

THE GOVERNANCE SPECTRUM

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GMC Nepal

The Governance Spectrum

Quarterly Review of Events and Trends

Formerly known as the ‘Governance Watch’, The Governance Spectrum is a periodic publication by GMC Nepal released every four months. Previously, ‘Governance Watch’ was published on a bi-monthly basis. This publication attempts to identify, document and analyze events related to conflicts/disputes/tensions that occur across Nepal’s four key governance domains:

1. Political System and Governance
2. Development Governance
3. Ethnocultural Governance
4. Natural Resource and Environmental Governance

To identify and document such events, GMC Nepal regularly monitors twelve national and provincial daily newspapers. This approach is both cost-effective and practical for tracking and documenting incidents across the country. GMC Nepal defines an event as a specific occurrence or happening that takes place at a particular time and location. It involves participants or actors and can be either planned or spontaneous. Events can vary widely in nature, their scale, their impact and the actors involved. In the context of analysis, an event is a unit of data used to observe patterns, effects or changes over time.

Governance conflicts, as defined within the context of GMC Nepal’s research, are disagreements, disputes or tensions arising from the implementation of governance system. These conflicts manifest in various forms, including those related to natural resources and environment, development, identity and political system. They are often characterized by actions such as protests, violence or legal challenges. The underlying issues to these conflicts are of power, resource allocation and the effectiveness of governance structures.

This report thus highlights key governance conflicts observed in the previous four months (October 2024 to January 2025) and a set of recommendations as potential avenues to resolve those conflicts.

Note: This report may explain multiple occurrences of the governance conflicts by highlighting only specific news and events. Hence, the governance conflicts may not be limited to examples specified in this report.

Governance Monitoring Centre Nepal (GMC Nepal) is a Centre for Social Change (CSC)’s flagship initiative. It is a platform for tracking, analyzing and addressing the governance-related conflicts/disputes across Nepal with specific focus on four governance areas mentioned above. Through research, media monitoring, stakeholder dialogues and other publications, GMC Nepal provides evidence-based insights and recommendations on governance reform.

Overview of Recorded Events

Media Coverage: October 2024 - January 2025

Between October 2024 and January 2025, a total of 186 events were documented, which is a slight increase compared to the previous period (June 2024 to September 2024). The events during this period encompassed a mix of nonviolent actions, conflict resolution efforts, and violent incidents.

Table 1. Recorded events by nature

Nature of event	No. of events
Violent	29
Nonviolent	126
Conflict resolution	31

Figure 1. Number of events by types



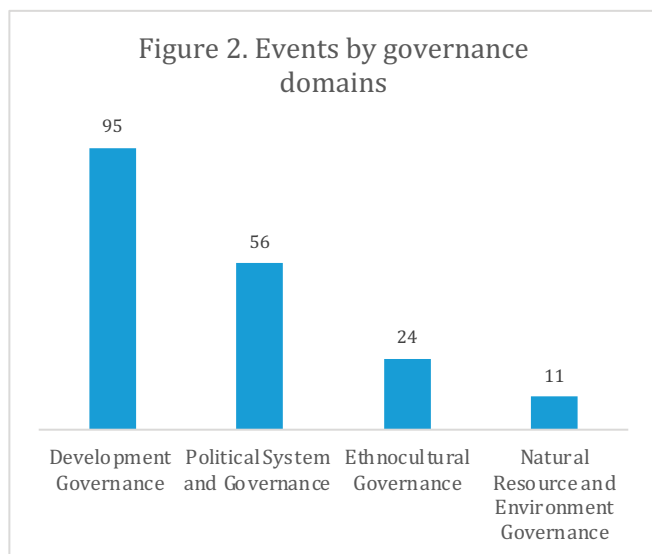
The majority of events were nonviolent, accounting for 126 events, and 29 violent events which demonstrates that peaceful activism remained the dominant form of expression. However, there was also an increase in conflict resolution efforts (31 events) and violent incidents compared to the previous period. The rise in conflict resolution suggests ongoing attempts to address disputes, but the simultaneous increase in violent events indicates unresolved tensions that led to confrontations.

