Role of Civil Society Organizations in Developing Nations: Navigating from the Lens of National Security in Nepal

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ABSTRACT

How do civil society organizations (CSOs) contribute to promoting national security? How does it impact national security? While analyzing the role of CSOs, it is undoubtedly clear regarding their significant impact, underscoring their roles in governance enhancement, political accountability, and security sector improvements. However, in the present world order and socio-political context, it is also required to navigate through the lens of national security. This study critically examines the fundamental role CSOs play in strengthening national security. Research delves into the various ways that CSOs contribute to dimensions such as accountability, rule of law enforcement, security sector administration reforms, and transforming society. The primary objective is to explain how civil society functions as a cornerstone for promoting and maintaining national security. The paper identifies key areas and explores the contributions of civil society to fostering societal change and upholding the rule of law. Based on these findings, the study offers a set of strategic recommendations aimed at amplifying the efficacy of CSOs in national security domains. These include promoting reinforced collaborations between CSOs and governmental bodies, enhancing public awareness initiatives, advocating human rights and civil liberties, engaging in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, empowering marginalized communities, and fostering global cooperative efforts. These recommendations are intended to optimize the role of civil society in the broader context of national security and governance. By navigating through historical engagements between government and CSO, evaluating regulatory frameworks governing operations, and assessing the positive and negative impacts of activities on national security, this study aims to understand the complex roles of involvement and find ways to balance development efforts with the overall needs and sovereignty of the developing nations.

Keywords: Civil Society Organization, Democracy, Government, National Security, Security Sector Reform

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I. INTRODUCTION

The consensus among scholars is that civil society is an international, self-governing, nonpolitical organization that unites people on issues of shared interest. It is formed because of the demands of the system and society (Islamoglu, 2015). According to Evers (2013), the civil society community is thought of as a tool for tackling several issues. In an effort to change the status quo, it fights for individual rights. Furthermore, it preserves well-established social norms and behaviors, backs democracy and the representation of the people, and defends peace, security, progress, and good administration (Gupta, 2011). Though most other countries accepted and used it for their residents' greater welfare, this idea was mostly developed in the West (Islamoglu, 2015). As a result, in 1945, the UN acknowledged the value of nongovernmental groups in Article 71 of the UN Charter. This clause paved the way for civil society organizations to formally participate in UN operations and advance social development, democracy, and human rights (Gabel & Ningning, 2022).

This change has not, however, been without challenges. Due to concerns about their ideological, methodological, political, economic, and strategic biases, CSOs in developing countries are coming under more and more scrutiny. These worries draw attention to the challenges associated with the operational openness of CSOs, cultural sensitivity, and the preference for donor requirements over local needs (MacColman, 2016). Furthermore, the distinct geopolitical setting of many developing countries—being surrounded by powerful neighbors—adds another level of complexity to the framework that CSOs in those nations operate within. CSOs' operations and their adherence to national legal and diplomatic norms must be carefully examined due to the strategic interests and security concerns inherent in the location of emerging nations, particularly in the context of foreign policy and national security (MacColman, 2016).

In this regard, it is worthwhile to assess the effects of CSO on matters of national security while determining their contribution to developing nations. Current research seeks to explain the different ways in which CSO's contributions and actions impact the security and stability framework of a nation. The specific goal of this paper is to draw attention to the role CSOs play in advancing national security and offer suggestions for how Nepal may make it stronger and more successful.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Many developing countries implemented liberal economic policies in 1990, which made it possible for CSOs to work with government organizations on social, economic, human rights, humanitarian, and community development issues. In those countries, civil society organizations have transitioned from a passive to an active role in defining significant policies and influencing the political and social landscape of the nation (Wagle, 1999). While CSOs were initially facilitators, some eventually changed to deliver services, while others began to influence policy and decision-making instead of putting the needs of the community first. Their services have been criticized as a result of this change, as well as their increased responsibility and scarce resources.

Despite gaining strength over the past three decades and actively participating in capacity building, policymaking, and implementation processes, these organizations have struggled to gain credibility among the general population (Van Bavel, 2020). They are often accused of failing to bring about tangible changes, overlapping government responsibilities, and increasing dependency on CSOs. Such dynamics acquire added significance given a nation's strategic position, where intangible powers' potential influence might twist national priorities and compromise the security imperatives of developing nations.

The specific contributions of CSOs and their role in national security are yet to be determined. In general, it is perceived that civil society plays a function in governance and social transformation, although its possible influence on national security lacks clarity. As such, the impact of CSOs on reforming the security sector, political accountability, and transforming society calls for a wider and more conclusive study. This research, therefore, sought to determine CSO's role in developing nations through the lens of national security.

1.2 Research Objective

To determine CSO's role in developing nations from the Lens of national security.

1.3 Research Question

What is the role of CSO's in developing nations from the Lens of national security?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework
2.1.1 Social Contract Theory

This theory is anchored on the fundamental ideas of philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. It provides a basic understanding regarding the beginnings and aims of civil society as a group reaction to safety, law, and welfare demands inside a state (Seabright et al., 2021). This concept is particularly relevant to understanding how CSOs have evolved and transformed into key actors in filling governance gaps, especially in governments undergoing social and political upheavals.

Similarly, social contract theory provides a lens through which CSOs contribute to enhancing governance. This is in addition to ascertaining how responsive and inclusive governmental institutions can be explored. This theory stresses elements such as accountability, openness, and participatory democracy. These factors are essential for governments that are working to bolster their democratic systems due to the fact that sustained progress is dependent on the participation of a strong civil society. This theory focuses on how CSOs form collaborative networks and trust, boost the resilience of communities, and enhance national security. At the same time, social contract theory represents a core component of this framework, according to Bhuiyan et al. (2023), who noted that it emphasizes how important CSOs are in boosting socioeconomic sectors. The authors also observed that this advances democratic ideals as well as improving the knowledge of the people regarding environmental sustainability and human rights. This is because these organizations possess a big influence on the policies and security of a nation since they represent divergent interests and regulate state operations.

