

Political Engagement and Conflict: A Study of Youth Migrant Returnees in Kaski District, Nepal

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Abstract

This paper examines the political engagement of youth migrant returnees and emergence of conflict during their political reintegration in Nepal. This paper focuses specifically on political engagement and conflict dynamics among youth migrant returnees in Kaski District. The study investigates whether political conflict emerges primarily from the assertive participation of returnees or from resistance by established political actors. Using qualitative approach that includes 15 key informant interviews and a structured survey of 200 returnees, the study finds that although migrant returnees are highly motivated to participate in local politics and actively seek entry, established local structures frequently oppose their inclusion, leading to rivalry and conflict. Reintegration into Nepal's hierarchical and patronage-driven political structures is still difficult, even though many returnees report having moderate-to-high political awareness, international experiences, and exposure to leading role and management in their workplaces. Study finds that both reasons coexist as causes for conflict- migrant returnees actively seeking entry into local politics

Keywords:

Political engagement, youth, migration, returnees, conflict, Nepal

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and existing political parties resisting their political participation which can be seen in the form of ideological gaps, generational divides, and power rivalries rather than direct hostility. Overall, this study includes reinterpretations of international theories of political engagement and conflict, including relative deprivation, political socialization, and social capital. It emphasizes on the structured reintegration and participatory governance reforms as ways to reduce conflict and promote inclusive democracy, and it argues for governmental acknowledgement of returnees as socio-political actors rather than passive economic agents.

Introduction

Youth political engagement is a key factor in social change and democratic renewal. Involving young people in politics promotes intergenerational representation in governance in addition to creativity and accountability. However, in developing nations like Nepal, the youth, who are best suited to spearhead reform, are also the most mobile. With remittances accounting for over 28% of the country's GDP, labour migration has changed Nepal's socioeconomic structure during the last ten years (World Bank, 2023). A paradoxical social dynamic has been created within this process by the outmigration of productive youth and the return of politically conscious, socially exposed individuals. Although returnees bring new perspectives and skills to the table, their reintegration into traditional political systems is frequently tense.

Gandaki Province's Kaski District serves as an example. Since the early 2000s, Kaski, which is well-known as a political center and one of the districts that sends the most labour to Nepal, has seen a significant influx of young people. According to the International Organization for Migration, 11.6% of Gandaki Province's total population resides abroad, with Kaski contributing the largest share (23.2%), followed by Nawalparasi East (15.6%), Tanahun (13.0%), and Syangja (12.3%) (IOM, 2024). After labour contracts expired, significant number have returned (Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security [MoLESS], 2022). These returnees' growing presence in public settings, including as ward meetings and local party offices, has spurred discussions about their political role and possible points of contention.

Human history has been marked by migration. Ravenstein (1885) framed the "Laws of Migration" based on analysis of the 1881 British census, providing one of the initial systematic attempts to explain migration patterns. His work identified key regularities, including the importance of distance, the predominance of short-distance migration, rural-to-urban movement, and gender differences, with women more likely to migrate over shorter

distances. Ravenstein highlighted that economic factors, particularly the search for better employment opportunities, were the primary drivers of migration, while improvements in transport and communication facilitated movement. Although essentially descriptive, his laws laid the empirical foundation for later theoretical expansions in migration studies. Stouffer (1960) introduced the concept of intervening opportunities, highlighting that migration decisions are shaped not only by origin and destination factors but also by the opportunities and constraints encountered along the way. This perspective complements the push–pull framework later formalized by Lee (1966), which highlights the role of origin conditions, destination attractions, intervening obstacles, and individual characteristics. These foundational theories continue to inform migration studies and have been further contextualized in the Nepali setting by scholars such as Khatiwada (2014).

In response to persistent domestic unemployment and the need to generate remittance inflow, the state actively promotes overseas work, making labour migration from Nepal as a key economic strategy (Sijapati et al., 2017; MoLESS, 2022). As a result, labour migration in Nepal extends beyond individual economic choice and reflects a structurally mediated process shaped by state policy and global labour demand. In this sense, the relationship between migration and politics in Nepal cannot be explained solely by theories of international conflict. Although models such as Gurr's (2010) relative deprivation theory explain irritation resulting from expectations that are not satisfied, they fail to take into account how Nepal's state policy externalizes labour. In a similar vein, broken local political trust networks influenced more by kinship-based mobilization and party patronage than by civic voluntarism must be used to interpret social capital theory (Putnam, 2000). In order to understand how the experience of migration influences participation and conflict upon return, the study places itself inside a hybrid analytical model that integrates perspectives on social capital, political socialization, and structural dependency (Easton & Dennis, 1967).

