

Political Criminalization in Nepal (1990-2007): A Systematic Review of Literature on Democratic Transition, Political Violence and Governance

Rudra Nath Dahal

Associate Professor (Sociology/Education), Research Coordinator, Planning & Research Management Committee (PRMC), Barun Multiple Campus, Khandbari, (Affiliated by Tribhuvan University)

Corresponding Author: Rudra Nath Dahal, **E-mail:** dahalrudra18@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Submitted: December 29, 2025

Accepted: June 03, 2026

Published: July 30, 2026

Volume: 1

Issue: 1

KEYWORDS

Political criminalization, democratization, political violence, governance, Nepal (1990-2007).

ABSTRACT

The decade between 1990 and 2007 can be seen as one of the key periods in the political history of Nepal, where the country had to undergo a process of transitioning from monarchical authoritarianism to multiparty democracy, along with the emergence of an armed struggle and significant problems in consolidating the new democracy. In this review of existing literature, I will investigate the concept of political criminalization in Nepal through the analysis of the ways in which political actors, movements, and institutions become entangled in violence, coercion, corruption, impunity, and the undermining of democratic institutions. The review encompasses academic literature that is related to topics such as democratic transition, Maoist insurgency (1996-2006), state responses, identity politics, institutional weaknesses, and poor governance. The literature review shows that although there has been an expansion of political participation in Nepal after 1990, there have also been problems with unstable institutions, exclusion, poor rule of law, and the use of extra-institutional political methods. This review goes further to show that both the state and non-state actors were involved in making the problem worse because of coercion, human rights abuses, and problems with constitutional order. In this case, this article uses a systematic review of literature method to identify major debates, theories, and research gaps on Nepal's democratization and political change from 1990-2007. In conclusion, it is evident that sustainable democratization needs improvement in accountability, governance, institutional changes, and DE politization of violence in politics.

1. Introduction

Political criminalization has emerged as one of the serious problems of democratic governance. Particularly in young democracies, where institutional weakness, weak rule of law, and politics of patronage present opportunities for criminals to get involved in politics. Political criminalization is the phenomenon by which criminal acts like violence, corruption, intimidation, extortion, and clientelism get linked with politics. Political criminalization weakens the institutions of democracy, diminishes public trust, and creates a lack of accountability and good governance (Bayart, Ellis, & Hibou, 1999; Della Porta & Vannucci, 1999). Political transitions do not always result in the consolidation of democracy. Political liberalization of transitional societies may present an opportunity for informal associations, armed groups, and criminal networks to infiltrate political institutions owing to the inefficiency of the state apparatus, law enforcement, corruption, and competitive politics (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986; Huntington, 1991; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). The case of Nepal is relevant in this regard. In Nepal, after the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990, there was a remarkable political change till 2007 in terms of frequent change of governments, constitutional instability, Maoist insurgency (1996-2006), royal coup of 2005, people's movement of 2006, and republican phase (Hachhettu, 2002; Lawoti, 2005; Upreti, 2006). However, during this era, the growth of democracy was accompanied by growing political instability, political violence, corruption, impunity, electoral malpractices, and the involvement of armed and criminal elements in politics. The Maoist insurgency played a major role in causing political criminalization due to the adoption of coercive and criminal practices like forced recruitment, extortion, violence, human rights abuses, among others, as well as the coercive nature of state institutions and political parties (Human Rights Watch, 2004; OHCHR-Nepal, 2005).

Political criminalization in Nepal did not only occur through armed conflict, but corruption, patronage politics, abuse of public resources, electoral manipulation, and protection of criminal networks were some other means of political criminalization. Despite the availability of plenty of research works on Nepal's democratization, conflicts, peace process, and governance, there is a lack of cohesive literature on the issue. Thus, this systematic review attempts to review and critically analyse the current literature on political criminalisation in Nepal from 1990-2007, focusing on the concepts, causes, manifestations and consequences of political criminalisation on democracy and democratic institutions. This review, based on the PRISMA 2020 framework, examines the existing literature including articles, books and reports among others and identifies major themes, theoretical frameworks, methodologies and research gaps. This study makes an important contribution towards the understanding of the phenomenon of political criminalisation in Nepal's democratic transition.

2. Methodology

For the purpose of the present study, a systematic review method was used based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) framework (Page et al., 2021) to ensure the rigour and transparency of the research process. The review intended to synthesise the current qualitative and mixed-methods literature on political criminalisation in Nepal's democratic transition period (1990-2007).

2.1 Review Process

The review process followed five subsequent steps: (1) identification of research questions, (2) literature searching, (3) screening and selection of studies, (4) data extraction, and (5) thematic synthesis. Four research questions were developed, covering conceptual issues, determinants, forms, consequences, and research gaps on political criminalization in Nepal.

