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Democracy Vs Monarchy: The Unfolding Crisis in Nepal

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Nihar R Nayak**

Abstract

This article analyses the resurgence of pro-monarchy protests in Nepal since March 2025. It links the movement to growing public frustration over political instability, corruption, and economic decline. The protests are supported by monarchist groups and have attracted thousands of people, including many young and urban middle-class citizens. While the movement reflects deep disillusionment with the federal democratic system, return to monarchy remains unlikely due to strong political resistance and ongoing state crackdowns. Additionally, the article revisits the historical role of the monarchy and examines India's response, arguing Nepal's future lies in democratic reform and hence addressing governance failures is key to restoring public trust and political stability.

Introduction

Nepal's political landscape has long been defined by upheaval and transformation in the pursuit of democratic stability. It has once again entered a period of political churning, with pro-monarchy protests emerging in Kathmandu and beyond since March 2025. Unlike previous crises that were mere manifestations of power struggles within parties, the 2025 unrest is a form of deeper public expression of frustration bucking

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against the parliamentary system that was painstakingly created after the 2006 Jana Andolan II.

The movement to restore the constitutional monarchy gained significant momentum in early 2025, manifested through widespread street demonstrations that many perceived as a potential remedy for the country's enduring political instability. On 9 March, over 10,000 citizens assembled near Tribhuvan International Airport to welcome former King Gyanendra Shah after his tour of western Nepal (Kathmandu Post, 2025). Led by businessman Durga Prasai and some leaders from the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), protesters held placards with slogans like "Come back King, save the nation" and "Abolish the federal republican system".[1] The rally, fuelled by monarchist sentiments and widespread frustration among youth and the urban middle class, highlighted growing concerns over political instability and economic decline. The movement, whose momentum had been gathering in preceding weeks, reveals an emergent political undercurrent marked by growing public discontent and a reinvigorated debate regarding the viability of Nepal's current republican governance model.

While there have been monarchist sentiments in Nepalese politics ever since the monarchy was abolished in 2008, the recent surge in protests denotes a shift in the political atmosphere. Though the pro-monarchy demonstrations of March-April 2025 highlight deeper democratic drawbacks, any imminent prospect of restoring the monarchy remains unfeasible. The movement faces strong opposition from major parties; the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist Centre (CPN-MC), Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist–Leninist), here onwards the CPN-UML, the Nepali Congress (NC), factionalism within the royalist groups, and government crackdowns, limiting its momentum. This article attempts to critically analyse the pro-monarchy movement in Nepal and its prospects, if any.

Methodology

This study undertakes a comprehensive analysis of monarchical protests in Nepal through an explanatory framework, scrutinising the sudden surge in demonstrations advocating for the restoration of the monarchy and the replacement of the existing republican system. The study is interpretive in nature, aiming to understand political behaviour,

discourse, and the factors contributing to the significant increase in pro-monarchist rallies in Kathmandu, as well as the extent of public support for these movements

This study is guided by the following questions:

1. What factors contributed to the emergence of pro-monarchist rallies in March 2023, and what conditions led to their intensification by March 2025?
2. How did republican factions and political parties respond to the resurgence of pro-monarchy demonstrations?
3. How did external actors, including neighbouring states and international organisations, react to the renewed pro-monarchist mobilisations?
4. What motivations underpinned the pro-monarchists' demand to replace the republican system with a constitutional monarchy, despite the absence of conclusive evidence of systemic failure?

However, the study is limited to analysing the pro-monarchy developments between 2023 to 2025, with a particular focus on the monarchist protests that intensified from March 2025 onwards. It draws on varied reported data and interpretive analysis. While the reliance on qualitative data constrains the generalisability of the findings, it facilitates a deeper, contextually grounded understanding of Nepal's evolving political dynamics.

The Context

On 19 February 2025, on the eve of Nepal's "Democracy Day", former King Gyanendra issued a video statement where he shared his worries about the direction the country was taking. In his address, he criticised the prevailing political mindset as being "rooted in exclusion" and warned that the nation's very survival was at risk. He highlighted rising national debt, the collapse of industries and businesses, and the deterioration of educational institutions as major factors driving an excessive brain drain and deepening public despair. [2] His message resonated widely across different segments of society, reflecting widespread frustration with ineffective political leadership and persistent governance failures.

On 28 March 2025, tensions escalated when another wave of monarchist demonstrations erupted in Tinkune, Kathmandu.[3] The unrest turned violent as protesters clashed with police, set a house on fire, and

attempted to breach security barricades. Authorities responded with arrests and a heavy security deployment. The clashes resulted in two fatalities and over 110 injuries, marking a sharp rise in hostilities between monarchist supporters and the state apparatus, raising concerns over the government's ability to manage growing dissent.