This article argues that political conflict involving migrant returnees in Nepal is not produced solely by returnees' political ambition nor exclusively by societal resistance. Rather, conflict emerges from a reciprocal interaction between reform-oriented aspirations of returnees and the established gatekeeping practices of established political actors. The current study addresses a fundamental conceptual ambiguity that whether society opposition to their political engagement cause conflict, or migrant returnees themselves create conflict by pursuing political participation. Field data indicates that the two processes are connected. While local political elites view returnees' reformist inclinations and outside exposure as challenges to the current power structure, their attempts to engage frequently undermine

long-standing patronage arrangements. This tension shows up not only in leadership competitions but also in cultural misinterpretations of assertiveness as arrogance, selective mobilization during election seasons, and subtle exclusion from decision-making.

It is found that the political reintegration of returnees in Nepal is still little understood, despite large remittance inflows and the symbolic valuation of migrant labour. Returnees are rarely praised as political participants in the national discourse, rather they are frequently praised as economic contributors only. The reintegration of young returnees in Kaski District has brought up both opportunities and conflicts. Many provide managerial and leading abilities as well as exposure to governance in other countries, but their involvement is restricted by established hierarchies and inflexible networks. Sometimes, this friction shows itself in micro-level conflicts, such as disagreements over local party nominations, development budgets, or ward-level leadership. At the same time, the absence of institutional pathways for engagement often compels returnees to operate through informal or digital spaces, creating a fragmented kind of activism. In this context, this study aims to address the knowledge gaps identified in understanding the political engagement of youth migrant returnees and conflict dynamics in Nepal, with a focus on Kaski District. To achieve the research aim, this paper examines the dynamics and determinants of political engagement among youth migrant returnees; attempts to identify barriers, motivations, and sources of conflict in local political contexts and analyzes how returnees' prior political experience and international exposure shape their political engagement.

Review of Literature

Individual agency, socio-political systems, and foreign exposures combine to impact the political engagement of young migrant returnees. Various types of political engagement have been identified by studies on the subject, ranging from conventional practices like voting and party membership and unconventional ones like petitions, protests, and online activism (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Given that returnees may be influenced by political practices they have experienced elsewhere, this distinction is especially relevant to them.

Migration and return are processes of political reorientation and identity transformation in addition to economic movements. Labour migration is a state-managed coping strategy for unemployment and budget deficits in the majority of emerging nations (ILO, 2022). This dynamic is especially noticeable in Nepal, where labour export is institutionalised by the government as a way to maintain macroeconomic stability through remittances (MoLESS, 2022). As a result, migrant return is an integral aspect of Nepal's political and economic system.

The range of actions people do to participate in political processes, from voting, attending meetings, and joining parties to advocacy and social activism, is referred to as political engagement (Verba et al., 1995). The experience of governance overseas, exposure to democratic or authoritarian systems, individual socioeconomic standing, and the responsiveness of local institutions upon return are some of the overlapping aspects that impact this participation for returnees (Karki & Sijapati, 2018). However, reintegrating politically conscious returnees can become controversial in places like Nepal where networks of kinship, patronage, and factional loyalty play a significant role in mediating political participation. Their foreign-learned standards of accountability, efficiency, and transparency frequently conflict with informal and hierarchical local organizations. The core of the conflict between institutional conservatism and returnee reformism is this disagreement.

Research on return migration in Nepal has mostly concentrated on economic reintegration, including skills transfer, entrepreneurship, and remittance use (Sijapati et al., 2017). Political reintegration, which defines how returnees regain civic agency and voice within their communities, has received less attention. According to research from Ghana (Kleist, 2008), the Philippines (Aguilar, 2014), and Sri Lanka (Perera, 2018), returnees can serve as "development brokers," bridging local customs with global concepts. Nepal's situation is different, though, as many of its returnees are from low-wage labour sectors rather than professional diasporas. Therefore, social legitimacy, the way the local community recognizes and embraces their new worldviews, has a greater influence on their reintegration than institutional capital.