2.2 Empirical Review

Owa et al. (2020) assessed the functions of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in bolstering civil society and promoting democratic growth. Authored in 2020, research explored how these agencies resulted to democratic processes and social progression in the context of developing states. The study detailed multiple functions of NGOs in areas of service delivery and policy advocacy. It also offered a theoretical model for comprehending their wider effect on civil society.

In 2016, Bhatta assessed the shifting correlation between the state and civil society organizations (CSOs) in Nepal. Although the research failed to address the direct impact of CSOs on national security, its findings indicated an extensive evaluation of the historical and changing dynamics between the state and civil society. The outcome enlightened how assessing these interactions could impact Nepal's national security.

Zürn (2004) assessed how legitimacy issues across the world affected governance systems. Research offered a model for gaining insight regarding intricacies and challenges of legitimacy faced by global agencies. This study was applicable in determining the influence of CSOs on national security in developing countries, as it demonstrated the democratic shortfalls and transparency issues embedded in global governance models. This kind of revelations were valuable in comprehending how CSOs connected and influenced global agencies and in the end impacting their function and legitimacy in matters concerning national security within the settings of developing states.

III. METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research design combining both quantitative and qualitative methods was adopted in this research. This offered an in-depth analysis of the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in national security. The secondary research entailed an extensive review of existing scholarly material where articles, books, and reports were analyzed to obtain knowledge on established perspectives regarding CSOs and their impact on governance, social reform, and national security. The primary research involved a survey questionnaire which targeted 20 professionals and persons with knowledge on CSOs' functions in national security. At the same time, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were performed with experts to obtain additional information. Survey data was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Statistical instruments were employed to analyze closed-ended survey questions, while qualitative analysis was utilized to KIIs responses. Responses from surveys, calculated on a range from 1 to 5, were translated to a percentage scale (0% to 100%) for elaborate interpretation. The undermentioned formula was utilized to convert:

Percentage= (Average Score −1)/4×100

This expression adjusts the 1-5 scale to a scale of 0-100%, whereby:

- A score of 1 (Very Ineffective) corresponds to 0%,
- A score of 5 (Very Effective) corresponds to 100%.

The percentages, after being converted were then depicted using a bar chart to demonstrate the perceived effectiveness of CSOs across various faces. This visualization offered a vivid depiction of how responders perceive CSOs effectiveness in contributing to national security from both theoretical and pragmatic perspectives.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Perceived Effectiveness of CSOs in Key Areas

This research focused on assessing Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) perceived effectiveness in core areas within Nepal. Outcomes are depicted below in Figure 1.
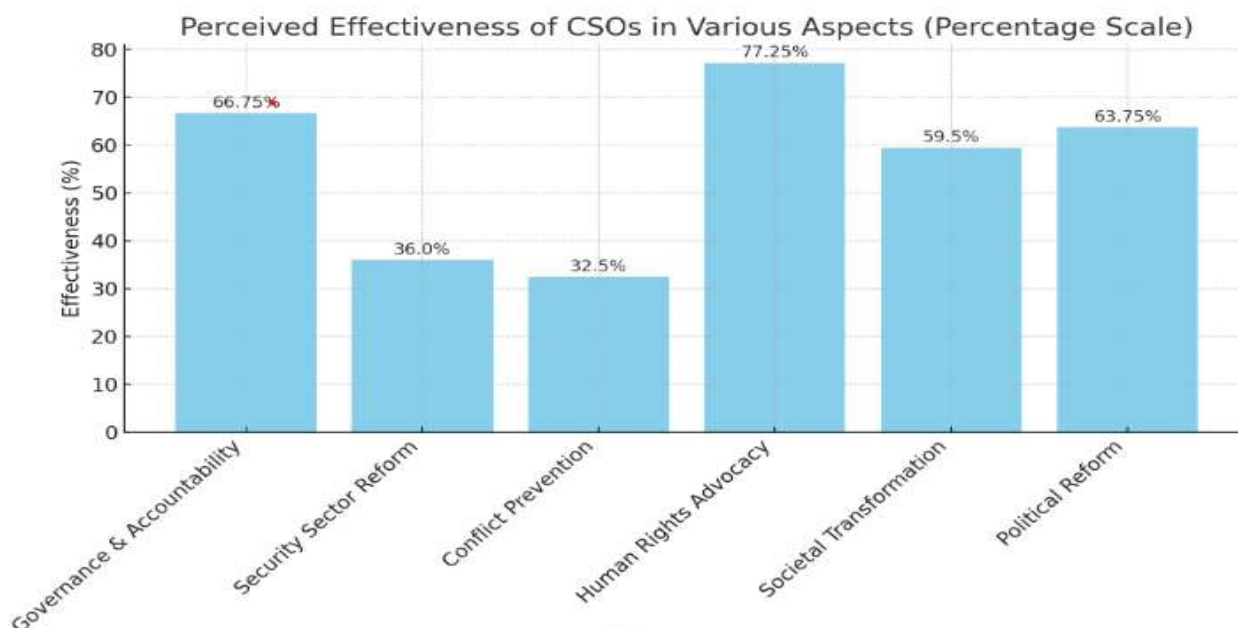
Figure 1
Perceived Effectiveness of CSOs in Key Areas in Nepal

Study outcomes as demonstrated in Figure 1 showed that 70% of responders regarded CSOs as moderately effective in enhancing governance and accountability. In human rights advocacy context, CSOs were regarded as adequately effective, attaining a relatively increased effectiveness rating near 80%. CSOs effectiveness in realizing societal transformation was in addition viewed positively with scores between 60% to 70%. At the same time, CSOs were viewed to function effectively in political reform, with score ranging from 60% to 70%. In the end, in Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Conflict Prevention CSOs were perceived to be lower, with effectiveness ratings closer to 50%.