After several weeks of silence, on 13 April 2025, former King Gyanendra broke his silence over the incident, stating, "We are deeply saddened to hear about the violence, arson, and vandalism during the recent public protests, which caused significant human and material losses". [4] Earlier during the 8 April demonstration at Balkhu, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) had demanded systemic change under the slogan, "Let's change the system to change the situation". The party also called for the release of its Vice-Chair Rabindra Mishra and General Secretary Dhawal Shamsher Rana, both arrested during the 28 March protest.[5] Subsequently, at its meeting on 18 April, RPP Chairman Rajendra Lingden announced plans to hold rallies in prohibited areas of Kathmandu on 20 April, alongside protest meetings, sit-ins, and demonstrations in all 77 districts on 22 April. [6]

However, these demonstrations were delayed due to restrictions imposed following the violent protests of 28 March. The monarchists eventually organised a motorcycle rally in Kathmandu on 9 May. Before that rally, on 8 May, the Joint People's Movement Committee declared an indefinite nationwide protest to commence on 28 May 2025, Nepal's Republic Day, asserting that it would garner support from Rastriya Shakti Nepal, Nepali Congress (BP), Shiv Sena, and other aligned groups (see Annexure II).

This sequence of events does not imply that public sentiment favouring the restoration of the constitutional monarchy has subsided. On the contrary, demands for a return to monarchy have gained traction in Nepal over the past two years (see Table 1), with recurring public rallies in and around Kathmandu led by RPP and other royalist groups calling for the reinstatement of the monarchy and Nepal's status as a Hindu state.

Historical Backdrop

Nepal's monarchy is often remembered by people with a sense of nostalgia as a symbol of national unity and political stability, despite its historical record of facing several

Table 1: Pro-monarchy Demonstrations in Nepal Since 2023

Date	Place	Remarks
23 November 2023	Kathmandu (Balkhu, Tinkune)	10,000 protesters, led by Durga Prasai's group and RPP, demanding monarchy restoration and Hindu state status. Turned violent with clashes against police and CPN-UML supporters; riot police used tear gas, batons, and water cannons.
24 November 2023	Kathmandu (Tinkune)	Follow-up protests by Prasai's supporters after his house arrest. Demonstrations remained large but less violent; focused on the demands of the monarchy and the Hindu state.
21 February 2024	Kathmandu	RPP-organised protest, part of the ongoing pro-monarchy movement, demanding the restoration of monarchy. Relatively peaceful, with national flag-waving and slogans supporting Gyanendra Shah.
9 April 2024	Kathmandu	RPP-led demonstration calling for monarchy reinstatement and a Hindu state. Peaceful, with thousands chanting pro-Gyanendra slogans; met with a heavy police presence.
9 March 2025	Kathmandu (Tribhuvan Airport)	Ten thousand supporters welcomed Gyanendra Shah, blocking airport access and demanding restoration of the monarchy and Hindu state. Peaceful, with riot police deployed but no violence reported. RPP-organised, with slogans like "Vacate the royal palace." UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's poster was seen.
28 March 2025	Kathmandu (Tinkune, Baneshwor)	Violent clashes with police; 2 killed (a protester, journalist), 35 protesters and 53 police injured. Protesters torched buildings, vehicles; demanded monarchy and a Hindu state. Curfew imposed; 105 arrested, including RPP leaders.
5 April 2025	Kathmandu	RPP-led protest, led by Pashupati Shumsher Rana and Prakash Chandra Lohani, demanding the release of arrested royalist leaders and free medical treatment for those injured on March 28. Focused on monarchy restoration; peaceful but tense.
8 April 2025	Kathmandu	Moderate RPP demonstration continuing pro-monarchy demands. Planned indefinite protests from April 20, but no further reports confirm continuation. Peaceful, with a focus on the Hindu monarchy.

Data compiled from various Nepalese newspaper reports from November 2023 to April 2025

revolts that eventually led to its replacement by a constitutional democratic republic. Established by Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1768, the Shah dynasty unified the country by integrating various tribal regions under an absolute monarchy lasting over 240 years. The hereditary succession system ensured political continuity, with monarchs revered as incarnations of the Hindu God Vishnu. This historical and religious legacy continues to resonate with Nepali people, particularly among its majority Hindu population.

However, the monarchy's centralising tendencies significantly hindered Nepal's democratic evolution. Resistance to royal authority emerged as early as the country's unification period, with Janajati groups criticising the monarchy for imposing cultural and economic dominance of a Hindu ruling elite. Notably, during 1846–1951, the monarchy was relegated to a ceremonial role as real power resided with the Rana prime ministers. The Ranas replaced absolute monarchy with an autocratic oligarchy, marginalising the King's authority. Interestingly, during this period, the monarchy aligned with democratic forces to end Rana rule, culminating in the 1951 Delhi Agreement that restored the monarchy while displacing the Ranas. Democratic resistance, including armed movements, was instrumental in these changes, and by the 1950s, demands for democracy expanded, supported by marginalised Madhesi communities in the Terai region. [7]

Although the monarchy regained prominence in the mid-1950s, King Mahendra (reigned 1955–1972) suspended the 1959 constitution and dissolved the democratically elected Parliament in 1960 and introduced the party-less Panchayat system, promoting a homogenised national identity under the slogan *Ek Raja, Ek Bhesh, Ek Bhasa* (One King, One Dress, One Language). This policy was an affront to Nepal's diverse social landscape by marginalising ethnic, linguistic, and regional groups. While Tribhuvan and Mahendra initially facilitated democratic transitions, Mahendra's 1960 coup entrenched autocracy, banning political parties and suppressing democratic aspirations for three decades. During the Panchayat era (1960–1990), the monarchy consolidated its rule while Ranas were relegated to minor elite roles. Persistent underground resistance, however, kept democratic aspirations alive, leading to the First People's Movement (*Jana Andolan I*) in 1990. Mass protests and strikes led by the Nepali Congress (NC) and

communist factions demanding multiparty democracy paralysed Kathmandu, forcing King Birendra to lift the ban on political parties and accept a constitutional monarchy in 1991. Despite this change in constitutional limits on his power, he continued to assert his autonomy, which became a major issue of contention as it hindered the democratic trajectory of the country.