This study recontextualizes four key theoretical frameworks to suit the socio-political setting of Nepal. According to Easton and Dennis' 1967 political socialization theory, political socialization is the process by which people pick up political beliefs and values from peers, institutions, and life events. Migration is one of these life-changing experiences. Youth from Nepal who migrate for work are frequently exposed to models of civic engagement, legal responsibility, and structured governance that they believe are lacking in their home country. These encounters result in altered expectations and behaviours upon return. However, these recently learnt principles are frequently disregarded or mistrusted in a system where patronage politics predominate (Wright, 1975). Therefore, while the theory explains how exposure overseas raises consciousness, it does not explain how institutional institutions at home limit its expression.

According to Gurr's (2010) relative deprivation theory, people become frustrated and conflicted when they believe that their expectations and the real world are not aligned.

This disparity shows up for returnees as they reintegrate. They contrast opaque domestic governance with transparent systems overseas. In Kaski, a large number of respondents expressed disenchantment with local power monopolies and resource allocation. The ensuing annoyance frequently results in assertive reformist behaviour, which elder leaders mistakenly perceive as arrogance, rather than violence. In this sense, Gurr's paradigm aids in the explanation of the psychological underpinnings of dissatisfaction that motivate returnees to engage in political activism or conflict.

According to Putnam's (2000) social capital theory, social capital, such as networks, trust, and norms that promote cooperation, is essential to political participation. Collaborative participation is more likely in settings where there is a high degree of trust. Nonetheless, relatives, ethnicity, and party allegiance are thought to be the main pillars of Nepal's social capital, which is strongly bonding (Dahal, 2019). Cross-culturally exposed returnees are more likely to support bridging capital, which encourages inclusivity and merit-based decision-making. However, Nepal's traditional systems frequently undervalue this type of capital, which leads to a gap between local political traditions and international civic standards. As a result, social capital theory clarifies the reasons why returnees find it difficult to integrate into exclusionary networks while also explaining the possibility of cooperation.

In contrast to many other nations where migration is a personal decision, Nepal's government actively encourages labour export as a means of ensuring the country's economic sustainability. The structural dependency concept, which holds that developing nations continue to rely on international labour markets to support local consumption, is consistent with this pattern (Castles & Miller, 2009). Remittance inflow takes precedence over political reintegration when the state externalises its labour. As a result, the Nepali situation cannot be well explained by notions of international conflict or reconciliation. Conflict here is more about systemic neglect brought about by the state's inability to provide returnees with political spaces that go beyond economic narratives than it is about intergroup violence.

Research conducted in Asia and Africa shows that when migrants return home, they usually try to change local governance. For instance, Malik (2017) noted that Pakistani returnees encountered opposition from established elites, while Rahman (2019) discovered that returnees in Bangladesh frequently eschew traditional party systems in order to participate in civic organisations. Although they were frequently viewed with suspicion, Perera (2018) observed how migration in Sri Lanka turned returnees into agents of localized reform.

Similar processes are being investigated in Nepali studies. According to Karki & Sijapati (2018), migrants who are exposed to democratic cultures abroad show greater political consciousness, but they also encounter obstacles such as institutional access, skepticism, and exclusion. According to Thapa (2017), patronage still dominates Nepal's youth political scene, deterring independent entry. Furthermore, Sijapati et al. (2017) noted that labour migration elevates economic remitters while marginalising them politically, reshaping social hierarchies.

The lack of structural critique in earlier works is a significant gap. Although community-based reintegration is emphasized by international researchers, the Nepali context necessitates an examination of how state policy itself generates conflictual circumstances. Productive young are externalised rather than empowered locally as a result of the government's persistent preference for remittance income over labour welfare (MoLESS, 2022).

Three outcomes result from this remittance governance. They are ideological mismatch, fragmentation of civic engagement, and depoliticisation of migration (Adhikari, 2021). The fragmentation of civic engagement indicates that local institutions rely heavily on patron-client relationships, leaving little room for reform-minded returnees; depoliticisation of migration values migrants for their income rather than their political opinions; and ideological mismatch maintains that exposure to the outside world cultivates liberal-democratic values that are at odds with Nepal's factional political environment. Consequently, institutional exclusion rather than individual behaviour is the primary cause of conflict.

