




SOUTH ASIA IN 2024: Democracy at Risk Amidst the Rise of Electoral Populism-An Election Lens to Democracy


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South Asia is home to 25.2 percent of the world population with almost half of its population below the age of 24. With economic growth expected to reach 6.1% in 2025, it is one of the fastest-growing regions in the globe for the next two years (Job for Resilience). However, the region struggles with pressing challenges of widespread poverty, social inequality, illiteracy, and detrimental impacts of climate change. The governance mechanisms in South Asian countries are increasingly becoming more restrictive to civic voices and authoritarian; politics becoming increasingly polarized; and populist. According to the Civics Monitor, Bangladesh's civic space is categorized as "closed," while India and Sri Lanka are "repressed." The Maldives, Nepal, and Bhutan experience "obstructed" civic spaces with limited civic participation. This also reflects a concerning trend in South Asian democracies, suggesting a need for redirection to restore and enhance democratic processes.





2024 has been a decisive year for global elections, with half the world's population participating in voting. Five South Asian countries - India, Maldives, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, have also concluded their elections with billions of people taking to the ballots to make a choice. These elections were marked by media manipulation, suppression of opposition, populist campaigns, misuse of power and blatant display of authoritarianism. The election also fell short in ensuring the effective right to vote and access to ballots for all citizens, despite continued promises.

The South Asian elections presented some unexpected outcomes; in the form of limiting the dominance of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India; students' protest against the quota provisions toppling the Awami League government in Bangladesh within six months post-election. Meanwhile, in Pakistan, rigged voting and false election results established a more restrictive government dismantling opposition, while Nepal still struggles to form a stable government post 2022 elections leading to government changes for the fifth time so far. In Nepal, there has been a strong rise of alternative parties and an increased number of young parliamentarians, yet it hasn't been able to prevent instability, leading to disruptions on the function of state mechanism.



Accountability Lab works with leaders, changemakers, journalists, politicians, scholars, and civil societies to catalyze change via collective convenings, exchange of ideas, and adapting learning. We bring you another episode of "Policy Park" featuring highly talented, and seasoned panelists from South Asia who will share their observations and analysis on the recent elections.

Key Topics:

-  Is South Asian democracy diminishing? Can it be lived with elections? What are the implications of election outcomes for democratic processes and practices?
-  What are some of the common and unique challenges and trends that emerged during elections?
-  What does the future trajectory of South Asian democracy look like?
-  How can we prepare ourselves to hold our elected leaders more accountable, and ensure that the election does not just become a tool to perpetuate authoritarianism but serve the interest of the citizens?



Massive protests rocked Sri Lanka in 2022, leading to a collapse of government. Photo: Twitter

Speakers



Moderator / Speaker
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Key Notes
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Jagannath Lamichhane
Social Activist and Columnist
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Interested participants are also welcome to suggest ideas or topics for discussion. Please submit your questions along with registration forms.

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