4.2 Relation between State and Civil Society

The study aimed to explore the relationship between the state and civil society. The findings reveal that social relationships grounded in equality, trust, respect, and inclusiveness among citizens is essential for the development of civil associations. These associations foster coordination and cooperation among members of society to achieve common goals. Inclusivity is crucial for the recognition of an organization as part of civil society; otherwise, it risks becoming a mere mass society. Civil society plays a vital role in maintaining democracy, good governance, and the rule of law, which mass society alone cannot effectively support (Dash, 2001).

Civil society organizations (CSOs) address the gaps left by political authorities, bureaucracies, local bodies, and the business community. By enhancing societal moral values and consensus, CSOs work towards the welfare of common people. A strong and unified civil society holds the government and private sector accountable, ensuring that they act fairly and effectively. This association lends legitimacy to government actions by compelling authorities to respond to the needs and aspirations of the populace.

According to Dash (2001), *"Civil society is typically defined as a domain of self-organization and self-mobilization; this association results from a person's connections and networks. Consequently, it has always been backed by nonprofit organizations or civil unions."* Civil society acts as the voice of the people and serves as a mediator between the government and the populace. From a neoliberal perspective, the government exerts limited control over civil society. Thus, these organizations meticulously scrutinize democratic processes and their values, serving as a crucial component of the state in upholding societal values and bridging the gap between family and state for the greater good.

However, various viewpoints offer a nuanced understanding of civil society's role. Marxism argues that the capitalist class continuously forms civil society or similar associations, fostering egoistic competition, wage exploitation, class inequality, and power reproduction, which lead to societal divisions (Marx & Engels, 1848). Antonio Gramsci shared similar views, observing that dominant groups control civil society through consent rather

than coercion. Gramsci contended that civil society is resilient and operates independently of the official government in capitalist or class-based societies (Katz, 2010).

Despite these differing perspectives, civil society has proven to be a valuable autonomous institution complementing state functions, particularly in developing countries. Therefore, the relationship between CSOs and the state is both profound and integral.

4.3 The Role of CSOs in Promoting Social Coexistence and Sustainable Development

The study explored the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in supporting the development of both "software" elements, such as the rule of law, good governance, and policy enhancement, and "hardware" elements, such as infrastructure and economic development. The diverse functions of CSOs in developing nations are outlined as follows:

4.3.1 Good Governance

The study explored the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in supporting the development of good governance and outcomes are illustrated in figure 2 below.
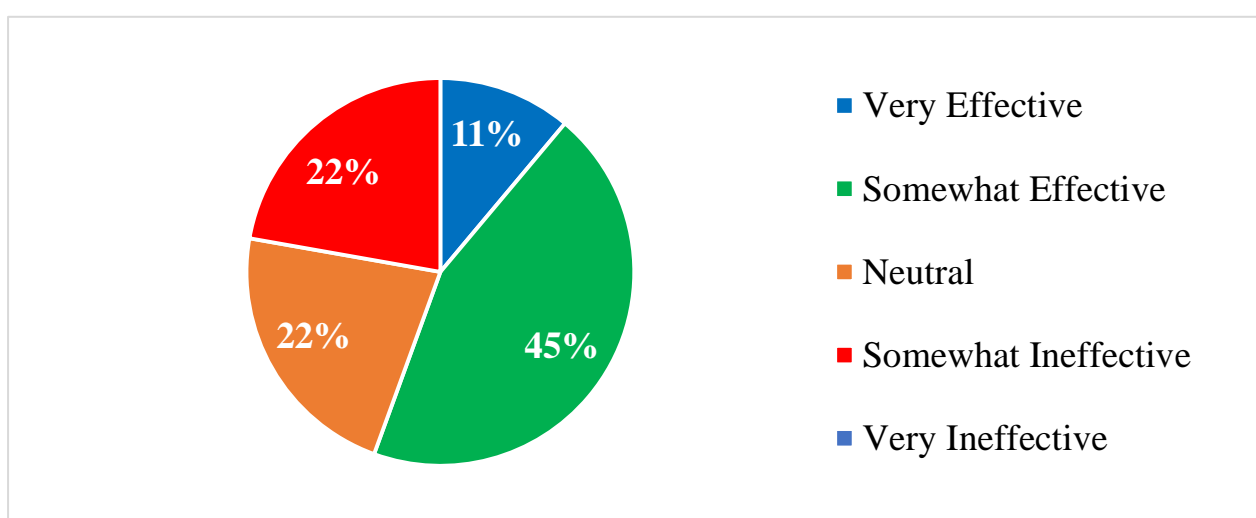

Figure 2
Effectiveness of CSOs in Good Governance

Findings illustrated that majority (45%) of participants concurred that CSO's were somewhat effective in enhancing good governance.. 22% of those polled reacted by stating that CSO's as somewhat ineffective. Similarly, 22% of responders were neutral to the statement. Only a minority (11%) of respondents observed that CSO's were very effective in promoting good governance.

Good governance encompasses several social factors and government mechanisms crucial for social progress, economic growth, and national security in developing nations. It entails factors such as transparency, accountability, fairness, and inclusiveness. CSOs are valuable in boosting and safeguarding systems of good governance.

Good governance calls for effective operation of government apparatuses in developing nations. In this regard, adhering to social norms and the rule of law is paramount. CSOs work hand in hand with existing governments to advocate for the enforcement of governance norms and values through government guidelines. They are mandated to promote transparency, accountability, and responsibility, ascertaining that citizens acquire information regarding administrative, political, and social activities (Dahal, 2020). As such, CSOs are called to preserve information regarding national security.