This study attempts to close a significant conceptual and empirical gap. Although earlier Nepali studies like Karki & Sijapati, (2018) and Thapa, (2017) have examined youth migration from an economic perspective, the political aspect was mainly unknown. This study adds to a grounded understanding of the returnees who want to enter politics and the structural and psychological elements that discourage them in the process, inviting conflict in the course of their attempt to engage in politics.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative design to comprehensively examine the political engagement of youth migrant returnees in Kaski District. The Gandaki Province's Kaski District was specifically chosen due to its active local political scene and high proportion of young migrant returnees. Kaski offers a pertinent background for examining the advantages and disadvantages of returnee political participation because it is a semi-urban district

with a variety of political actors. The qualitative design provided in-depth insights into motivations, lived experiences, conflict dynamics and perceived challenges. In order to find recurrent patterns, explanatory elements and qualitative data were transcribed, coded thematically, and then examined. Data sets were integrated to guarantee coherence and thoroughness of interpretation. This article is substantially revised and updated version of the author's MPhil thesis submitted in 2024 to the Department of Conflict, Peace and Development Studies, Tribhuvan University, Nepal.

The study employed a multi-stage purposive sampling strategy. First, Kaski District was selected purposively because of its high rate of labour migration and active local political environment. Within the district, respondents were identified from major municipalities and rural municipalities including Pokhara Metropolitan City. All samples were treated as a whole for the district. The study sample consisted of 200 returnees aged 20–40 years, of whom 68% were male and 32% female. Of those surveyed, roughly 64% had finished secondary school, 21% had degrees from higher education, and 15% had only up to a secondary education. 18% percent had relocated to East Asian countries such as South Korea and Japan, 20% had been in Europe or North America, and the majority (62%) had worked in Malaysia and Gulf states like Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. The average length of time spent abroad was between two to six years. 60% had no previous political connection, whereas 40% had participated in unofficial political activity before migration, such as youth groups or student unions. As a result, responses reflected the diversity of the returnee population, which included both very educated people with prior political exposure and politically unexperienced workers. Stronger inclinations for post-return engagement were demonstrated by the latter group, indicating that political socialization starts prior to migration and develops during cross-border experiences.

This paper acknowledges several limitations. First, the use of purposive and snowball sampling limits the generalizability of the findings beyond Kaski District. Second, the study relies partly on self-reported perceptions of political participation, which may involve recall bias. Third, the relatively modest sample size restricts the application of more advanced statistical modelling. Despite these limitations, this study focuses specifically on youth migrant returnees aged 20–40 years in Kaski District and does not include migrants who have permanently settled abroad or returnees older than 40 years. The research also focuses on local political engagement rather than national-level political participation. These delimitations were adopted to maintain analytical focus on youth reintegration within local governance structures.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents and interprets the main conclusions of the study on the political participation and conflict dynamics of young migrant returnees in Nepal's Kaski District. The findings from four focus group discussions (FGDs) with returnees, local political authorities, and civil society actors, as well as 15 key informant interviews (KIIs), provide context and support for the in-depth qualitative results of the survey of 200 returnees. The findings and discussion are presented under following themes that emerged from the study: (1) Motivations for political engagement (2) political engagement levels and forms; (3) sociocultural and structural constraints; (4) conflict and mediation patterns; and (5) the impact of pre-migration political tendencies.

Motivations for Political Engagement

The migration encouraged increased political consciousness and action by exposing people to a variety of political systems and practices elsewhere. According to survey results, 71% of returnees were inspired to get involved in politics through party affiliation, social action, or involvement in neighborhood associations. The survey participants firmly agreed that the main motivators were the influence of foreign experience (50%) and the need for social change (55%), as well as discontent with government (60%). The disparity between perceived inefficiency at home and effective governance systems elsewhere was frequently highlighted by FGD participants. A 32 year-old returnee from South Korea noted:

During my stay in South Korea, I saw that people are part of the whole system. The system guided everything rather than political structure. When you observe how well systems function abroad, you come to the conclusion that our local leaders lack discipline and honesty rather than resources. I wanted to change that but I realized that, in Nepal, without being a part of politics, nothing can be done solely. So, I decided to get involved in politics.