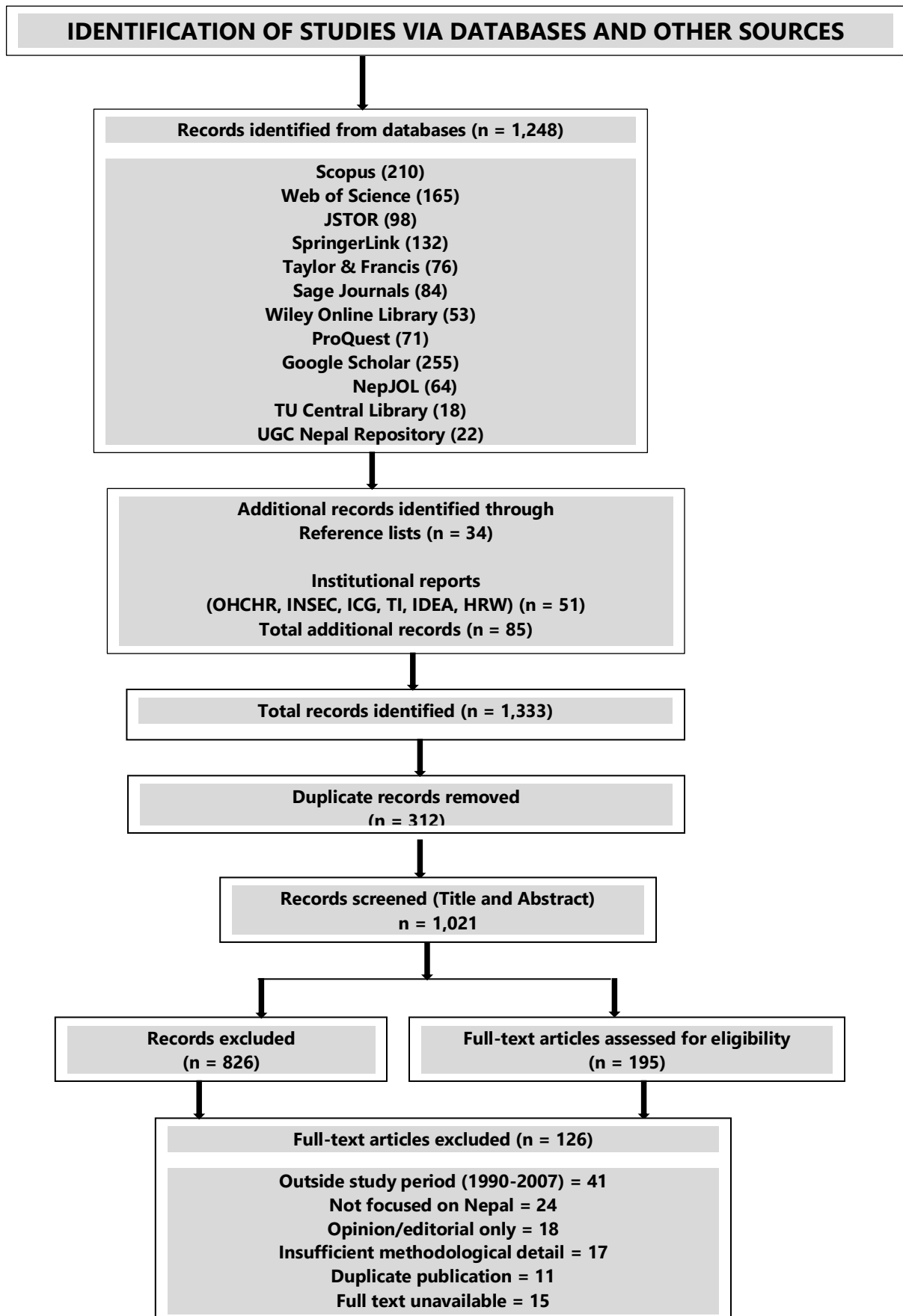
Appropriate literature was gathered from leading academic databases, which included Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, Sage Journals, Wiley Online Library, ProQuest, Google Scholar, NepJOL, Tribhuvan University Central Library, and UGC Nepal Digital Repository. In addition, grey literature produced by organizations, such as International Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty

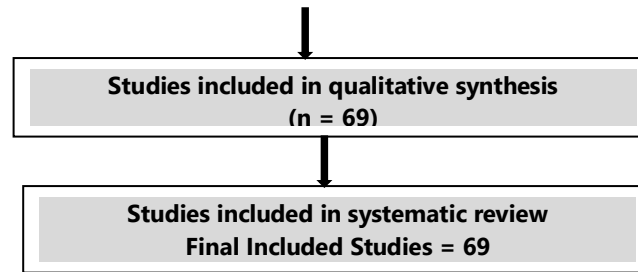
International, OHCHR-Nepal, INSEC, International IDEA, IFES, International Alert, and Transparency International was examined. Search strings were formulated using Boolean operators and keywords associated with political criminalization, democratic transition, political violence, governance, corruption, and Nepal.

Studies were selected based on the following criteria: country of study- Nepal; timeframe 1990-2007; theme political criminalization or related topics; and language-only English articles, books, book chapters, theses, and reports, published in peer-reviewed journals. Studies outside the selected time period, opinion pieces, duplicative works, and studies not providing sufficient information on methodology were excluded. After duplicates were filtered out, screening of titles, abstracts, and full texts of articles was conducted following the PRISMA 2020 framework. Information about publication details, research aims, methodology, theory used, results, governance implications, and limitations of the research was extracted from the selected articles following a systematic approach through the use of a standardized data extraction form.