Among the different types of events, peaceful demonstrations were the most common, with 70 recorded events. This trend suggests that public protests and rallies remained a key tool for expressing grievances and demanding policy changes. Additionally, official decisions (24 events) and legal actions (20 events) played a significant role during this period, indicating increased government and judicial involvement in addressing social and political issues. Another notable trend was the

increase in arrests (10 events), reflecting stronger law enforcement measures. Violent demonstrations, riots and physical assaults together accounted for 29 events, demonstrating that some protests escalated into clashes. A particularly concerning development was the occurrence of a bombing threat, signaling a severe security risk that was absent in the previous period.

The governance themes during this period revealed shifting priorities and emerging concerns. Development Governance was the most dominant theme, with 95 events, reflecting a growing focus on infrastructure, economic policies and governance effectiveness. Political System and Governance, which had been a major theme in the previous period, saw a slight decline to 56 events, suggesting a reduced but still significant focus on governance-related discussions. Additionally, there was an increase in number of events related to Ethnocultural Governance (24), indicating a rising focus on

identity, ethnicity and cultural representation in governance. Natural Resource and Environmental Governance, though present, saw a slight decline (11 events).



Consistent with previous observations, Bagmati province experienced the most events related to governance conflicts (excluding resolution efforts), predominantly centered in the Kathmandu Valley. A more comprehensive analysis of the issues, including a detailed examination of the underlying factors and the roles of key actors involved is provided in the subsequent sections.

Conflict Resolution Efforts:

The conflict resolution efforts observed in this period highlighted a combination of negotiations, legal interventions, policy revisions, and enforcement actions to address disputes across different sectors. One prominent method of resolution was through negotiations and agreements between conflicting parties. For example, Rangeli Municipality revised tax policies following protests, and an agreement was reached between locals, Helambu Rural Municipality, and the Ministry of Water Supply to address post-flood reconstruction concerns. Tulsipur Sub-metropolitan City employees also returned to work after a five-point agreement with city officials, showing that structured discussions often lead to resolutions.

Legal interventions and court rulings played a crucial role in settling disputes. The Patan High Court's interim order regarding the Gaushala Dharamshala dispute, the Supreme Court's verdict

against Deepak Manange for attempted murder, and the Kaski, Rupandehi and Kathmandu District Courts' bail order for Ravi Lamichhane in the cooperative embezzlement case are examples of judicial involvement in conflict resolution. Similarly, the Supreme Court overturned Kathmandu Metropolitan City's law on school management committees, rejected a petition against the national ID card system, and annulled amendments permitting infrastructure projects in national parks. These cases show how courts serve as final arbiters in policy and legal matters.

Another key approach was compensation-based reconciliation, which was often used to address grievances, particularly in cases of accidents or social disputes. The drowning incident in Kerabari-8 was resolved by offering financial compensation to the victims' families, though locals expressed concerns that monetary compensation alone was inadequate. The government also reached a settlement with Ruby Khan regarding justice for Nirmala Kurmi, committing to legal action in exchange for ending protests.

Legislative and policy amendments were employed to address systemic issues and prevent future conflicts. The Supreme Court reviewed decisions on salary increments for joint secretaries and land use near riverbanks, citing financial feasibility concerns. The government introduced an ordinance regulating cooperatives, ensuring stricter oversight. Similarly, the withdrawal of the Madhesh Province language bill due to protests from lawmakers and public highlights how legislative proposals are adjusted in response to opposition.

Lastly, law enforcement and regulatory measures were utilized to maintain public order and address legal violations. Prohibited zones were declared in Kaski to prevent unrest following the arrest of Ravi Lamichhane. The Supreme Court ordered a halt to illegal stone excavation from rivers, and Rupandehi District Court imposed a significant bail amount on Lamichhane in a cooperative fraud case. Additionally, Kathmandu Metropolitan City was allowed to proceed with its waste management tender, ensuring that administrative decisions are not unduly obstructed.

1. Political Systems and Governance

The majority of the recorded events between October 2024 and January 2025 (57% of the total recorded events under the Political Systems and Governance domain) were nonviolent in nature, followed by events related to conflict resolution efforts (23%) and violent events (20%).

Administrative disputes have emerged across municipalities, often involving clashes between elected representatives and bureaucrats. Executive decisions, such as in Rapti, Tulsipur, Dharan and Pokhara, have sparked protests over dismissal of contractual-employees¹, the appointment of acting officials² and the termination of contract employees³. Similarly, lack of accountability within local governments and provincial administrations have led to public dissatisfaction, as seen in the Transport office relocation dispute in Okhaldhunga⁴ and financial mismanagement protests in Chhipaharmai Rural Municipality⁵. These governance challenges reflect inefficiencies in Nepal's decentralized system, where power struggles between different administrative units create instability.