Subsequently, during the Maoist insurgency and political instability of the early 2000s, King Gyanendra made a final bid for absolute power by dissolving Parliament in 2002 and again in 2005, assuming full executive authority. His actions provoked strong resistance from mainstream political parties and the Maoist movement, leading to a unified 12-point agreement of November 2005, which called for republican rule and the abolition of the monarchy. As King Gyanendra attempted to undermine the republican move, the Second People's Movement (Jana Andolan II) in April 2006 forced him to restore Parliament, which eventually led suspension and formal abolition of the monarchy in May 2008.

Although royal rule formally ended, the monarchy's legacy continues to influence Nepal's political discourse. While for some, it remains a symbol of national unity, identity, and guaranteed political stability, for others, it represents an exclusionary and autocratic institution resistant to democratic and inclusive governance. As a result, the monarchy's historical role remains deeply divisive in Nepal's evolving political landscape.

The Tipping Point: Timing and Underlying Tensions

Over the past 17 years, Nepal has experienced 14 governments and frequent shifts in political alliances, fuelling persistent instability (See Annexure I). During this period, the country has cycled through 13 prime ministers and more than 20 deputy prime ministers, underscoring the volatility of coalition politics. The continued dominance of three key political figures, such as Sher Bahadur Deuba (Nepali Congress), KP Sharma Oli (Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist), and Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist Centre), have perpetuated a revolving-door system with little meaningful progress, significantly undermining governance effectiveness and contributing to systemic failures.

This pattern of frequent leadership change, coupled with a lack of accountability and meaningful reform, has fostered widespread

public frustration over nepotism, favouritism, and entrenched corruption. High-ranking political figures have been implicated in major scandals, reinforcing perceptions of impunity and selective justice. For instance, Sher Bahadur Deuba, a five-time prime minister, has faced allegations of accepting illegal commissions in an aircraft procurement deal for Nepal Airlines[8]. His wife, Arzu Rana Deuba, has also been linked to the fake Bhutanese refugee scam, with leaked audio suggesting financial transactions with a suspect. The scandal has implicated several senior leaders, including former Home Minister Bal Krishna Khand and Deputy Prime Minister Top Bahadur Rayamajhi.

Allegations of corruption have similarly overshadowed KP Sharma Oli's tenure. His government's approval of the controversial Giri Bandhu Tea Estate land-swap deal was widely criticised for benefiting private interests, prompting opposition calls for investigation.[9] Additionally, former UML Vice-Chair Bhim Rawal accused Oli of shielding key allies involved in the Lalita Niwas land scam. [10]

Corruption allegations have transcended party lines. The Cooperatives Scam has implicated figures across Nepal's political spectrum, including Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) Chairman Rabi Lamichhane, Nepali Congress Deputy President Dhanraj Gurung, Maoist Centre MP Bahadur Basnet, and CPN-UML MP Rishikesh Pokharel, either directly or through associated individuals. [11]

Similarly, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, widely known as Prachanda, has also faced scrutiny over financial irregularities. In October 2024, Yubaraj Paudel 'Safal' filed a formal complaint with the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), demanding an inquiry into alleged embezzlement of funds allocated for Maoist fighters stationed in temporary camps during the post-conflict peace process. The complaint names 13 individuals, including Prachanda himself, along with Deputy General Secretaries Barshaman Pun 'Ananta' and Janardan Sharma 'Prabhakar'.[12] Although the investigation remains ongoing, the case has reignited concerns over financial mismanagement during Nepal's transitional period.

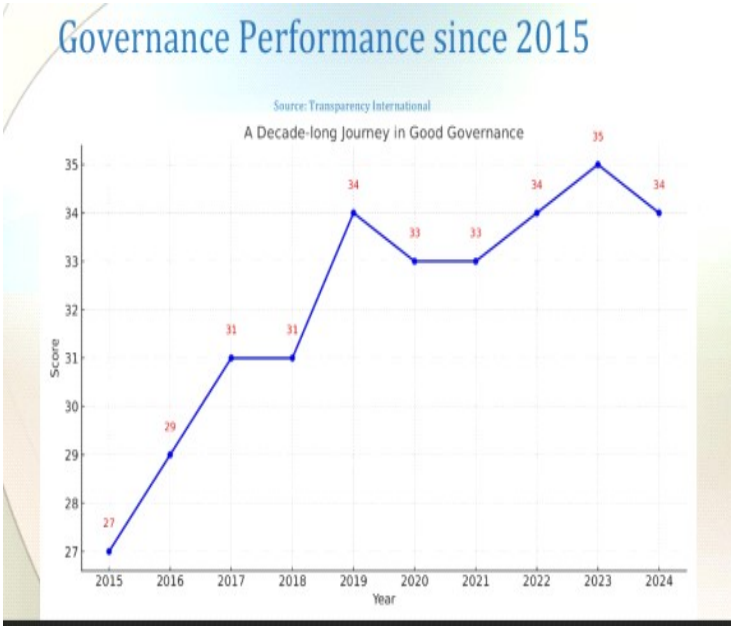
Nepal's enduring corruption challenges are reflected in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, where it ranked 108th out of 180 countries