4.3.2 Maintenance of Political Accountability

The study intended to look at CSO's role in maintenance of political accountability and outcomes depicted in figure 3 below.
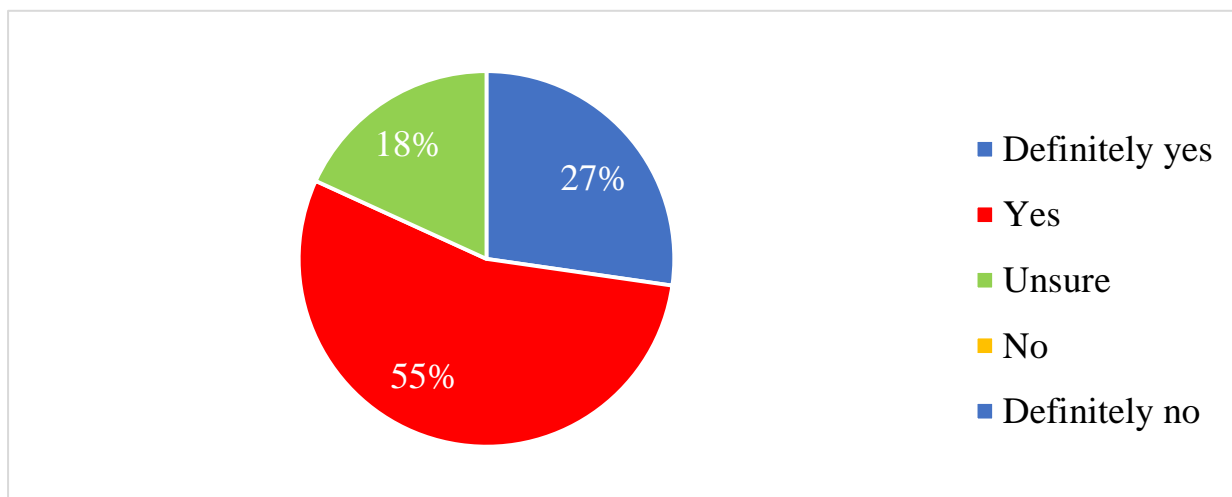
Figure 3
Maintenance of Political Accountability

From the findings, majority (55%) of the participants agreed to the statement. 27% of those polled noted that CSO's definitely agreed that CSO's played a role in preserving political accountability. On the contrary, a minority (18%) of responders were unsure of the statement.

For political parties in a country to be effective, political accountability is paramount. In a democratic setting, citizens have the responsibility to oversee and challenge any perceived contraventions of government policies. CSOs, which function on behalf of individual citizens, have a role to play in state democratization. This is realized by enhancing political accountability. CSOs effectiveness is thus dependent on the political and social consciousness of the citizenry and a culture of ethical conduct.

In developing states, political awareness and education are usually constrained. This makes it hard to call the civil society to participate effectively with the general populace. Political parties with unethical motives may attempt to fragment civil society to undermine the success of CSOs. Historically, CSOs have provided community services, built trust, and resolved conflicts. They work to promote legal reforms and uphold the rule of law to establish a robust political accountability system. However, the mere creation of constitutions and policies does not guarantee justice.

CSOs continuously monitor state information systems, structures, and mechanisms to maintain political accountability and inclusivity. To cultivate a culture of political responsibility, CSOs must engage in ongoing dialogue with government officials at various levels. Although the individual impact of civil society may seem limited, its role in political and policy reform is more significant than commonly perceived (Zharkevich, 2010).

4.3.3 Security Sector Reform

This study sought to determine CSOs' contribution to Security Sector Reform and Rule of Law. Results are illustrated by figure 4 below.
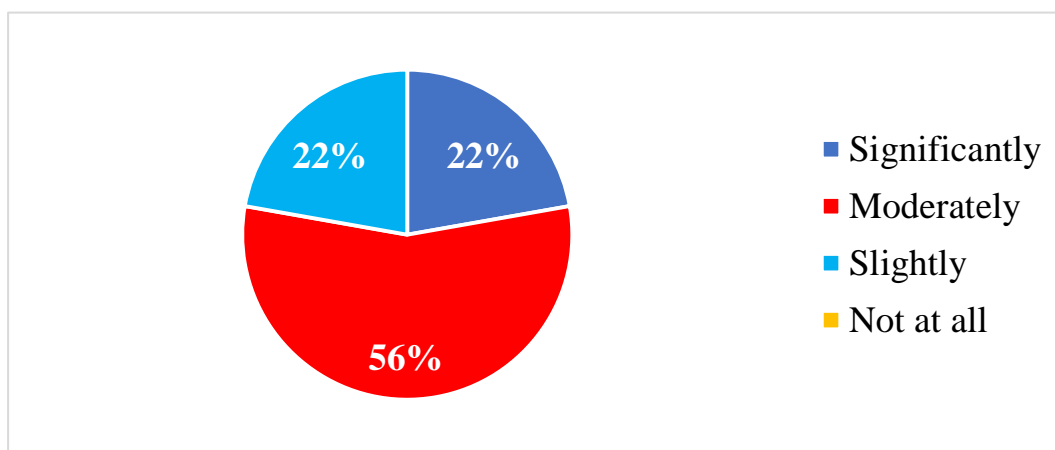

Figure 4
CSOs' Contribution to Security Sector Reform and Rule of Law

According to the findings, vast majority of respondents (56%) moderately agreed with the statement. Meanwhile, same number of participants (22%) slightly and significantly agreed that CSO's contributed to security reform and rule of law.

Security Sector Reform (SSR) encompasses transforming institutions and behaviors within the security sector to enhance its effectiveness, accountability, and alignment with democratic principles (MacColman, 2016). SSR aims to address various security challenges in developing nations and establish sustainable democratic systems.