As the studies had diverse designs and results, it was not possible to conduct statistical meta-analysis. Instead, thematic synthesis of the collected information was done, and thematic categories such as democratic transition, political violence, criminal networks, patronage politics, corruption, impunity, governance, institutional weakness, peacebuilding, and the rule of law were developed. The review has been reported following the PRISMA 2020 Statement.

Figure 1
PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram for the Systematic Review





3. Results

3.1 Characterization of the Literature

The systematic literature search yielded 1,333 documents from electronic databases and institutional repositories. Once duplicates were removed, 1,021 documents were left for further screening at the level of the title and abstract. Based on the predefined criteria for inclusion/exclusion according to the PRISMA 2020 statement, 69 sources were chosen for qualitative synthesis (Page et al., 2021). The selected sources consist of peer-reviewed articles from academic journals, academic books, book chapters, dissertations at the PhD level, and reports produced by international organizations, governmental bodies, and civil society organizations. In total, these publications offer a thorough picture of political criminalization, democratic transition, political violence, governance, and institutional transformation in Nepal between 1990 and 2007.

The reviewed literature is characterized by great discipline diversity. The greatest number of sources is provided by political science, followed by conflict and peace studies, public administration, sociology, development studies, and human rights research. It can be explained by the multidisciplinary nature of political criminalization, which goes beyond electoral politics and includes such factors as armed conflict, poor governance, corruption, patronage systems, and institutions' accountability (Hachhethu, 2002; Lawoti, 2005; Upreti, 2006). In addition, there have been influential reports on political violence, human rights abuse, poor governance, and institutional reform prepared by international organizations such as Human Rights Watch (2004), International Crisis Group (2005), OHCHR-Nepal (2005), and International IDEA (2008).

A temporal analysis shows that publications grew substantially after the emergence of Maoist insurgency in 1996 and reached a peak in the post-conflict era (2006-2008). While the earlier literature concentrated mostly on democratic revival, constitutional reforms and political party formation in the wake of the People's Movement of 1990, the later literature turned increasingly towards analysing issues of armed conflict, state restructuring, governance crises, peace talks, and transitional justice (Muni, 2010; Hutt, 2004). This change in the literature is indicative of the changing political situation, wherein democratic consolidation came to be interwoven with conflict politics and institutional weakness.

From a methodological point of view, qualitative methods prevailed in the existing literature.

The vast majority of research used such techniques as document analysis, historical analysis, case study, interviewing elites, reviewing policies, or comparative political analysis. Mixed-methods research was rather rare, whereas quantitative research was not common enough due to the difficulty of measuring political criminalization and the lack of appropriate longitudinal data sets. As a result, many researchers used triangulation with such tools as official documents, election results, parliamentary debates, newspapers' archives, databases, and institutional publications (Upreti, 2006; Lawoti, 2005).

In terms of concept, literature shows a great deal of variation in the way political criminalization is defined. Instead of having one standardized definition for the phenomenon, scholars took different angles on the problem, including corruption, clientelism, patronage politics, political violence, abuse of state power, organized crime, impunity, and weak institutions (Bayart et al., 1999; Della Porta & Vannucci, 1999). Such diversity in concepts demonstrates that political criminalization in Nepal included not only the engagement in illegal political activity but also its normalization in democratic institutions.

As for theoretical approaches used by the reviewed authors, there was a great variety of them as well. Such theories as democratic transition (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986), democratic consolidation (Huntington, 1991), state fragility (North et al., 2009), political opportunity structures, governance theory, and conflict transformation were the most common theoretical bases used by the researchers. Nevertheless, only a small number of authors actually analysed political criminalization as an independent concept, while the rest studied it indirectly in relation to other phenomena like corruption, armed conflict, electoral violence, institutional decay, etc.

In general, the literature has shown that the Nepalese democratic transition process provided the environment where there were both opportunities for democratic engagement and opportunities for criminals to penetrate political institutions. Despite the

considerable number of empirical findings in various fields of study, the literature on this topic is fragmented; therefore, it is important to develop an integrative analytical framework of democratic transition, political violence, governance, and political criminalization.

Table 1
Characteristics of the Literature Reviewed Systematically (n=69)

SN	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Journal Articles	34	49.3
2	Books	12	17.4
3	Book Chapters	8	11.6
4	Institutional Reports	10	14.5
5	Doctoral Theses	5	7.2
	Total	69	100

3.2 Major Themes

The thematic analysis revealed six main themes, which emerged repeatedly throughout the reviewed academic literature: (1) democratic transition, (2) political criminalization, (3) political violence, (4) governance and institutional weakness, (5) corruption and patronage politics, and (6) peacebuilding and democratic consolidation. The presence of overlapping among these themes showed that political criminalization had occurred because of the interaction between political instability, institutional weakness, conflict, and poor governance and was not an isolated concept.

3.2.1 Democratic Transition

The first main theme is related to Nepal's democratic transition, which happened after the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in the course of the People's Movement of 1990 and resulted in Nepal's transformation into a multiparty democratic state. Almost all research papers present democratic transition as a process of constitutional reforms, political liberalization, greater political participation, and freedoms of citizens (Hachhethu, 2002; Lawoti, 2005). Nevertheless, the scholars constantly mention that democratic institutions were weak because of unstable coalitions, politicized administration, inefficient judiciary, and weak state capacity.