Similarly, political struggles were evident within and between parties. Opposition parties accused the government of bypassing parliamentary processes and undermining democracy⁶, that could potentially lead to mass protests in Kathmandu. Meanwhile, Chairman of the District Sports Development Committee, Dang was reinstated by the court after his politically motivated dismissal.

The judiciary has also been entangled in political and legal conflicts, with contempt of court cases⁷, criminal charges against politicians⁸, and controversial legal rulings. High-profile cases, such as the Supreme Court's intervention in land transfers⁹ and several corruption allegations against politicians, indicate both the judiciary's role in maintaining accountability and the growing political interference in legal matters. Additionally, protests over governance failures, such as police inaction in assault and murder cases, tax hikes, and corruption, demonstrate public frustration with Nepal's governance.

Policy and legislative disputes have further fueled tensions, with controversial government decisions on national identity cards, education policies, and social media regulations sparking legal battles and public protests. The CIAA's opposition to restrictions on anonymous corruption complaints¹⁰ and the Supreme Court's intervention in school management¹¹ highlight ongoing debates over governance transparency and accountability.

Overall, Nepal's political governance in this period was characterized by persistent power struggles, administrative inefficiencies, legal disputes, and public dissatisfaction, reflecting the complexities of political transition and institutional development in relation to federal structure.

Highlight-

The Supreme Court ruling on the National Identity Card policy¹² was a landmark case in this period, as it determined the legality of making the national identity card mandatory for accessing government services. Initially, the Supreme Court had issued an interim order halting the policy, following a writ petition filed by Advocate Ram Bahadur Raut, who argued that it would restrict citizens' access to essential public services, including social security benefits, pensions, and SIM card registration. However, the government, through the Attorney General's Office, defended the policy, stating that it was necessary to prevent fraud, such as duplicate pension claims, and to facilitate integrated digital governance. On January 19, 2025, the Supreme Court ultimately ruled in favor of the government, allowing the policy to move forward. The case was significant because it highlighted key governance challenges, including balancing digital security with privacy rights, ensuring equal access to public services, and defining the extent of judicial oversight in government policy decisions. By upholding the government's stance, the ruling set a precedent for future digital governance initiatives, reinforcing bureaucratic control over citizen identification systems while raising concerns about inclusivity and accessibility in Nepal's federal governance framework.

2. Development Governance

A total of 95 events related to Development Governance were documented during the period of October 2024 to January 2025. It mostly reflected disputes and challenges in both infrastructure development and soft development sectors. The nature of the majority of these events were nonviolent, accounting for 73 events, whereas 14 were violent and 8 were related to conflict resolution. These events emerged due to a number of reasons such as inefficiencies in public service delivery, disputes over infrastructure expansion, and issues tied to financial accountability.

Among the nonviolent events, 11 stemmed from disputes and protests over infrastructure projects, such as road construction, urban development, encroachments of public property, and delays in completion of developmental projects. In some cases, communities protested against poorly executed road projects¹³ that left neighborhoods inaccessible, while others voiced concerns about pollution due to unpaved and dusty roads, blockages affecting pedestrian movement. Complaints about electric line extensions¹⁴ and hasty road expansion¹⁵ were also raised, as many settlements demanded that they did not receive reasonable compensation.

Five documented incidents highlighted government failures in public service sectors, particularly in health, education, and economic opportunities in informal sectors. Reports surfaced of inadequate medical facilities, where citizens struggled to access essential health care services due to mismanagement and lack of accountability. Similarly, inefficiencies in educational institutions¹⁶ led to protests, with students and teachers demanding better resources and infrastructure.

Interestingly, no events provided direct evidence of complete conflict resolution. However, some measures were taken to address governance disputes, including government-led initiatives aimed at improving waste management¹⁷, implementing reform and quality control in the education sector¹⁸, and judiciary intervening to ensure the proper execution of infrastructure projects¹⁹. While these efforts indicated a step toward resolution, the absence of a structured conflict resolution

framework and a follow through of the promises made left many disputes unresolved.