When we say security sector, it consists of organizations that are authorized to use force, such as the military, paramilitary, intelligence services, and police, along with civil structures that are responsible for their management and oversight. SSR involves collaboration among stakeholders, including government ministries overseeing the development of democratic norms and principles of good governance (Budhathoki, 2013).

CSOs play a crucial role in SSR by advocating for inclusive participation and fostering a sense of ownership among traditional and marginalized communities (Schnabel & Born, 2011a, p. 18). They assess security requirements and advocate for impartial judicial systems, efficient law enforcement, and transparent media. Inclusive participation, impartial law enforcement, and adherence to democratic norms and human rights are essential for effective SSR (Schnabel & Born, 2011). CSOs monitor reform processes, ensuring they are responsive to internal and external political and social dynamics.

SSR is a continuous process that requires adaptability and flexibility, and CSOs are vital in advocating for necessary adjustments to state security apparatus. Their process strengthens governance mechanisms, contributes to national development, and enhances security by promoting accountability and inclusivity within the security sector. To summarize, CSOs drive SSR initiatives in developing nations, ensuring the security sector is responsive to the needs of all citizens while upholding democratic principles.

4.3.4 Promotion of Rule of Law

Research focused on determining the effectiveness of CSO's in promoting rule of law. Study results are demonstrated in figure 5.
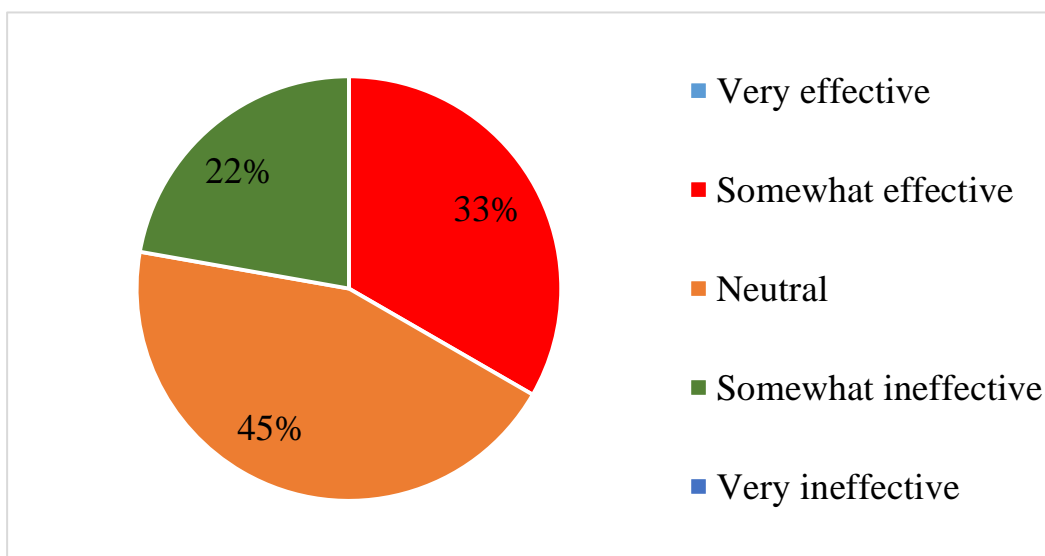

Figure 5
CSO's Effectiveness in Promoting Rule of Law

From the outcomes, slight majority (45%) of participants were neutral regarding the statement that CSO's promoted rule of law. 33% of those polled regarded CSO's as somewhat effective while only 22% indicated they are somewhat ineffective.

Corruption in the government system and human civilization is not a new phenomenon, and throughout history, it has crippled societies, leading to economic and political instability. Influential philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and ancient Indian scholar Chanakya have discussed its detrimental effects (Miller, 2023). Corruption persists due to human traits like greed and ambition, which are influenced by upbringing and societal values.

To mitigate the rampant corruption, nations implemented countermeasures to uphold the rule of law. The right to information, pioneered by Sweden in 1776 and further advocated through the Civil Society Declaration in Geneva

in 2008, empowers citizens to access government information (Bramha, 2019). CSOs use tools like the Right to Information (RTI) Act to promote the rule of law.

4.3.5 Social and Economic Development

To deal with ethical and unethical business practices, CSOs stepped in to advocate for social change (Kallman & Clark, 2016). These organizations play an important role in boosting community economic capacity through various vocational projects and providing essential technological and resource-based services like healthcare and education, especially in those areas where the government has not been able to serve.

CSOs also engage in local and marginalized areas for capacity-building activities, provide training and resources for their economic development, and support innovative solutions to mitigate economic challenges. Their global interdependency and connections enable them to secure economic assistance for community development, job creation, and poverty alleviation.

Generally, every government must look after and develop citizens' financial development strategies; however, it cannot be ruled out that, due to different causes, they may overlook crucial socioeconomic issues. Therefore, CSOs act as development partners, advocating for people's rights and addressing community needs (Roy, 2015). They contribute to national security by scrutinizing government activities utilizing various socio-economic aspects of the community, such as mass media. Moreover, CSOs play a significant role in poverty alleviation and empowering marginalized communities. They establish programs for vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and access to microcredit, enabling individuals to improve their economic conditions (Roy, 2015). So, CSOs endeavor to promote social and economic development in developing nations, contributing to national development and security by addressing socioeconomic issues, empowering communities, and advocating for citizen participation.

4.3.6 Promotion of Societal Coexistence

Civil society is the outcome of human society; it comprises individuals, organizations, and groups independent of the government. This organization plays a vital role in promoting societal coexistence in diverse societies and functions as a bridge between the family and the state. Civil society fosters understanding, inclusivity, and harmony through dialogue, advocacy, accountability, and education (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA], 2009).