3.2.2 Political Criminalization

Another prominent theme in the literature is that of political criminalization. As opposed to the process of criminals coming into politics, the concept of criminalization here refers to violence, corruption, intimidation, extortion, abuse of position, election-rigging, and patronage systems being used for political gain (Bayart et al., 1999; Della Porta & Vannucci, 1999). Political parties, local elites, insurgent movements, and state agents are seen as agents engaging in such practices, which eroded democratic norms and accountability.

3.2.3 Political Violence

Political violence can be considered another prominent theme in the literature. Maoist insurgency (1996-2006) has been identified as the key turning point for the country, which intensified armed conflict, increased political polarization, and human rights violations. Killings, disappearances, torture, extortion, recruitment through force, arbitrary detention, and human rights violations carried out by both state security agencies and Maoist's insurgents have been extensively documented (Human Rights Watch, 2004; OHCHR-Nepal, 2005; International Crisis Group, 2005). Apart from armed conflict, violence related to elections, strikes, and demonstrations have become increasingly common during the period of democratic transition.

3.2.4 Institutional and Governance Weaknesses

Another thematic focus is the failure of governance. Several researchers have noted that factors such as poor rule of law, politicization of public agencies, corruption, low administrative capacity, and inadequate accountability mechanisms have led to political criminalization (International IDEA, 2008; Transparency International, 2007). The research indicates that the inability of institutions to fight corruption, investigate political crimes, and enforce legal accountability has been facilitated by institutional weaknesses.

3.2.5 Corruption and Clientelist Politics

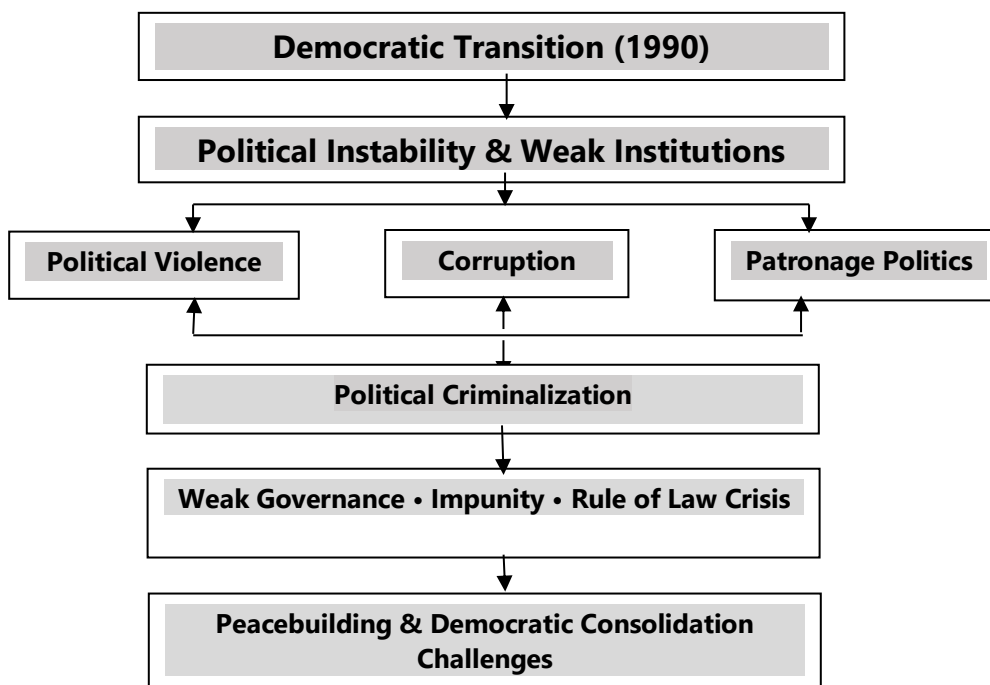
Corruption and clientelism have often been considered the structural causes of political criminalization. Patron-client networks among political elites, civil servants, businessmen, and power brokers in different regions have affected recruitment, resource distribution, contracting, and funding for elections.

3.2.6 Peacebuilding and Consolidation of Democracy

Finally, the third major theme revolves around peacebuilding and consolidation of democracy after the Comprehensive Peace Accord signed in 2006. While peace-building initiatives managed to end the armed conflict in Nepal, most scholars agree that the structural factors contributing to political criminalization, such as impunity, corruption, politicization of state institutions, and poor governance, continued to exist beyond the period of the conflict (Upreti 2006, Muni, 2010).

In general, the synthesis of the above themes illustrates that political criminalization in Nepal cannot be viewed in terms of being a mere result of the armed conflict or corruption alone. Rather, it is a multi-dimensional phenomenon resulting from the interplay between democratic transition, political violence, weak institutions, patronage politics, and poor governance. The reviewed literature clearly shows that all the above themes support each other and determine the path of Nepal's democratic transition from 1990 to 2007.

Figure 2.
Framework of Political Criminalization in Nepal (1990-2007)



This systematic review of 69 articles shows how political criminalization in Nepal occurred through the interplay between the process of democratic transition, armed conflict, poor governance, corruption, and patronage politics. While the process of democratic transition opened up space for political participation, poor governance and conflict were responsible for the development of coercive and illegal practices in politics. These results are essential to discuss Political Transition and Political Criminalization in more detail in the next chapter.