Such statements demonstrate how returnees' views towards public accountability are reoriented by political socialization during migration, exposure to functioning bureaucracy, civic engagement, and respect for the law. Another recurring theme was community expectation. About 40% of respondents claimed that their exposure and perceived "global perspective" were the reasons why their communities pushed them to get involved in local politics. The idea that returnees possess symbolic capital even in cases when their material reintegration is still lacking is supported by this type of moral pressure.

But there were other reasons besides altruism. Pragmatic motivations like networking, influence, and entrepreneurship were uncovered via FGDs and KIIs. As one respondent said:

I noticed that people abroad are less concerned by politics, but here in Nepal, it seems to be at the center of everything. I feel that everywhere there is politics. Connection with political leaders is important to get even a simple work done. It is difficult to even register a business firm without political connections. Politics is about access as much as it is about change.

This shows that one looks at political engagement as necessary part to get work done which is the pragmatic part of society different from the ideological aspect that sees society as a whole functions by the rule. This combination of pragmatism and idealism supports the findings of previous international studies by Aguilar (2014) and Perera (2018), which revealed that returnee participation is a mixed pursuit of resources and recognition which they feel can be received with the political connections.

Levels and Forms of Political Engagement

From the study, returnees were found to have engaged in politics in a variety of ways, from leadership to symbolic actions. The distribution across the five categories is summed up in the following table.

Table 1

Levels of Political Engagement among Youth Migrant Returnees (N = 200)

Category of Engagement	Frequency	Percentage	Description
Voting in Elections	185	92.5%	Nearly all respondents participated in at least one local or national election.
Attending Political Rallies	150	75%	Active involvement in collective political expression.
Campaign Participation	120	60%	Returnees assisted in election campaigns or party mobilization.
Holding Leadership Roles	42	21%	Only a small number held formal positions like ward committees, cooperatives.
Online Political Activism	95	47.5%	Social media used for expressing opinions, sharing political content, or criticizing governance.

Source: Field Survey (2024).

The largest involvement rate was seen in voting, indicating that returnees saw it as a civic obligation. But there was still little representation in leadership. KIIs from party leaders acknowledged that new entrants are encouraged during elections but sidelined in real decisions, since only one-fifth of respondents had decision-making responsibilities. This research lends credence to the claim that, despite their motivation and awareness, returnees experience structural exclusion. Furthermore, clear gender differences were observed. Only 8% of female respondents had formal political positions, with reasons including lack of party mentorship, patriarchal norms, and time constraints. Approximately 38% of returnees indicated an intention in getting involved in politics, according to empirical data from Kaski (field survey, 2024), however just 20% had any official political position. This disparity is a reflection of society's reluctance to accept migrant-led leadership as well as the lack of access points. Exposure to foreign governance raises political consciousness, but it also causes alienation when returnees run into inflexible party structures.

The study also found that the destination countries had a major impact on the level of participation. While those returning from restrictive labour destinations such as the Gulf States tended to stay observers, those coming from democratic systems such as South Korea and Japan were more likely to take part in local governance initiatives. This variance supports the idea that experiential learning overseas shapes political behavior, which is in line with the political socialization theory of Easton and Dennis (1967).

Structural and Cultural Barriers to Political Engagement

The study showed that returnees encounter a complex range of barriers preventing them from engaging in politics for the long term, despite their eagerness. According to survey results, 85% of participants mentioned being excluded from political organizations, 90% mentioned having trouble reintegrating, and 55% mentioned prejudice or discrimination from established players. Three interconnected factors are found to be the cause of these obstacles. First, Nepal's political system is dominated by patronage and institutional gatekeeping through kinship, seniority, and loyalty networks. Returnees are frequently recruited as campaign mobilisers by local party leaders, but they are not allowed to hold leadership positions. The "wait-your-turn" approach deters younger participants and perpetuates generational disparity. During interviews, one ward committee member acknowledged that "Returnees are energetic, but we cannot give them positions immediately; they must be loyal to the party doctrines first." It embodies the idea of bonding social capital, which Putnam (2000) defined as close-knit, inward-looking networks that are resistant to newcomers.