in 2023. Since the establishment of democratically elected governments in Kathmandu in 2017, Nepal has never scored above 50 out of 100. As illustrated in the graph below, its score has remained at or below 35 since 2015, indicating pervasive corruption within its political system.

Shifting Sentiments, Economic Strains and Anti-Govt. protests

The decline of trust in alternative political forces, particularly the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), has marked a significant turning point in Nepal's political landscape. In December 2024, allegations against RSP leader Rabi Lamichhane severely damaged the party's credibility, prompting a shift in youth support towards pro-monarchy platforms backed by the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) and its affiliate, RPP-Nepal. Without a credible opposition capable of articulating public grievances in Parliament or leading impactful protest movements, many citizens have turned to the monarchy as a symbolic stand-in for strong leadership.

Economic hardship has further fuelled this discontent. Nepal's stagnant economy, high unemployment (12.6%), and soaring



Source: Transparency International

inflation (7% in early 2025) have strained livelihoods, compelling tens of thousands of young Nepalis to seek employment abroad (The Kathmandu Post, 2025). According to a 2024 report by the International Labour Organization (ILO), Nepal witnessed the highest surge in labour outmigration among the 13 Asian countries it analysed. The report further documented a 102% increase in the number of Nepali workers migrating abroad between 2019 and 2023. [13]

Further compounding economic vulnerabilities, Nepal was placed on the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) grey list for the second time in February 2025.[14] Since remittances contribute nearly 25% of Nepal's GDP, [15] any disruption in financial flows resulting from heightened international monitoring or sanctions would directly impact millions of households. Meanwhile, public disillusionment has manifested in frequent protests against government policies; since February 2023, at least 17 demonstrations have been recorded, reflecting widespread dissatisfaction and perceptions of governance failure (see Annexure IV).

Amidst this discontent, former King Gyanendra's increased visibility has further influenced Nepal's political discourse. His nationwide visits to religious sites, which attract large crowds, have unsettled mainstream political parties.[16] Once regarded merely as a historical figure, some now interpret his renewed public presence as a potential symbol of unity and alternative leadership.

Regional Significance and Political Symbolism

At this juncture, former King Gyanendra appears to have sought to convey the monarchy's regional relevance alongside efforts to consolidate domestic support. His cultural visits to India, where he received royal receptions at Niranjan Peeth in Haridwar in April 2021, were widely interpreted as attempts to bolster favourable perceptions within Nepal. [17] During these trips, he met Hindu saints and seers with substantial followings in Nepal, reinforcing his politico-cultural appeal.

In October 2024, Gyanendra made a historic first visit to Bhutan, where he engaged with both former and current Kings. Despite Nepal's Hindu majority and Bhutan's Buddhist identity, his red-carpet welcome highlighted shifting diplomatic optics. Given historical tensions over the Bhutanese refugee issue between the two countries, the

visit generated speculation in Nepal, with some political leaders asserting, "The visit is not ordinary. It has a hidden agenda".[18]

Nepali Royalists have framed these visits as evidence of Gyanendra's growing acceptance at the regional level, fostering a narrative in Kathmandu that the monarchy, abolished in 2008 following the India-mediated 12-point agreement, may no longer be politically untouchable. [19]

The Viability of Restoring the Monarchy

In the evolving political environment of Nepal, monarchist factions continue to advocate for a reversal of the 2008 republican transition. Their core demands include:

- Restoration of the constitutional monarchy
- Re-establishment of Nepal as a *Hindu Rashtra*
- Abolition of federalism
- Crackdown on corruption and promotion of good governance [20]

Despite these objectives and ambitions, the feasibility of restoring the monarchy remains highly uncertain and is contingent on four key factors: leadership commitment, internal unity and organisational coherence within the royalist camp, social inclusivity of their Hindu Rashtra, and public support.

(i) Lack of Leadership Commitment

For the monarchy to regain political legitimacy within a democratic framework, former King Gyanendra would need to engage with the electoral process. Following a major pro-monarchy rally, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli challenged Gyanendra to contest elections, framing democratic participation as the appropriate channel for his return to the power corridors of the country. [21] Similarly, Nepali Congress General Secretary Bishwa Prakash Sharma urged the former king to contest the 2027 elections to establish his desired system, stating, "The election is scheduled for 2084 BS. If you believe you have the people's support, you can run with the Crown as your election symbol". [22]

However, Gyanendra's reluctance to enter electoral politics suggests an unwillingness to embrace democratic norms. His absence from rallies and preference for solitary appearances, detached from party leadership, have reinforced perceptions of his disinterest in seeking democratic legitimacy.[23] Additionally, lingering public dissatisfaction over his authoritarian rule, particularly the

2005 royal coup, has left a lasting negative impression. At 77 years of age, he lacks the dynamism to galvanise widespread support, while his son, Paras Shah, who is tainted by his own controversy, offers no credible succession plan, thereby further weakening the monarchy's prospects.