Additionally, political influence was heavily observed in cases involving microfinances and cooperatives, where citizens sought justice for alleged mismanagement of their savings²⁰. The political parties and personnel were found to have significant interests, leading to further complications in resolving disputes. Many citizens accused public financial institutions of fraud, demanding intervention, but the political entanglement often delayed justice. During this period, government also issued an ordinance amending several laws related to cooperatives in Nepal. The ordinance, recommended by the Council of Ministers, introduces a 'National Cooperative Regulatory Authority' to oversee savings and credit cooperatives. Key provisions include stricter membership regulations, savings and loan limits, mandatory credit reporting, and penalties for non-compliance. The ordinance also grants the Authority legal powers similar to a district court to regulate cooperatives, protect savers, and address financial mismanagement in the sector.

Highlight-

In the case of alleged fraudulent activities in cooperatives, high profile figures like Ravi Lamichhane, former DIG Chhabi Lal Joshi, GB Rai and others faced multiple trials across various courts of the country. The accusations sparked widespread public interest and legal scrutiny, leading to an intense courtroom battle over several months. There has been a deeply divided public response over the legal proceedings. Victims' group affected by the alleged fraudulent activities organized multiple demonstrations, demanding strict legal action and justice. Similarly, Lamichhane's supporters also took to the streets, protesting in his defense and claiming the case is politically motivated. These opposing demonstrations have at times led to clashes between protest groups and interventions by law enforcement authorities. After months of legal battles, the court ultimately ruled for his release on bail. This case highlights the broader governance challenges related to financial fraud, legal accountability, and public trust in the justice system, reflecting growing concerns over transparency and embezzlement in the public financial sector.

3. Ethnocultural Governance

Between October 2024 to January 2025, a total of 24 events related to ethnocultural governance were documented. These events were predominately nonviolent in nature, with 16 events, while four were violent and four were related to conflict resolution. Bagmati province recorded the highest number of these events (10), followed by Madhesh (6), Koshi (6) and Lumbini (2). The events underscored the widespread nature of ethnocultural issues, reflecting both national and local concerns.

The majority of the nonviolent incidents involved peaceful demonstrations (10), and have primarily focused on asserting ethnic rights and preserving cultural identities and heritage. For instance, the Kirat community protested against the naming of Koshi Province²¹, arguing that the name fails to reflect their historical and cultural identity. Similarly, the Marwari Service Committee demonstrated against the Pashupati Area Development Trust (PADT) to secure rights with Gaushala Dharamshala²², a facility managed by the committee over eight decades. The PADT contends that the Committee's claim lacks legal standing, leading to disputes and legal interventions. Similarly, Heritage Conservation Society staged demonstrations demanding the demolition of the Chayadevi Complex in Thamel, claiming it was built on the historic Kamalpokhari pond²³. These movements highlighted the challenges Nepal faces in balancing governance with the recognition and preservation of its diverse cultural heritages and identities.

In addition to these identity-based disputes, some incidents have exposed issues of sexual exploitation by authorities. Security personnel²⁴ and elected representative²⁵ were alleged for heinous crimes such as raping minors, which further complicate governance challenges by questioning the accountability and justice.

Amid these challenges, there were also efforts of conflict resolutions. Most notable was the agreement between protesters and government to prosecute those responsible for the murder of Nirmala Kurmi²⁶ and provide protection to her family. This came after over 68 days of continuous protests, highlighting the effect of persistent pressure

from the public. Another significant instance was the Madhesh Province Government shelving its intended language bill²⁷, that sought to designate official working languages for the province. Actors such as parliamentarians were involved in this protest who argued that the inclusion of languages like Hindi in the bill threatened the safeguarding of native languages. The retraction of the bill indicated the government's responsiveness to public sentiment and its commitment to preserving linguistic heritage.

Highlight-

A widely covered case during this period was the escalating dispute over the Pathibhara cable car project in Taplejung²⁸. This project sparked intense opposition from local communities, particularly the Limbu groups, who consider Mukkulung (Pathibhara) as sacred and integral to their cultural identity. Demonstrators asserted that the construction project would not only desecrate their religious heritage but also lead to environmental degradation and disrupt the livelihoods of indigenous groups.

Mukkumlung Conservationists have been protesting for five years, with tensions escalating into violent confrontations when security forces got involved. The confrontation reached a peak at Baludanda, where protesters pelted stones at the police, prompting security forces to fire 12 rounds of tear gas and open fire resulting in injuries to both civilians and police personnel²⁹. In response to the crackdown, Mukkulung conservationists imposed an indefinite traffic ban on key transport routes, including the Mechi Highway, Tamor Corridor, and Taplejung, significantly disrupting movement in the region.