Second, cultural misunderstandings of assertiveness occur because, as FGDs revealed, returnees' communication styles which are influenced by their experience to the workplace overseas, can occasionally be interpreted as haughtiness. A local elder reportedly warned one of the respondent, "Don't talk like you're still in Qatar; this is Nepal." These interactions show that, even with good intentions, cultural dissonance between formal foreign workplace culture and informal local politics often shows up as interpersonal conflict. Third, many returnees are burdened by psychological and financial limitations; they return with debt and are unable to participate in patronage-based politics. Psychological disengagement is the outcome of both financial constraints and disappointment at being excluded. These challenges confirm Gurr's (2010) relative deprivation theory which states that the discrepancy between expectations of inclusion and recognition and outcomes in the form of exclusion and dependency leads to frustration and, in some cases, confrontation.

Pre-Migration Political Inclination and Post-Return Adjustment

According to the survey, 40% had previously been exposed to politics, mostly through family ties, youth organizations, or student unions. Of these, 62% returned to politics, while only 31% of those who had never been involved in politics did so. This suggests that political inclination prior to migration is a reliable indicator of engagement after returning. But it also connects with friction: those who had previously been involved in partisan politics were more inclined to go back and report conflicts with local elites. KIIs with local party leaders corroborated this tension:

Those who were politically involved prior to their trip overseas return with expectations. They seek positions or recognitions right away. Friction results from that. Some who have engaged in student politics, youth organizations, or community-level activism, they often anticipate recognition of their past contributions and expect to be integrated into decision-making positions upon return. This expectation is further reinforced by their exposure to different governance practices abroad.

This statement highlights the significant role of pre-migration political behaviour that make them seek the role in political engagement processes among migrant returnees. Individuals who were previously engaged in political activities such as student politics, youth organizations, or community activism are more likely to return with previous political identities and expectations of recognition and inclusion. Such sense of continuity in political participation leads them to anticipate integration into local decision-making structures. This expectation is further increased by their exposure to governance practices abroad, which often enhances their political awareness, confidence, and perceived competence.

However, these expectations seem to frequently confront with the realities of local political systems governed by rigid hierarchy and networks. As a result, returnees with prior political experience are found to be more likely to experience adjustment challenges and friction, particularly when their claims for leadership or recognition are not immediately acknowledged. This dynamic illustrates a wider mismatch between individual political agency shaped through past experience and migration exposure, and structurally controlled opportunities for participation in the local context.

Conflict Dynamics between Reform and Resistance

There were two primary types of conflict recorded involving returnees in Kaski. They are competition for leadership positions and resources, as well as ideological and generational conflicts with older political actors. According to survey results, 55% of participants had ideological conflicts with local leaders, frequently centered on issues like budgetary allocation, transparency, and the place of young people in politics. According to FGDs, returnees' demands for responsibility and meritocracy put traditional patron-client relationships to the test. A 33-year-old returnee explained:

I asked that the budget details be posted online by the ward office so that people could easily access information and there would be more transparency. However, the local leaders dismissed my idea, saying that politics doesn't work like that here. From what I had seen overseas, such practices were normal and helped build accountability between the government and the public. They told me I was displaying foreign customs.

This dynamic exemplifies a form of ideational and institutional conflict, where competing understandings of “appropriate” political practice lead to tension between actors. This shows how locally rooted practices and globally educated expectations collide, which is a theme that is congruent with research conducted in Bangladesh (Rahman, 2019) and Pakistan (Malik, 2017), where returnees were viewed with mistrust for questioning opaque governance systems. Much of the friction is also rooted in generational relations. Younger returnees value innovation and transparency, while older leaders rely on loyalty and seniority. Senior leaders deliberately silence younger voices, according to 61% of respondents. This generational divide is consistent with Thapa's (2017) observation that Nepal's political culture discourages young people from innovating since it values seniority over merit.