(ii) Fragmented Monarchist Leadership

Nepal's pro-monarchy movement remains deeply divided, lacking cohesion and a clear direction. The Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) and RPP-Nepal, the primary royalist platforms, face internal discord, with leaders such as Rajendra Lingden, Rabindra Mishra, Kamal Thapa, Durga Prasai, Dhawal Shumsher Rana, Keshar Bahadur Bista, and Navaraj Subedi pursuing conflicting agendas. The table below captures the issues that divide them, focusing on key figures, their affiliations, and their stances, drawing from available sources.

This fragmentation became evident in March 2025, when the *Jana Andolan Committee* was formed under Gyanendra's backing to restore the monarchy and declare Nepal a Hindu state. The appointment of 86-year-old Panchayat-era leader Navaraj Subedi as committee commander sparked disagreements within the RPP.[24] Senior leaders, including Lingden, Thapa, Prasai, and Bista, refused to join, accusing Mishra and Rana of manipulating Subedi's selection. As committee member-secretary, Mishra has pushed for immediate royalist mobilisation, deepening internal divisions.

Beyond leadership disputes, monarchist factions remain split over federalism, the role of religion, and the monarchy's structure. Kamal Thapa's advocacy for "democracy with a king" and Lingden's vague endorsement of a "monarchy system" have failed to unite hardliners.[25] Without a cohesive vision and unified leadership, the movement continues to struggle for legitimacy and political traction.

(iii) Loose Organisational Structure

Alongside committed leadership, a robust and coordinated organisational structure is essential for sustaining a transformative movement. Like its leadership, Nepal's royalist organisations lack coordination and a coherent strategy to drive political change. Despite being Nepal's oldest political party, the RPP has undergone multiple schisms since its establishment in 1990, primarily due to divergent approaches among senior leaders

Table 2

Differences among leaders and factions within RPP and other royalist groups

Leader/Group	Affiliation	Hindu Rashtra Stance	Constitutional Monarchy Stance	Remarks
Rajendra Lingden	RPP (Chairman)	Strongly supports	Advocates for a ceremonial cultural monarchy, with Parliament deciding succession (not necessarily the eldest son).	Challenged by Dhawal Shamsher Rana and Rabindra Mishra. Often blamed for joining the Maoist-led government.
Dhawal Shumsher Rana	RPP (General Secretary)	Strongly Supports	Endorses a constitutional monarchy as a unifying force.	Questions the leadership ability of Lingden. He appears to be closer to the King.
Rabindra Mishra	RPP (Vice-Chairman)	The priority is the Monarchy rather than the Hindu Rashtra.	Advocates for a strong constitutional monarchy as a symbol of stability. He demanded that Gyanendra's grandson become the King.	Does not like Lingden Leadership. He appears to be closer to the King.
Kamal Thapa	RPP-Nepal (Leader, splinter group)	Prioritises Hindu nationalism (Hindutva) over monarchy, advocating for a Hindu state with religious freedom.	Dropped the constitutional monarchy agenda in 2022, focusing on cultural conservatism. Previously lukewarm on monarchy, favouring ceremonial kingship.	He dissented from the RPP. His faction is more focused on Hindutva than on the restoration of the Monarchy.
Durga Prasai	Independent Royalist (Businessman)	Strongly supports Hindu Rashtra, framing it as a defence against secularism and foreign (Christian/Muslim) conversions.	Pushes for a constitutional monarchy.	His aggressive tactics are criticised by Lingden, causing royalist disunity. He was extremely critical of the RPP leaders.
Nabaraj Subedi	Head of the Joint People's Movement Committee	Priority is the Monarchy over the Hindu Rashtra.	Staunch Supporter	He is close to the Ex-King. He is 86 years old and backed by Mishra and Rana.
Ex-King	Not associated with any factions	No Statements	No Statements	He does not participate in the monarchist rallies. The King is above the party politics. There are successor issues.

regarding their proximity to the monarchy, resulting in five splits by 2017. Although over 40 pro-royalist fringe groups (see Annexure II) have declared support for restoring the monarchy, they show little inclination to mobilise under the RPP or RPP-Nepal's auspices.