As a legitimate organization globally, CSOs implement various initiatives and tools to promote societal coexistence and harmonious relations. They encourage dialogue, campaign for diverse opinions, and hold authority and communities responsible. Through working with civil society, societies can establish a more cohesive and peaceful coexistence (UNOHCHR, n.d). The core goal of CSOs' efforts is to enhance societal perseverance and peace as well as contribute to national development and security. Boosting understanding of collective stability and a sense of responsibility and togetherness aids the formation of a stable and inclusive society.

4.3.7 Education and Awareness-Programs

This research focused on assessing Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) participation in education and awareness programs within Nepal. Outcomes of the study are depicted below in Figure 6.
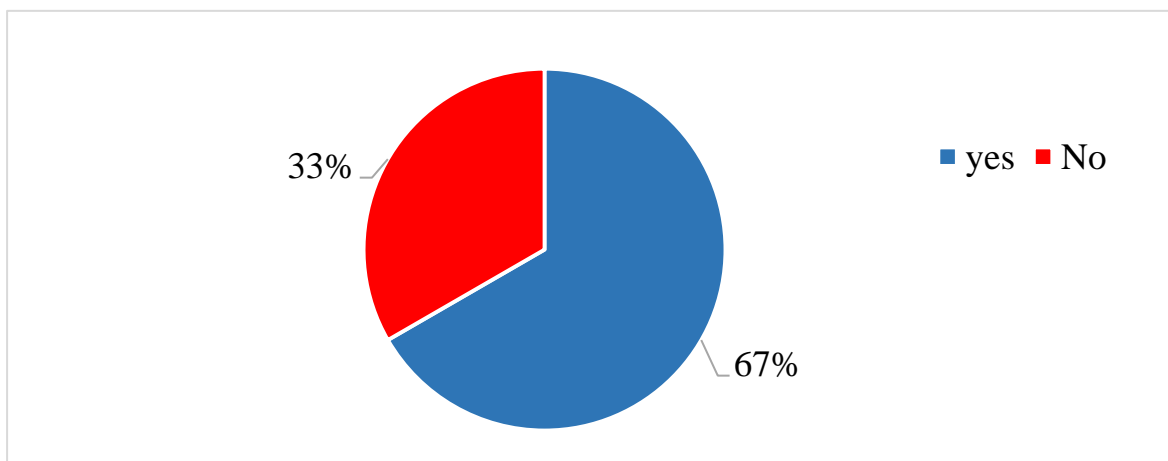

Figure 6
Awareness of CSOs' Role in National Security

Study outcomes as demonstrated in Figure 6 showed that 67% of responders were in agreement that CSOs had a major role in creating awareness in matters national security. Only 33% of those polled did not agree with the statement.

Under the guidance of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), CSOs are necessary in imparting knowledge to communities on matters regarding social harmony, diversity, tolerance, and the value of societal coexistence in developing countries. They establish educational initiatives, awareness programs, seminars, and training workshops to boost intercultural tolerance and respect (UNESCO, 2023).

CSOs' participation in education initiatives and awareness-programs promote national security by encouraging social cohesion and minimizing tensions stemming from cultural or ethnic differences. As such, CSOs, which are related to the education and awareness fields, always play a vital role in promoting literacy, education, and awareness-raising in developing nations by contributing directly and indirectly to their development and enhancing national security.

4.3.8 Peace building and Conflict Resolution

This study aimed at determining Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) involvement in peace-building and conflict resolution programs within Nepal. Study findings are illustrated below in Figure 7.
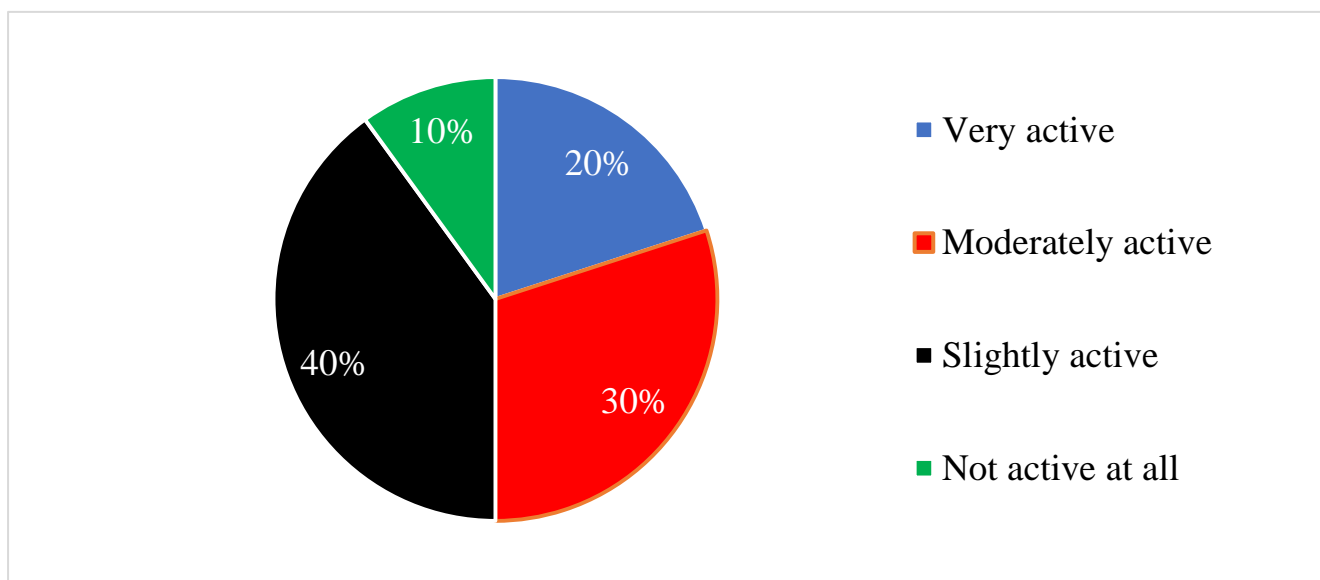

Figure 7
CSO's in Peace Building and Conflict Resolution

Outcomes demonstrated that 40% of the participants agreed that CSO's as slightly active in peace-building and conflict resolution efforts while 30% noted that they are moderately active. Similarly, 20% concurred with the statement. On the other hand, only a minority (10%) who hinted that CSO's were not active at all in promoting peace building and conflict resolution initiatives.