This conflict exemplifies the complexities of ethnocultural governance in Nepal, where development projects often collide with indigenous rights, environmental concerns, and cultural preservation. The prolonged protests and violent confrontations signal the need for inclusive decision-making processes that involve affected communities and balance development initiatives with respect for local traditions, environmental sustainability, and the rights of indigenous peoples.

4. Natural Resource and Environmental Governance

During the period of October 2024 to January 2025, a total of 11 events were documented under the domain of Natural Resources and Environmental Governance. These events covered public demonstrations to legal actions, each reflected the concerns about environmental degradation and resource exploitation. The incidents involved a multitude of challenges: industrial accidents, resource disputes, mining, pollution, and infrastructure development. Geographically, these issues spread across various regions. Issues included urban development in Bagmati, recovery and compensation after Melamchi flood³⁰, resource conflicts³¹ in Madhesh, and land dispute³² in Sudurpaschim. Similarly the issue of industrial pollution³³ and river conservation arose in Gandaki³⁴, and industrial accidents in Koshi. These all reflected the struggle between development and environmental protection.

These events were driven by the involvement of multiple actors, including local communities, civil society organizations, government agencies, and the private sector. Local communities and civil society groups were often at the forefront of demanding accountability, organizing protests and calling for stricter environmental laws. In contrast, government bodies struggled to balance industrial growth with environmental protection, often facing resistance from affected communities. The private sector, particularly in industries like mining, construction, and manufacturing, frequently found itself at the center of these conflicts, especially when their activities were seen as damaging the environment. Public protests were crucial outlet for people to voice their concerns. Four major protests were organized by local communities and civil groups. They demanded better environmental management, strict regulations, and action against polluting industries. The most notable protest took place in Nawalpur, where locals blocked the gates of Chaudhary Industrial Village to demand cleaner air³⁵, water, and waste management.

More than half of the documented events under this governance domain were related to efforts for

conflict/dispute resolution. Several of these events were related to negotiations, showcasing the dialogue between communities, industries, and government authorities. These cases mostly revolved around compensation for industrial accidents, disputes over resource management, and disagreements on infrastructural development. Legal actions played a key role during this time as well. There were three major cases, including a Supreme Court ruling, tackling environmental violations. The Supreme Court's decision against illegal mining and infrastructure in protected areas³⁶ showed the judiciary's role in making industries accountable and protecting the environment.

Ultimately, looking ahead, Nepal needs stronger environmental laws and enforcement mechanisms. The gap between legal compensation and true accountability calls for systemic changes in the legal and regulatory frameworks. Grassroots activism, as seen in the 'Save Kaligandaki Campaign' and the protests in Nawalpur, shows that public engagement is a powerful tool in holding industries accountable and driving environmental reforms. The role of the judiciary, as demonstrated by the Supreme Court's decision on illegal mining, remains critical in ensuring that industries are held to account for their environmental impact. A more balanced and sustainable approach is needed where the importance of development is recognized ensuring the protection of natural resources for future generations.

Highlight-

In Kerabari, Morang³⁷, two children drowned in a pit created by a crusher industry. Compensation of 26 lakhs was proposed for the family of the deceased. However, the local community, dissatisfied by the compensation alone, argued that such incidents could not be solved with financial relief but required strict regulations and the culprit should be held accountable legally. This case shows the gap that prevails between compensation and true justice. Compensation does provide economic relief to some extent, but communities want not only reparation but also systemic change to prevent future accidents. For this, there seems to be the importance of strict legal obligations where the perpetrators are brought to justice.

Overall Analysis and Recommendations

The governance trends from this period highlight both the progress and challenges, Nepal faces in implementing its federal system. While public participation, legal accountability, and policy autonomy signal growth in decentralized governance, power centralization, financial mismanagement, and political conflicts expose weaknesses. Below is a more in-depth explanation of these key takeaways from this period:

1. Public engagement in governance is high

The large number of peaceful protests (70 events) and civil society actions demonstrates that Nepalese citizens are actively involved in governance issues. This reflects a maturing democratic culture where people demand transparency, accountability, and better policies. Protests covered an array of concerns, including economic decisions, political disputes, and service delivery.