In response to this fragmented and horizontally dispersed landscape, former King Gyanendra established the Joint People's Movement Committee (JPMC) under Navaraj Subedi's leadership to unify royalist groups under a single banner. However, Subedi's appointment was met with significant opposition from senior RPP leaders, excluding Rabindra Mishra and Dhawal Shumsher Rana. As reported on 8 June 2025, divisions within the royalist camp have deepened due to the JPMC's failure to mobilise an effective people's movement since March. RPP leaders have since demanded a committee restructuring, including Subedi's removal as chairman, while RPP Chief Rajendra Lingden has indicated that his party may reconsider its commitment to the committee. [26]

(iv) Challenges to Social Cohesion

Efforts to re-establish Nepal as a Hindu Rashtra threaten social harmony in a nation defined by its ethnic and religious diversity. Marginalised groups, including Indigenous Nationalities and Madhesis, consider secularism as critical for preserving their cultural and political rights. A shift toward religious exclusivism risks reversing inclusivity gains since 2008 and provoking significant unrest.[27]

Additionally, monarchist factions advocate for abolishing federalism in favour of centralised governance, undermining Nepal's post-2015 federal system. Despite its limitations, federalism was instituted to promote inclusion and decentralisation, and its dismantling could heighten societal polarisation and erode democratic progress.[28] The Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) has strongly condemned these anti-constitutional protests, underscoring widespread resistance among Indigenous communities to the monarchy's reinstatement.[29]

(v) Absence of Momentum and Popular Backing

Unlike Nepal's transformative movements, such as the Maoist insurgency or the Nepali Congress-led democratic struggles, the monarchist revivalism lacks longevity, clarity, and mass mobilisation. Political analyst Lok Raj Baral dismisses the monarchy's

return as unrealistic given its destabilising history.[30] Former Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai echoed this sentiment, stating, "What is dead cannot be resurrected", [31] while KP Sharma Oli described pro-monarchy aspirations as "nothing more than a daydream".[32]

Successful political movements require sustained public support, charismatic leadership, and substantial financial resources, which monarchists lack. Public support for reinstating the monarchy or establishing a constitutional monarchy has remained consistently low since its abolition in 2008. Across four national elections since then, royalist parties have averaged less than 4% of total votes cast (see Annexure II). Their efforts remain largely symbolic without electoral participation by the former king, cohesive leadership, or popular momentum. Moreover, current royalist street mobilisations appear as elitist pushes to reinstate a political order historically dominated by the monarchy rather than calls for broader governance reform. Historically, even successful movements required years of grassroots mobilisation, leaving the monarchy's fractured base ill-equipped to generate comparable political traction.

Republican Responses to the Pro-Monarchist Demands

Despite ideological divergences and parliamentary rivalries, Nepal's republican forces presented a united front in confronting royalist demands in both public and legislative domains. Following the Joint People's Movement Committee's (JPMC) announcement of a pro-monarchy rally scheduled for 28 March in Kathmandu, CPN-Maoist leaders swiftly terminated their month-long political awareness campaign in the Terai and organised a counter-rally in Kathmandu on the same day. The party asserted that any attempt to undermine Nepal's republican framework would be met with revolutionary resistance. As an opposition entity, it held the ruling Nepali Congress (NC) and Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) coalition government accountable for its governance failures, which, it argued, had created conditions enabling royalism's revival. The CPN-Maoist also expressed suspicions regarding potential external involvement in the monarchist mobilisation.

The NC and CPN-UML likewise articulated concerns over the royalist

resurgence. The NC central committee passed a resolution rejecting calls for a constitutional monarchy and reaffirming its commitment to the republican system. It further resolved to organise mass gatherings to demonstrate public support for republicanism. Similarly, CPN-UML Chairman KP Sharma Oli urged republican forces to consolidate in countering the monarchist movement, challenging former King Gyanendra to contest elections if he believed he commanded public support and to pursue political change through constitutional means. The party organised a parallel rally on 29 May to oppose royalist street protests, aligning with the CPN-Maoist's strategy of direct confrontation.

Perceived External Role in the Monarchist Resurgence

The monarchist revival has rekindled debates over the "India factor." During demonstrations outside Tribhuvan International Airport on 9 March 2025, placards featuring Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath triggered widespread speculation regarding a covert "Indian hand" in the pro-monarchy movement.[33] Protesters, including Pradeep Bikram Rana (who later fled to Gorakhpur, citing persecution), carried posters interpreted by some as evidence of tacit backing from Indian Hindu cultural organisations such as the RSS and VHP.[34] Yogi Adityanath's historical ties to Nepal's Shah dynasty, rooted in the Gorakhnath Mutt's spiritual authority over the Gorkhas, amplified these perceptions. His previous call in 2015 for Nepal to restore its Hindu Rashtra status and monarchy, [35] coupled with his meetings with Gyanendra in Lucknow (February 2025), has fuelled speculation of Hindutva influence despite his political silence on Nepal since assuming the chief ministership in 2017.

The circulation of Adityanath's posters on social media intensified narratives of external orchestration, with segments of Nepali society viewing the protests as backed by Indian Hindutva groups aiming to restore a Hindu monarchy. In response, Nepal's Foreign Minister Arzu Rana raised concerns directly with Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on the sidelines of the Raisina Dialogue in March 2025, receiving categorical denials of any Indian role. She also discussed the issue with the Indian Ambassador to Nepal, Naveen Srivastava.[36] The sensitivity of Nepal's ruling parties to such incidents, where a single placard can trigger high-level

diplomatic discussions, reflects deep-seated anxieties within Nepal's republican leadership regarding external political manipulation.