4. Discussion

This review of literature on political criminalization in Nepal during the period of democratic transition (1990-2007) has synthesized evidence on democratic transition, political violence, poor governance, corruption, poor institutional development, and political practices. As a result of this review, one can say that political criminalization in Nepal was not a one-dimensional process characterized by the fact that criminals entered politics; instead, it is a multi-dimensional process in which political institutions, actors, and governance processes were shaped by coercive practices and violence.

Thus, the results confirm the idea of the scholars of democratic transition about the fact that political liberalization does not necessarily imply the consolidation of democracy. According to O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), as well as Huntington (1991), the democratization process should be characterized by both political competition and strong institutions, mechanisms of accountability, and adherence to democratic norms. In this context, the case of Nepal during the period from 1990 to 2007 can serve as a good example. Though the restoration of multi-party democracy in 1990 contributed to the establishment of constitutional government and the growth of political freedoms, weak state institutions, unstable governments, change of

political elite frequently and a lack of mechanisms of accountability hindered the consolidation of democratic procedures (Hachhethu, 2002; Lawoti, 2005).

An important point that can be made based on this literature review is the existence of the link between the processes of democratic transition and political criminalization. Weak institutions in transitional societies frequently do not regulate political competition well; hence, political actors may employ non-democratic means, such as intimidation, violence, corruption, and clientelism, to attain and keep their positions of power (Bayart, Ellis, & Hibou, 1999; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). The case of Nepal is an example showing how the lack of proper regulation of political competition may lead to the development of criminal political practices.

The analysis above shows that political criminalization in Nepal occurred via multiple interconnected dimensions. Violence employed as a political means was one of the key dimensions of political criminalization in Nepal. Firstly, the Maoist conflict (1996-2006) greatly influenced Nepal's political life by undermining the state's sovereignty and developing new modes of political organization. The war led to numerous human rights abuses, including murder, disappearance, torture, recruitment by force, extortion, and limitation of people's civil rights by both the state and non-state parties (Human Rights Watch, 2004; OHCHR-Nepal, 2005).

Nevertheless, according to the review, political criminalization can hardly be analysed only in terms of armed conflict. While the Maoist uprising fuelled the process of criminalized political behaviour, many other underlying issues had emerged before the conflict and persisted afterward. In addition to the problems of armed conflict, there were cases of corruption, patronage politics, abuse of state resources, manipulation during elections, and protecting the interests of criminal figures by political actors. As previous studies show, political parties and actors often used informal networks in their mobilization and resource allocation (Dix, 2011; Transparency International, 2007).

In addition, one may conclude that the lack of effective governance is another key element enabling political criminalization. Democratic governance presupposes such elements as strong institutions, rule of law, accountability, and transparency. However, while going through the transitional period, the public institutions in Nepal were often influenced by political interference, poor administrative capability, corruption, and inefficiency in enforcing laws (North, Wallis, & Weingast, 2009). According to the mentioned scholars, institutions' fragility results from the fact that elite groups manipulate their political power for private or organizational benefits.

Another important finding is associated with the link between political criminalization and patronage politics. The reviewed works suggest that patron-client relations played a very important role in Nepalese politics during the transitional period. Political leaders frequently resorted to personal contacts, local elites, and informal organizations to gain electoral backing and political leverage. These practices led to the weakening of programmatic politics and fostered loyalty-based politics. As political competition relies not on programmatic but rather on personal and material factors, the risk of corruption and favouritism increases (Della Porta & Vannucci, 1999).

An important gap in the current state of knowledge has been identified by the review. Even though there are plenty of studies dedicated to the analysis of Nepal's democratic transition, the Maoist conflict and the peace process, as well as governance issues in Nepal, only a few studies address the issue of political criminalization per se. Existing studies consider corruption, violence, conflict, and weak institutions as different and independent issues and do not look at these phenomena as a single criminalization process.

Furthermore, the methodology of the literature under review deserves a separate consideration. The majority of the studies relied on qualitative research methods that included historical analysis, interviewing, case study, and document analysis. These methods helped to learn more about the complicated political context in Nepal, but the lack of quantitative and comparative research made difficult the quantification of trends, patterns, and relations between the indicators of political criminalization. Future research could benefit from the application of mixed methods, when combined qualitative research will be accompanied by quantitative analyses of such indicators as electoral violence, corruption, performance of institutions, and political accountability.

Implications of the findings for democracy and institutional development in Nepal are obvious. First of all, improvement of accountability mechanism, judicial independence, and performance of anti-corruption institutions is needed to strengthen democratic institutions because elections alone cannot provide for their proper functioning if politicians are able to achieve their goals through informal networks, violence, and corruption. Secondly, political finance regulations, open procurement

procedures, and stronger control mechanisms are necessary to reduce opportunities for political criminalization. Thirdly, post-conflict societies need transitional justice.

Furthermore, the review reveals that peacebuilding efforts should also take into account institutional and governance factors behind political criminalization. While the Comprehensive Peace Accord signed in 2006 was able to put an end to the conflict and create a new political arrangement, peace agreements do not have the capacity to change structural factors that are creating criminalized politics. Institutional reform, good governance, human rights accountability, and building up citizen's confidence in democracy are key to sustainable peace (Upreti, 2006; Muni, 2010).