However, while public engagement is a positive indicator, frequent protests, disputes, and cases of non-cooperation suggest that many governance mechanisms are not functioning effectively. If people repeatedly resort to protests for rather than dialogue-based problem-solving, it signals that decision-making processes are not inclusive or responsive. This shows that Nepal's federal institutions still need to strengthen channels for civic engagement, policy consultations, and conflict resolution.

2. Centralization of power in Kathmandu

Although Nepal's federal system is designed to distribute governance responsibilities across provinces and local levels, the events show that Federal capital (Kathmandu) remains the political and administrative center. With 70 out of 186 total events occurring there, it is clear that key governance decisions and disputes are still concentrated in the capital.

This imbalance poses a serious challenge to

federalism. Ideally, provincial and local governments should have more autonomy to handle their own internal matters. However, the low number of recorded events in Karnali (1) and Sudurpaschim (5) provinces suggests that either provincial and local governance structures are weak, or governance issues in these areas do not receive enough national attention. For federalism to be effective, Nepal must ensure that all provinces and local governments have strong institutions, financial independence, and decision-making authority.

3. Corruption and legal accountability remain key issues

The events include multiple arrests, legal actions, and corruption cases, indicating that Nepal's institutions are making efforts to enforce accountability. Cases like the arrest of a Mayor and ward-presidents in financial fraud and legal actions against cooperative fraud operators show that oversight bodies are active. These actions are essential for maintaining public trust in the federal system.

However, the fact that a number of corruption cases exist in the first place suggests that Nepal's governance mechanisms still lack strong internal controls. If local governments misuse resources or fail to follow transparency standards, federalism could become an excuse for decentralized corruption rather than good governance. To prevent this, Nepal needs stronger regulatory oversight at all tiers of governments, ensuring that governance remains transparent and accountable.

4. Weak coordination between three tiers of government

One of the biggest challenges for Nepal's federalism is policy coordination between central, provincial, and local governments. A clear example of this is the ongoing disputes and conflicts around the employee management, and natural resource management and revenue sharing.

Such incidents highlight gaps in intergovernmental communication and financial management. While federalism gives provinces

autonomy, Nepal still lacks clear coordination frameworks for policy decisions that affect both local and national levels. Without better communication between the federal, provincial and local governments, there is a risk of inconsistent policies, economic inefficiencies, and governance conflicts.

Additionally, corruption in development projects and financial mismanagement at the local level show that many provinces lack the technical and institutional capacity to manage resources effectively. Strengthening financial accountability, improving administrative efficiency, and clarifying the division of responsibilities between federal and provincial governments will be critical for Nepal's governance model to succeed.

5. Political conflicts and power struggles are frequent

Political parties played a major role in governance-related events, often engaging in disputes over leadership, policy decisions, and authorities. Such conflicts indicate that Nepal's political institutions are still adjusting to the federal structure.

Power struggles between different political actors, whether between federal and provincial officials or within parties themselves, can slow down decision-making and policy implementation. If party interests continue to dominate governance discussions, it will be a challenge for Nepal's federal system to function effectively. For long-term success, Nepal needs stronger institutional mechanisms that prioritize stable governance over political competition.

Nepal's federalism is evolving, with high public engagement, increasing legal accountability, and growing policy autonomy at the provincial level. However, centralized power, weak policy coordination, financial mismanagement, and political conflicts continue to undermine effective federalism.

To strengthen its federal model, Nepal must focus on:

1. Establishing clear frameworks for cooperation between federal, provincial, and local governments.
2. Strengthening regulatory oversight to prevent corruption at all levels.
3. Empowering provincial institutions with the resources and expertise to function independently.
4. Creating mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution and governance consensus.

By addressing these challenges, Nepal can transform its federal system into an effective, decentralized governance model that promotes inclusive development, accountability, sustainability and stability.

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About CSC

Centre for Social Change (CSC) is a non-profit making social think-tank based in Kathmandu, Nepal. Since its establishment in 2015, CSC has been actively working to bring positive transformation in the socio-political dynamics of Nepali society through involvements in the fields of research, development practice, education, advocacy, and community mobilization. CSC's current works are focused on issues surround conflict transformation, peacebuilding, democracy and governance, migration, labor and employment, civic space, civil society development, public policy, climate change, and social development.

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