It has been proven that CSOs have been playing a crucial role in peace-building and conflict resolution in developing nations. They mediate between conflicting parties, facilitate reconciliation processes, and promote long-term peace and stability (Mangen, n.d.). By their legal authority, CSOs implement various initiatives to address conflicts rooted in cultural, ethnic, or religious differences. They directly or indirectly work and provide support to bridge divides, foster understanding, and promote dialogue. CSO's role in facilitating peacemaking, peace building, efforts is to contribute to the societal coexistence and stability of the specific state, including region and globally.

Their peace and conflict resolution efforts directly support national development by creating conditions conducive to progress. Stable and peaceful societies are better able to focus on economic growth, social development, and infrastructure improvement. Additionally, CSOs' involvement in peacebuilding enhances national security by preventing likelihood of conflicts and violence. Addressing the root causes of conflicts helps build resilient and inclusive communities. In summary, CSOs, being non-profit and neutral organizations, have been playing a vital role in peace building and conflict resolution, specifically in conflict-ridden and developing nations, ultimately contributing to those states' development and enhancing their national security.

4.4 CSO as an Agent of Social Transformation

The study also explored the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) as agents of social transformation. Outcomes are shown in figure 8 below.
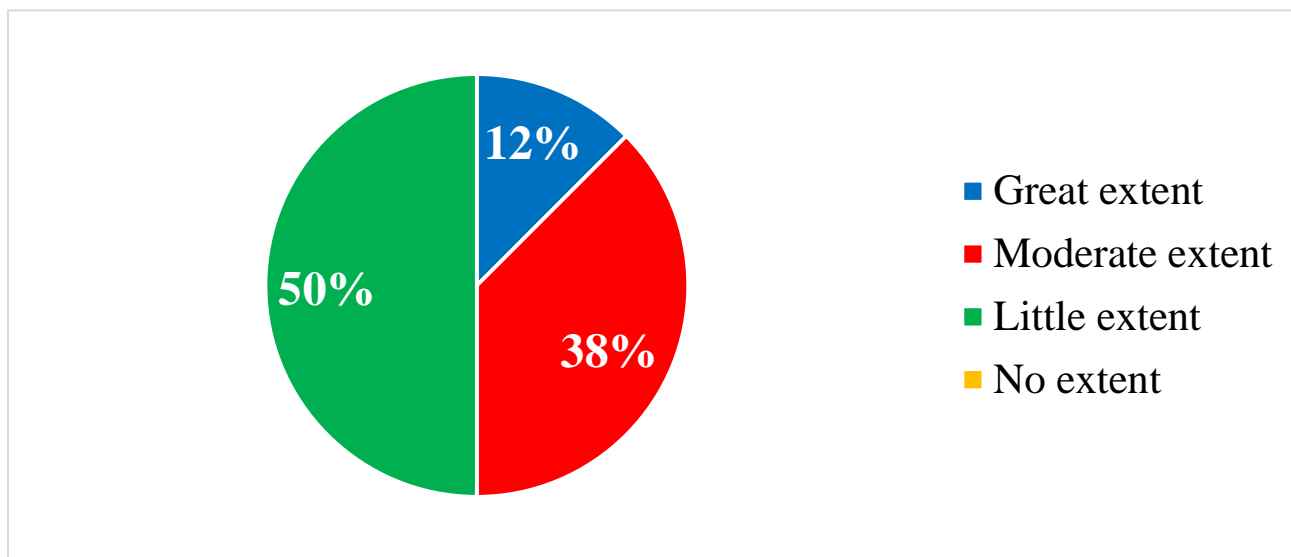

Figure 8
CSO's as Agents of Social Transformation

According to outcomes of the study, 50% of the respondents agreed to a little extent that CSO's acted as agents of social transformation. This was followed by 38% of responders who agreed to a moderate extent while only 12% agreed to the statement to a great extent.

The findings indicate that civil society consists of various associations formed by individuals from the same community. These organizations serve multiple functions, including monitoring, advocacy, service provision, capacity building, expertise, representation, solidarity support, environmental protection, and human rights observation (Roy, 2015).

Social change is the gradual transformation of cultural, social organization or structure, and ecological characteristics at various societal levels. According to Roy (2015) globalization has positively and negatively affected social change, benefiting individuals and communities. Countries have their own culture, beliefs, values, and systems where discrimination based on caste, creed, race, sex, and religion can be observed. To eliminate these deeply entrenched prejudices, civil society organizations are advocating for the necessary amendments to the Constitution and the Social Security Act in the name of rights and equality. Civil society is conducting various social awareness and education-related missions to improve and support the social standing of the people and community, particularly the disadvantaged. In addition, these communities balance Western ideals of liberalism, secularism, democracy, human rights, traditional governance, and the methods of nations and communities (Roy, 2015). Except for those that follow the interests and policies of caste communities and religions, civil society organizations exhibit every positive characteristic.