In terms of the theory of political criminalization in a transitional democracy, the study of the Nepalese experience is useful as well. It proves that political criminalization is not caused only by the fact of criminals joining the political sphere, but also through interactions of weak institutions, political competition, conflict processes, and bad governance. Consequently, political criminalization is a systemic process that involves both state and non-state actors.

However, this systematic review has some limitations. First, this analysis was confined to the English language publications only, thus potentially omitting some of the relevant Nepali language researches and perspectives. Second, this review is limited to the time period of 1990- 2007; therefore, the developments after 2007, such as federal restructuring, transitional justice and political changes, were out of the scope of this review. Third, because of the diversity of research designs and conceptual approaches used by the reviewed studies, statistical meta-analysis was not possible. Therefore, qualitative thematic synthesis was employed.

To conclude, this systematic review shows that political criminalization is one of the major problems of Nepal during its democratic transition of 1990-2007. Political criminalization is a result of the interplay of political instability, civil war, corruption, patronage politics, institutional weaknesses, and bad governance. This review shows that the establishment of democracy requires more than just the creation of a new constitution and conducting elections.

It needs well-developed institutions, good systems of accountability, good governance, and the presence of a political culture of democracy.

5. Research Gaps

There are some gaps that have been observed in the literature concerning political criminalization in Nepal during the democratic transition period (1990-2007). Despite the presence of many empirical studies on the democratization process, Maoist insurgency, peace process, challenges of governance, corruption, and institutional transformation in Nepal, there is not much literature available that deals with the integrated notion of political criminalization. While most of the literature concentrates on individual dimensions like political violence, corruption, conflict, or governance crisis, there is a limited number of literature available that examines how these various dimensions come together to create political criminalization.

First, there is a great conceptual gap about the definition and theory of political criminalization. In the reviewed literature, there is great variation in the interpretation of the term. While some researchers concentrate on the involvement of criminals in political institutions, others stress the use of criminal methods by political actors that include violence, threats, corruption, and patronage (Bayart et al., 1999; Della Porta & Vannucci, 1999). In the Nepalese case, many papers examine similar topics such as corruption, impunity, political violence, and clientelism without linking these topics to the phenomenon of political criminalization. Future research is expected to produce a contextually-specific theoretical framework which explains how political institutions become susceptible to criminal influences during democratic transition.

The second gap in the literature involves insufficient empirical research that would explore how much and in what ways political criminalization occurs. The current literature predominantly uses qualitative research methods like historical approach, interviews, case study, and documents analysis. Although these methods are helpful in understanding political phenomena, there is little evidence provided on the trends in electoral violence, corruption, political financing, crime networks, and performance of institutions. Future research should use mixed-methods that combine qualitative and quantitative evidence.

Third, the link between political parties and criminalization needs further examination. Existing literature shows that political parties were essential to the process of democratization but, at the same time, they were responsible for the development of patronage networks, informal politics, and protection of influential people (Hachhethu, 2002; Lawoti, 2005). Nevertheless, there is a need for further research that focuses on differences between various political parties, ideological groupings, and political networks at the local level.

Fourth, the significance of local governance and sub-political structure has not received adequate attention. Much of the literature in this context concentrates on the politics at the national level, including the royalist regime, the major political parties, and the Maoist insurgency. However, political criminalization happens through the local structure that involves political brokers, businesses, security structures, and power centres at the community level.

Fifth, much of the literature does not address the issue of gender, social inclusion, and marginalized community in relation to political criminalization. Even though political criminalization took place during a time when the Nepalese democracy movement highlighted the inclusion and representation of marginalized communities, none of the studies have examined how political criminalization affected marginalized communities, including women, Dalits, indigenous population, Madhesi, and others.

Sixth, the long-term effects of political criminalization have not been studied sufficiently. Although the available literature covers the direct effects of conflict and transition, there are few studies that explore the effects of the practices introduced between 1990 and 2007 on Nepal's subsequent political development. It is important to conduct longitudinal analysis in order to assess whether political criminalization is a temporary or permanent aspect of democratic politics.

Finally, comparative studies in this field are rare. The case of Nepal, as a post-monarchic and post-conflict democratic transition, is crucial for research purposes, but comparing Nepal's experience to the experience of other South Asian and transitional democracies can lead to theoretical generalizations. Comparative studies of countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and others that have gone through similar processes might reveal some common features, institutional differences, and ways of dealing with political criminalization.

Thus, several research gaps can be noted that suggest conducting interdisciplinary and empirical research on political criminalization in a comparative perspective.

6. Policy Implications

There are several key policy implications to be derived from the results of this systematic review concerning democratic governance, institutional change, and policy making both in Nepal and other transitional democracies. As the review suggests, political criminalization emerges when democratic institutions are not sufficiently developed, the mechanisms of accountability are inadequate, and the mechanisms of political competition are based on informal networks, coercion, and influence associated with resources. Thus, the solution to the problem of political criminalization requires the introduction of institutional reforms and improvements in the system of governance.