India's Complex Relationship with Monarchy

India's relationship with Nepal's monarchy has historically been characterised by strategic ambivalence. While India played a key role in reinstating the monarchy in the 1950s, King Mahendra later pursued an "equidistance" policy, fostering closer engagement with China and prompting India to withdraw its military mission from Nepal in 1970. His successor, King Birendra, subsequently declared Nepal a "zone of peace," further distancing bilateral relations. Tensions persisted through the late 1990s and early 2000s, exemplified by the 1999 hijacking of Indian Airlines Flight 814 en route from Kathmandu to Delhi, which raised security concerns. In 2005, King Gyanendra's outreach to China for arms supplies and advocacy for its inclusion in SAARC further signalled Nepal's selective engagement. Historically, the monarchy's hesitation towards hydroelectric cooperation with India until the mid-1990s also underlined bilateral frictions.

Moreover, India views Nepal as a critical buffer state amid its strategic competition with China. A return to monarchy could risk destabilising Nepal's domestic politics, especially given its history of autocratic rule under Gyanendra (2002–2005), creating a power vacuum that China could exploit. Nepal has reduced its trade dependence on India from 64 per cent in 2015 to 62 per cent by 2025, while China's share rose from 13 per cent to 19 per cent, intensifying India's strategic anxieties. Additionally, a monarchist government leaning toward China to counterbalance India would undermine Indian security interests, especially given ongoing border tensions.

Further, any perception of Indian backing for monarchist demands could aggravate anti-India sentiment within Nepal, particularly if it is perceived as Indian-backed due to protesters' use of Adityanath's image. Historical grievances such as the 2015 blockade continue to fuel mistrust, and association with a royalist revival could strain trade, transit, and cultural ties. Former Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai cautioned that restoring monarchy would invite "political instability" detrimental to both countries. Consequently, the BJP's official denials of involvement reflect attempts to avoid diplomatic fallout.[37]

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With an open border and deep socioeconomic ties, India remains wary of political turbulence and seeks to prioritise Nepal's stability. Rising governance challenges and potential anti-India narratives threaten to strain bilateral relations. India's calibrated actions, including the arrest of monarchist leader Durga Prasai and Prime Minister Modi's reaffirmation of support for Nepal's democracy at BRICS, signal a calibrated approach to reinforcing Nepal's democratic trajectory.[38] In an increasingly competitive regional environment, India must carefully navigate political perceptions to mitigate instability spillover. In an increasingly competitive regional environment, India must navigate political perceptions to mitigate spillover risks.

Monarchy Vs Republic: Legitimacy Crisis

Unlike movements advocating democracy, justice, or anti-corruption reforms, Nepal's pro-monarchist rallies represent a distinct case globally as an elite-driven effort to reinstate hereditary rule by supplanting the republican system. Drawing upon a 240-year legacy, royalist demands highlight historical, cultural, and political attachments to monarchy, often perceiving democracy as threatening established traditions of the country. While these protests do not explicitly oppose constitutionalism, they underscore a deeper legitimacy crisis within Nepal's political discourse: Should sovereign authority rest with an elected President or a hereditary monarch?

Conclusion: A Critical Opportunity for Democratic Renewal

Since the abolition of the monarchy in 2008, monarchists have consistently advocated for its restoration. The pro-monarchy demonstrations of March 2025 gained momentum amid perceived failures of democratic governance, with institutions struggling to address public grievances. This movement, which gained initial traction in 2023, intensified after the July 2024 formation of a coalition government by the two largest political parties, a dynamic which rendered the country without any effective, formal and strong parliamentary opposition. This evolving situation transformed protests into an outlet for youth and ordinary citizens frustrated with entrenched leadership within the NC, UML, and Maoist Centre.

However, while mass participation in Kathmandu demonstrations may indicate growing royalist sentiment,

it should not be interpreted as a wholesale rejection of democracy. Rather, it reflects a critique of Nepal's current constitutional practices and leadership deficits. The monarchists have leveraged public disenchantment with the established leaders of the NC and UML to advance their demands. Nevertheless, these demonstrations largely signify disillusionment with democratic governance rather than genuine nostalgia for autocratic monarchy. They reveal how such demands, rooted in perceived failure of the republican governance system to deliver socioeconomic dividends for the population and its susceptibility to elite corruption, have fuelled reactionary political alternatives. Such protests are likely to persist unless grievances are substantively addressed, thereby deepening political uncertainty.

Rather than merely resisting monarchist calls, Nepal's democratic forces must seize this moment to reaffirm constitutional principles while pursuing meaningful reforms. Importantly, restoring public trust in the democratic process requires a multidimensional approach, including integrating institutional reforms, equitable governance, and targeted socioeconomic interventions. To begin with, a robust anti-corruption strategy is essential by strengthening the mandate and operational independence of the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA). Additionally, tackling youth disenfranchisement through targeted national employment and skills development initiatives, such as those focused on public infrastructure works, vocational training, and micro-enterprise support. Such programmes can help re-engage a generation that feels excluded from the democratic dividend and is increasingly susceptible to reactionary narratives promising order and identity.

