade(Chori/ Paithari) in Border	Frequency	25	3	2	9	2	41
	Percent	60.97	7.30	4.90	21.95	4.90	100.00

Note. Interview taken from local level respondents (2023).

Interpreting the above table no.4, it is found through the perception analysis of the interviewed representatives that informal trade (Chori/ Paithari) in border areas is observed as a major impact of changing demography (60.97%), followed by economic instability (43.90%), incidence of violation of laws (39.02%) and economic inequality (31.70%). Whereas, the threat of terrorism (26.80%), ethnic and regional conflict (22.00%), religious conflict (24.40%), and food crisis (22.00%) are observed to be relatively less influenced by changing demography. The investigation shows that changing democracy has a significant impact on border security. Representatives of

local government have the perception that threat on the border side is increasing along with increasing population due to their geography linked with neighboring countries on border areas. Representatives were found afraid of the threat of economic instability, informal trade, ethnic and cross-border conflict, unemployment, the incidence of violation of laws, and many more consequences raised by changing demography in border areas. Additionally, the study shows that border security threat is highly influenced by the open border of Nepal and India more than that of China.

Table 5

Perception of Representatives on Role of Authorities to Mitigate the Risks Generated by Demographic Change

Various Authorities		Extremely Effective	Very Effective	Moderately Effective	Less Effective	Very less Effective	Total no. of respondents
Federal Government	Frequency	32	4	5	0	0	41
	Percent	78.00	9.80	12.20	0.00	0.00	100.00
Federal Member of Parliament	Frequency	2	17	22	0	0	41
	Percent	4.90	41.50	53.70	0.00	0.00	100.00
State Government	Frequency	20	15	6	0	0	41
	Percent	48.80	36.60	14.60	0.00	0.00	100.00
State Assembly	Frequency	2	21	18	0	0	41
	Percent	4.90	51.20	43.90	0.00	0.00	100.00
Local Government	Frequency	24	9	7	1	0	41
	Percent	58.50	22.00	17.10	2.40	0.00	100.00
Nepal Police	Frequency	5	6	10	18	2	41
	Percent	12.20	14.60	24.40	43.90	4.90	100.00
Armed Police	Frequency	9	2	10	18	2	41
	Percent	22.00	4.90	24.40	43.90	4.90	100.00
Nepal Army	Frequency	4	5	11	19	2	41
	Percent	9.80	12.20	26.80	46.30	4.90	100.00
Non-governmental Organization	Frequency	0	0	9	29	3	41
	Percent	0.00	0.00	22.00	70.70	7.30	100.00
Court	Frequency	0	0	7	30	4	41
	Percent	0.00	0.00	17.10	73.20	9.80	100.00
District Administrative Office	Frequency	9	3	10	17	2	41
	Percent	22.00	7.30	24.40	41.50	4.90	100.00
Media	Frequency	17	11	9	4	0	41
	Percent	41.50	26.80	22.00	9.80	0.00	100.00

Note. Interview taken from Respondents, (2023)

Through the investigation and analysis of the table no 5, it is found that the perception of the majority of interviewed representatives is based on the view that the federal government is primarily responsible for risk mitigation caused by changing population dynamics which has been resolving the risks in extremely effective ways (78%), with

similar efficacy followed by local government (58.50%), state government (48.80%) and Media too (41.50%). Also, the perception analysis states court roles to be effective in the lowest manner (73.20%) followed by the minimalistic role of non-governmental organizations (70.70%) including the sparse role of Nepal Police, Armed Police Force (43.90%), and others.

As provided by Schedule 5 [Related to Article 57 (1 and 109)] of the Constitution of Nepal, 2015, regarding the protection of national unity and territorial integrity, as well as rights and responsibilities regarding national security, the central government has power and jurisdictions to maintain them all and manage the security that includes border and such securities as well. This investigation has found the perceptions of local-level officials that changing demography have a significant impact on the border and several security prospects and the central government has the primary role to mitigate such security threats. So, the central government should enhance the investment to build the infrastructures and further investment ought to be done to maintain and manage the border security and should mobilize the national resources to control cross-border crimes and informal trade in the border.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This is not typically deductive research, where variables are derived from theory testing. In a large sense, this is an inductive search. When it tries to generate ideas about how the threat has been perceived by the local government members, there is a huge demography change, and it tries to connect these ideas with the theory and discussion of the security study, border study, and international relations. In that sense, this is generally hypothesis-generating research. Changing demography has major two dimensions: one is increasing demography while another is decreasing. The causes of changing demography vary according to geographical regions and the socio-economic and cultural background of society and the people over there. Demography rapidly decreasing or increasing has different consequences regarding various issues on border security as the perception expressed by the local level government. The perceptions argued by the representative of local level governments are similar to each other that is expressed as,

- a. Changing demography has the cause,
- b. Major drivers of changing demography are the accessibility to health, education, employment, and better life prospect for the people,
- c. Changing demography has its security implications including the threat to border security such as economic instability, illegal residence, social and cultural conflict, ethnical and regional conflict, organized crime, threat of terrorism and others,
- d. Security threats can be mitigated,
- e. The role to mitigate security threats is the obligation of the federal government,
- f. The threat perceptions of the local level governments of frequently increasing demography and frequently decreasing demography vary accordingly, such as,

increasing demography is perceived to cause social conflict resulting in border threat meanwhile decreasing demography is perceived to cause a lack of unified people to secure the border

It is recommended that the federal government should tie up with local-level governments to mitigate the causes and consequences of demographic change that impact border security and result in cross-border security issues. Related Schedules and Provisions of the Constitution of Nepal and respective laws regarding national security should also be amended to delegate the power and jurisdiction to the local level government for border security.

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