First, developing democratic institutions is to be a major policy goal. In order for democratic consolidation to occur, there must be the existence of autonomous institutions that regulate political conduct, enforce laws, and protect the rights of citizens. As the Nepalese case shows, only the combination of constitutional reforms, electoral processes, and effective judicial institutions, accountability, and transparency of public administration can lead to democratic consolidation (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986; Huntington, 1991).

Secondly, it is vital to conduct electoral reforms to decrease the criminalization of political competitions. According to the review, the processes of elections may be exposed to threats of intimidation, illegal financing, violence, and clientelism. It is possible to enhance electoral monitoring mechanisms, implement measures to improve political finance regulations, promote political ethics, and ensure transparency in the process of selecting candidates.

Thirdly, anti-corruption mechanisms need to be significantly strengthened. Political criminalization is related to such concepts as corruption, misallocation of public resources, abuse of power. Anti-corruption policies need to include the development of efficient investigation bodies, effective public procurement mechanisms, whistle blower protection, and freedom of public information. Anti-corruption mechanisms need to be independent from politics in order to ensure the credibility of their work.

Fourth, it is important that accountability mechanisms and transitional justice are improved. The transition process in Nepal proved that failure to resolve human rights abuses and continuing impunity can undermine confidence in democracy. A good transitional justice mechanism will have to deal with human rights abuses, deliver justice to the victims, and stop future abuses.

Fifth, there needs to be support for making political parties more democratic, accountable, and ethical. Political parties are key players in a democratic system; however, lack of accountability within political parties creates room for patronage, corruption, and criminal activities. Party reform needs to involve open systems for membership, leadership election process, finances, and ethics codes for political actors.

Sixth, building strong local governance and civic participation is important. Given the nature of political criminalization through informal local arrangements, it would be important to empower local authorities, civil society organizations, media, and communities. Citizen monitoring, social accountability mechanisms, and independent journalism can play a critical role in uncovering corrupt practices and misuses of political power.

Seventh, security sector reform is also important in post-conflict societies. From the review, it is apparent that both state security forces and armed groups were involved in perpetrating political violence in Nepal at the time of conflict. Professionalization of security structures and human rights compliance are necessary.

Last but not least, the role of education and democratic political culture needs to be highlighted. For long-term prevention of political criminalization, it is necessary that the citizens and political actors have some value systems like those of transparency, accountability, and democracy. Educational campaigns and awareness programs could help create such a political culture.

To conclude, in order to reduce political criminalization, it is necessary to develop a multi-faceted approach involving all the dimensions mentioned above. This applies not only to Nepal, but also to other transitional democracies with similar problems.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this systematic review investigated the political criminalization phenomenon in Nepal during the democratic transition period (1990-2007). This review has analysed existing literature related to the topic of democratic transition, political violence, governance, corruption, and institutional change. From the analysis, it can be found that political criminalization developed in complex and multi-dimensional ways due to the interaction of weak institutions, political instability, armed conflict, patronage networks, corruption, and governance failure.

From the review, it is clear that the re-introduction of multi-party democracy in 1990 in Nepal is seen as a political transformation with respect to increased political participation, constitutional rights, and democratic opportunity. Yet, the democratic transition took place in an institutionally weak environment, marked by political instability, lack of accountability, weak rule of law, and competitive politics. This institutional environment gave rise to coercive politics and criminalized political behaviour affecting democratic institutions. Maoist insurgency (1996-2006) was one of the main causes of political criminalization by increasing political violence, weakening state authority, and coercive practices of state and non-state actors. Nevertheless, the review finds that the armed conflict alone cannot be responsible for the phenomenon of political criminalization.

This research fills the gaps in the existing literature through integrating dispersed research findings from the fields of political science, conflict studies, governance studies, sociology, public administration, and human rights research. Political criminalization in this context is seen as a systemic process that entails the interplay between political institutions, governance arrangements, social relationships, and conflict. This approach enables us to have a holistic view of the problem and why democratic transitions can be vulnerable to criminal infiltration. There are some key implications for democratic consolidation. Sustainable democracy goes beyond the constitution and elections; it is about robust institutions, accountability systems, governance transparency, an independent justice system, and political responsibility. Thus, solving the problem of political criminalization would require sustainable reforms which focus on institutional capacity, political accountability, political finance, corruption, and inclusive governance. While the present review sheds light on political criminalization in Nepal, more research is required. Comparative research and mixed methods should be adopted in future researches. The impact of political criminalization on the democratic development of Nepal should also be explored.

In summary, political criminalization has been an important problem in the process of democratization in Nepal from 1990 to 2007. It did not occur because of one reason, but rather because of the convergence of factors such as institutional weakness, political violence, corruption, clientelism, and poor governance. These issues have important implications for Nepal and for other countries going through democratization processes.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ORCID Id: 0009-0009-8693-5408

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Disclosure: The authors declare that no artificial intelligence tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