Therefore, addressing systemic failures underpinning economic distress and political turbulence will be key to breaking cycles of unrest, strengthening Nepal's democracy, and fostering a more sustainable and inclusive future. ■

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Annexure- I
Government Changes in Nepal Since 2008 to Present

S. No.	Prime Ministers	Period	Total Duration	Supporting Parties
1.	Pushpa Kamal Dahal	15 August 2008-04 May 2009	10 months	20 political parties
2.	Madhav Kumar Nepal	25 May 2009-05 February 2011	1 year, 09 months	22-party alliance
3.	Jhala Nath Khanal	06 February 2011-14 August 2011	07 months	UCPN-Maoist
4.	Dr Baburam Bhattarai	28 August 2011-13 March 2013	1 year, 07 months	United Democratic Madhesi Front
5.	Khilraj Regmi	14 March 2013-11 February 2014	11 months	Interim government for the CA-II elections
6.	Sushil Koirala	11 February 2014 -11 October 2015	1 year, 08 months	CPN-UML
7.	K P Sharma Oli	12 Oct 2015-03 Aug 2016	11 months	Maoists, RPP-Nepal and MJF-D
8.	Pushpa Kamal Dahal	03 Aug 2016-06 June 2017	11 months	NC and others
9.	Sher Bahadur Deuba	07 June 2017-15 Feb 2018	08 months	Maoists Plus
10.	K P Sharma Oli	15 Feb 2018-12 July 2021 (by SC)	3 years 05 months	Maoists plus
11.	Sher Bahadur Deuba	12 July 2021-25 Dec 2022	1 year 05 months	Maoists plus
12.	Pushpa Kamal Dahal*	26 Dec 2022-27 Feb 2023	03 months	UML, RSP, RPP
13.	Repeat	27 Feb 2023-06 March 2024	1 year 07 days	NC plus
14.	Repeat	07 March 2024-14 July 2024	04 months 07 days	UML, RSP, JSP-Nepal
15.	KP Sharma Oli (Ongoing)	15 July 2024-Present	1 year 07 months	NC plus

Source: Data compiled by authors using open sources such as the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers, Government of Nepal, and English Media

Annexure-II

Fringe Pro-Monarchy Groups in Nepal

Sl No.	Factions	Leader
1	Rajsanstha Punarsansthapana Sangharsha Samiti	Bisantar Shakya
2	Desh Loktantrik Party	Manmohan Samsher Rana
3	Rashtra Bachau Mahaabhiyan	Birendra Sen
4	Nepal Bachau Abhiyan	Ishwariprasad Bhattarai
5	Congress Miteri Party	Dhanendra Bahadur Basnet
6	Ekata Nagarik Samaj	Raju Byanjankar-Newa
7	Rashtrawadi Bajhat Samuha	Shori Mahato
8	Rashtrawadi Nagarik Samaj	Chandra Bahdur Ramdam
9	Shiva Sena Nepal	Anil Baba Basnet
10	Hindu Mahasangh Antarrashtriya Sattavadi	Asmita Bhandari Samaj
11	Newa: RTF	Silugramji Mahajan
12	Rashtra Sanyojak Samaj	Santosh Rajabhag
13	Shahi Yuva Shakti Nepal	Pashupati Khadka
14	Rastriya Shakti Nepal	Keshar Bahadur Bista
15	Save Nation, Nationality, Religion, Culture, and Citizens Mega Campaign Nepal	Durga Prasai
16	Nepal Hindu Nation Re-establishment Forum	Dr Bishnu Prasad Baral

Source: Pramod Raj Sedhain, "What Does Former King Gyanendra Shah's Resurgence Mean? Unpacking the Turmoil in Nepal's Fragile Political Landscape", Nepalnews, 15 March 2025. Available at https://nepalnews.com/s/explainers/what-does-former-king-gyanendra-shahs-resurgence-mean-unpacking-the-turmoil-in-nepals-fragile-political-landscape/ (Accessed 22 May 2025)

Annexure-III

Vote Percentage of Major Political Parties in Nepal (All figures in %)

Elections	Nepali Congress	CPN-UML	Maoists	Royalists	Others
2008	21.14	20.33	30.81	1.03	26.69
2013	25.55	23.66	15.21	6.66	28.92
2017	35.75	30.68	13.66	3.29	16.62
2022	25.71	26.95	11.13	5.58	30.63

Source: Elections Commission and English Media reports in Nepal.

Annexure-IV

Street Protests by various sections and communities of Nepal since February 2023

1.	Teachers' Protests
2.	Bureaucrats' 10-point demands
3.	Protest against the removal of NEA chief, Kulman Ghising
4.	Loan-shark protest
5.	Protest by Resident Doctors
6.	Protest by milk farmers
7.	Protest by tenant farmers
8.	Protest by bankers
9.	Protests against cooperative scams
10.	Janajati protest against the Pathibara cable car project
11.	Protest by the family members of the war crime victims for justice
12.	Protest by the youths against delaying the investigation into the corruption cases against top political leaders
13.	Protests against the Bhutanese refugee scam
14.	Protests by the landless squatters
15.	Sugarcane farmers' protests
16.	Gold and silver traders protest
17.	Protests by public vehicle transportation operations

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