These organizations have played an important role in holding governments accountable for their actions and policies and providing social services. The gay rights movement and resistance against apartheid are significant examples of social change; similarly, in 1960, the free trade movement was held against multinational corporations to ensure that farmers and workers in developing countries were compensated fairly (Roy, 2015). Civil society has long advocated for the people's rights and equality, and these independent institutions have performed admirably in uniting all state citizens and transforming their communities for the greater good. The civil society act as an agent of social transformation is through grassroots movements that advocate for social change and challenge existing power structures. For instance; civil rights movement in the United States during the mid-20th century was driven by various civil society organizations, activists, and community leaders who fought against racial segregation, discrimination, and unequal treatment of African Americans (Ransby, 2003). Through nonviolent protests, grassroots organizing, and mobilization efforts, civil society played a pivotal role in challenging the status quo and demanding equal rights and opportunities for all citizens.

4.5 The Nexus of CSOs and National Security in Developing Nations

The study further investigated the relationship between Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and national security in developing nations. The findings show that there is a relationship between national security and the role of CSOs in developing nations. Civil Society organizations strive to foster a stable and secure environment conducive to the nation's development. They also assist in reducing potential societal challenges through community engagement, resilience building, advocacy, oversight, service provision, and social support, promotion of democratic values, conflict prevention, and resolution. These organizations also assist state authorities to prevent and respond to various threats and emergencies within a country's borders, including crime, terrorism, natural disasters, and public health crises. Therefore, CSO engagement in the state's multidimensional sector is critical for national security.

According to Barry Buzan, national security is the ability of a state to maintain its identity against its adversaries, maintain peace and order within its territory, and protect its sovereignty (Buzan, 1991). Alternatively, the current definition of national security extends beyond the state's territorial security, encompassing the welfare of its citizens and safeguarding them against harm and disruption. Furthermore, the UN Human Development Report 1994 mentioned the multi-dimensional concept of human security in a modern sense that encompasses the well-being, dignity, and rights of individuals and communities; food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security are part of the upgraded scope of national security (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 1994).

4.6 Case Study of CSOs in Nepal from the Lens of National Security

Historically evolving from traditional community-based organizations to pivotal entities in the post-1990 democratization era, CSOs in Nepal have played a transformative role in the nation's socio-economic fabric. Their roots, steeped in the cultural and philosophical traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism, date back to 2000 BC, demonstrating a longstanding integration in societal development (Llewellyn, 2024). Nepal's national security is shaped and challenged by its geostrategic location, ethnic and cultural diversity, economic stability, and internal and external factors. Two priorities emerge for Nepal: development and the maintenance of strategic neutrality. To meet these needs, Nepal has permitted the operation of CSOs, many of which have foreign origins (Uprety, 2019). These bodies are active throughout Nepal, supporting causes like human rights, justice, awareness, social development, small infrastructure development, and environmental conservation. However, their support and contribution have not been without critiques about performance.

A section of security analysts argue that the activities of CSO organizations might influence Nepal's national security priorities because they believe that most of the time CSOs are not transparent about their deeds. Some CSOs are believed to be marked by the ultra-modern concept of liberty and equality, which might disrupt Nepal's traditional social cohesion and unity.

The strategic location of Nepal's between influential neighbors together with its ethnic/cultural diversity demands balancing of development objectives and strategic neutrality. All these are integral to national security. CSOs have accelerated socio-economic advancement in Nepal, despite their activities raising concerns regarding priorities of the nation's security and sovereignty. A number of concerns in the context of CSOs' functions vis-à-vis national security are:

- Lack of transparency regarding funding sources and programmatic agendas fueling skepticism about undue external influences on Nepal's internal matters (Uprety, 2019).
- Perceived misalignment between some CSO initiatives and Nepal's traditional socio-cultural fabric, risking societal discord that could undermine national cohesion and unity.
- Duplication of efforts with government programs and inadequate coordination mechanisms potentially lead to the wastage of resources vital for national development.
- The advocacy of CSOs' pertaining liberal ideologies is viewed as irrelevant in regards to Nepal's tactical need to preserve neutrality in its foreign policy with neighbors.

In order to preserve strengths of CSO's while minimizing risks, Nepal need to maintain an equilibrium. This will empower CSOs' positive functions in aspects e.g. human rights, good governance, and community empowerment while at the same time forming elaborate boundaries which conform with sovereignty of the state, strategic neutrality, and socio-cultural preservation. Bolstered dialogue and collaboration between the state, security agencies, and CSOs will promote a better, cohesive and security-aware civil society ecosystem.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

CSOs are valuable agencies which are multifaceted and are necessary in enhancing national security in developing nations. They achieve this by bolstering governance, advocating for political accountability, pushing for reforms in security sectors, observing the rule of law, and boosting societal transformation. In this regard, CSOs are credited with establishing a stable and safe environment conducive to national growth and development. Their combined social and economic development work foster societal coexistence, education and awareness-creation, peace-building efforts, and dispute resolution. All this initiatives support directly national security goals. Nonetheless, despite CSO's valuable work, understanding their intricate operations through the lens of national security interests is vital. This entails strategic management, conforming with local sociopolitical dynamics, transparency, and meticulous consideration of possible unforeseen consequences. This calls for a balanced approach that incorporate CSO's strengths while at the same time protecting national sovereignty. As such, developing states can leverage civil society's power to strengthen their security, advancement, and overall well-being.

5.2 Recommendations

In a stable nation, civil society represents a necessary building block for growth, development and national cohesion. Nevertheless, in a conflict-ridden and war-torn nation, the state and civil society are mandated to lay the groundwork for conflict settlement. In essence, CSOs ought to collaborate and engage with prevailing government, security, and other national security agencies. This will greatly benefit both entities to organize, disseminate information, and merge their activities. Authority in place must prioritize public awareness programs that impart knowledge regarding socioeconomic vulnerabilities to national security, individual responsibility and community participation, and functions of civil society' in safeguarding the nation.

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