References

- [1] Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. A. (2012). *Why nations fail. The origins of power, prosperity, and poverty*. Crown Publishers.
- [2] Amnesty International. (2005). *Nepal: A spiralling human rights crisis*. Amnesty International Publications.
- [3] Bayart, J. F., Ellis, S., & Hibou, B. (1999). *The criminalization of the state in Africa*. Indiana University Press.
- [4] Brown, T. L. (2003). *The challenge to democracy in Nepal: Political instability and the failure of democratic consolidation*. Routledge.
- [5] Dahal, D. R. (2003). *Nepal: Conflict transformation and peace building*. Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University.
- [6] Della Porta, D., & Vannucci, A. (1999). *Corrupt exchanges: Actors, resources, and mechanisms of political corruption*. Aldine de Gruyter.
- [7] Dix, S. (2011). *Corruption and anti-corruption in Nepal*. Asian Education and Development Studies, 1(1), 51-65
- [8] Einsiedel, A., Malone, D. M., & Pradhan, S. (Eds.). (2012). *Nepal in transition: From people's war to fragile peace*. Cambridge University Press.
- [9] Gellner, D. N. (2008). *Resistance and the state: Nepalese experiences*. Social Science Press.
- [10] Hachhethu, K. (2002). *Party building in Nepal: Organization, leadership and people*. Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research.
- [11] Hachhethu, K. (2008). *Nepal in transition: A study on the state of democracy*. International IDEA.
- [12] Hachhethu, K. (2015). *Trajectory of democracy in Nepal*. Adroit Publishers.
- [13] Hangen, S. (2010). *The rise of ethnic politics in Nepal: Democracy in the margins*. Routledge.
- [14] Human Rights Watch. (2004). *Between a rock and a hard place: Civilian's struggle to survive in Nepal's civil war*. Human Rights Watch.
- [15] Human Rights Watch. (2005). *Clear culpability: "Disappearances" by security forces in Nepal*. Human Rights Watch
- [16] Huntington, S. P. (1991). *The third wave: Democratization in the late twentieth century*. University of Oklahoma Press.
- [17] Hutt, M. (2004). *Himalayan people's war: Nepal's Maoist rebellion*. Indiana University Press.
- [18] International Crisis Group. (2005). *Nepal: Dealing with a humanitarian crisis*. International Crisis Group.
- [19] International Crisis Group. (2006). *Nepal's peace agreement: Making it work*. International Crisis Group.
- [20] International IDEA. (2008). *Democracy in Nepal: A study of political institutions and democratic consolidation*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.
- [21] Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC). (1996-2007). *Human rights yearbooks*. INSEC.
- [22] Lawoti, M. (2005). *Towards a democratic Nepal: Inclusive political institutions for a multicultural society*. Sage Publications.
- [23] Lawoti, M. (2007). *Contentious politics and democratization in Nepal*. Sage Publications.
- [24] Lawoti, M. (2008). *Looking back, looking forward: Centralization, multiple conflicts, and democratic state building in Nepal*. Himalaya: The Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies, 27(1), 5-18.
- [25] Lawoti, M., & Pahari, A. K. (Eds.). (2010). *The Maoist insurgency in Nepal: Revolution in the twenty-first century*. Routledge.
- [26] Malagodi, M. (2012). *Constitutional nationalism and legal exclusion: Equality, identity politics, and democracy in Nepal (1990-2007)*. Oxford University Press.
- [27] Muni, S. D. (2010). *Maoist insurgency in Nepal: The politics of transformation*. Sage Publications.
- [28] Nepal Government. (1990). *Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990*. Government of Nepal.
- [29] Nepal Government. (2007). *Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007*. Government of Nepal.
- [30] North, D. C., Wallis, J. J., & Weingast, B. R. (2009). *Violence and social orders. A conceptual framework for interpreting recorded human history*. Cambridge University Press.
- [31] O'Donnell, G., & Schmitter, P. C. (1986). *Transitions from authoritarian rule: Tentative conclusions about uncertain democracies*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- [32] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR-Nepal). (2005). *Report of investigation into violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in Nepal*. United Nations.
- [33] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR-Nepal). (2008). *Conflict-related disappearances in Nepal*. United Nations.
- [34] Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., et al (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ*, 372, n71. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>
- [35] Sidel, J. T. (1999). *Capital, coercion, and crime: Bossism in the Philippines*. Stanford University Press.
- [36] Sharma, S. (2006). *The Maoist movement: An analysis of emerging issues in Nepal*. Martin Chautari
- [37] Subedi, P. (2010). *Nepal's peace process and challenges of democratic consolidation*. Asian Journal of Political Science, 18(3), 245-265.
- [38] Thapa, D., & Sijapati, B. (2003). *A kingdom under siege: Nepal's Maoist insurgency, 1996 to 2003*. The Print houses
- [39] Transparency International. (2007). *Corruption perceptions index 2007*. Transparency International
- [40] Tranfield, D., Denyer, D., & Smart, P. (2003). *Towards a methodology for developing evidence-informed management knowledge by means of systematic review*. British Journal of Management, 14(3), 207-222.
- [41] Upreti, B. R. (2006). *Nepali Maoist movement and implications for peace and democracy*. South Asia Regional Coordination Office.
- [42] Upreti, B. R. (2012). *Nepal's peace process and challenges of state transformation*. In A.
- [43] Einsiedel, D. Malone, & S. Pradhan (Eds.), *Nepal in transition: From people's war to fragile peace* (pp. 95-118). Cambridge University Press.
- [44] Wilkinson, S. I. (2004). *Votes and violence. Electoral competition and ethnic riots in India*. Cambridge University Press.