Resource and Leadership Competition

The study showed that competition for leadership positions was cited by almost 40% of respondents as a direct cause of political strife. Local elites frequently saw returnees who had been exposed overseas as threats. During cooperative elections or ward committee nominations, this rivalry occasionally turned into a factional rivalry. Not every returnee, though, made contributions to disagreement. About 24% of respondents said they had used their foreign-learned negotiating abilities to mediate disputes in their communities, especially for those who worked in multicultural environments. For example, one returnee from Qatar said:

In a company I served as a manager, I handled conflicts between employees from various countries whenever the conflict arose. This has developed within me the ability to mediate and resolve the issues. Now I am using this ability to deal in local social setting and I think I can play very active role to contribute to the society through involvement in politics.

This statement reveals that returnees have developed confidence through their roles during their service overseas. Due to this, returnees can be positioned as hybrid actors in local politics both as a challengers and a mediators. This means they represent the risk of conflict brought on by resistance as well as the possibility of reform.

Integrating Findings with Theory

The study finds that the conflict among returnees is not uni-causal. It results from both (a) their aggressive desire for involvement and change and (b) institutional and societal isolation. One of these two forces amplifies the other through dialectic interaction. As predicted by Easton and Dennis's (1967) political socialization theory, migration serves as a political classroom where exposure to foreign governance systems increases political efficacy and awareness. However, upon returning home, these values encounter a "re-socialization shock" in which pre-existing norms discourage innovation. In other words, migration socializes youth into global civic norms while reintegration dissocializes them into local patronage. The study demonstrates that unfulfilled expectations for transparency, meritocracy, and inclusion cause psychological tension, which, in contrast to violent rebellion, manifests as reformist agitation through demands for accountability, online criticism, or community mobilization. Gurr's (2010) framework effectively explains why dissatisfaction turns into activism or confrontation.

According to Putnam (2000), the study demonstrates that while bonding social capital based on uniqueness prolongs exclusion, bridging social capital based on openness and trust promotes participation. In Kaski, local politics still found to be dominated by bonding ties that keep returnees from taking advantage of their transnational experience, which leads to the political underutilization of a potentially reformist group. Nepal's state-led labour export policy, which externalizes its most productive youth and fails to reintegrate them politically, demonstrates the broader systemic dimension that is lacking in Western models. This creates a vicious cycle in which returnees continue to contribute economically but remain outsiders in society, meaning that conflict arises from policy neglect rather than just interpersonal friction.

Taking into account all available data, the study sees two different interpretations of conflict: society-driven conflict resulting from gatekeeping, generational dominance, and institutional resistance, and returnee-driven conflict resulting from assertive reformism, impatience with inefficiency, and expectations influenced by global exposure. Returnees strive for reform, while institutions fight back to maintain hierarchy, resulting in a reciprocal resistance loop. The low leadership conversion and high participation are explained by this cyclical tension. Importantly, the data show that returnees with more education, previous political exposure, and experience in democratic countries had higher levels of friction and stronger reformist aspirations. Those with less education or experience in the Gulf region, meanwhile, continue to be more obedient but less powerful. However, in the long run, such interplay of reformist aspirations and ambition for strong political engagement be viewed as a negotiation between agency, acceptance, and adaptation rather than as a straight line.

Conclusion

This study examined the political engagement and conflict dynamics among youth migrant returnees in Kaski District, Nepal. In the question of whether conflict is fueled by societal exclusion or by forceful political ambition on the part of returnees, the results demonstrate that both forces are at work at the same time, interacting in a cycle of reformist assertion and institutional resistance. Experiences overseas, education, and social expectations all contribute to their political consciousness. However, structural and cultural obstacles that impede true participation, such as generational dominance, and patronage-based politics reduce their enthusiasm.

From the findings of the study, it can be concluded that when long-standing customs of hierarchy and informal decision-making collide with returnees' aspirations of accountability and meritocracy, conflict results. However, instead of only causing division,

returnees also use their intercultural and negotiating abilities learnt abroad to mediate conflicts within the community. They can be positioned as hybrid agents of reconciliation and reform in Nepal's changing political terrain. It is clear from comparing the results to the goals of the study that both structural limitations and individual ambition influence the dynamics of political participation among returnees. Opportunities and challenges coexist. Returnees impact local conflict patterns as mediators as well as players, illustrating the interaction between local adaptability and global exposure.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author

Author Introduction

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