

Abdicate or consolidate? Comparing the strategic decision making of the Nepali and Bhutanese monarchies

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Why did the Bhutanese king unilaterally decide to give democracy to his subjects, while the Nepali king tried to take it away? Why cling to absolute monarchy when popular demand for democracy is strong? Why democratize when there is seemingly no demand for it? Who is more of a *gandu*: Jigme or Gyanendra? This paper addresses a question of strategic decision making. Our method for answering these questions is a paired case study using a most-similar-systems design. Bhutan and Nepal are natural cases for comparison because they share many similar features. They are both landlocked, mountainous countries, heavily dependent on their economic relations with India. And until very recently, they were the two remaining monarchies in South Asia. While the Wangchuk dynasty seems to be making a smooth transition to modern times, the turn of the twenty first century marked the beginning of the end for the Shah dynasty in Nepal. What explains the divergent political trajectories of the past decade?