

House of Representatives Election 2026

Observation Report



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ELECTION 2026**

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**Democracy Resource Center Nepal
Lalitpur**

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Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN)
Lalitpur, Nepal

Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
APF	Armed Police Force
CDO	Chief District Officer
CPN (Maoist Centre)	Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre)
CPN (UML)	Nepal Communist Party (Unified Marxist-Leninist)
CPN (Unified Socialist)	Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Socialist)
DRCN	Democracy Resource Center Nepal
ECN	Election Commission of Nepal
FNJ	Federation of Nepali Journalists
FPTP	First-Past-The-Post
Gen-Z	Generation Z
GoN	Government of Nepal
HoR	House of Representatives
JSP Nepal	Janata Samajbadi Party Nepal
NCP	Nepali Communist Party
NOTA	None of the Above
NRs.	Nepali Rupees
PABSON	Private And Boarding School's Organization Nepal
PR	Proportional Representation
RPP	Rastriya Prajatantra Party
RSP	Rastriya Swatantra Party

1

Background

Following the Gen-Z movement on September 8–9, 2025, the coalition government of the Nepal Communist Party (Unified Marxist-Leninist) [CPN (UML)] led by KP Sharma Oli and the Nepali Congress was toppled from power. In accordance with the demands of the protesters, President Ram Chandra Poudel appointed former Chief Justice Sushila Karki as the Prime Minister on September 12. On the same day, the President approved the decision made by the cabinet to dissolve parliament, and announced that elections for members of the House of Representatives (HoR) would be held on March 5, 2026.

The main task of the interim government was to conduct the election of the HoR. Initially, among the major political parties, the Nepali Congress and CPN (UML) opposed the formation of the interim government and the dissolution of parliament, calling it an unconstitutional move. On the other hand, the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) and the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) had accepted the dissolution of parliament. The members of parliament affiliated with the Nepali Congress and CPN (UML) filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court demanding the reinstatement of parliament. Furthermore, these two parties were hesitant to participate in the election, alleging that the interim government had failed to improve the security environment for the polls. Such activities by the two major parties sparked widespread concerns that the elections might not take place at the scheduled

time. However, after President Ram Chandra Poudel facilitated talks between the top leaders of the three major parties (Nepali Congress, CPN (UML), and Nepal Communist Party) and Prime Minister Sushila Karki, the state of deadlock was broken. This played a key role in building trust between the three parties and the government, and ultimately, the election was successfully held on the designated date.

This report was prepared by the Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) after observing the election management, campaigning, security arrangements, voting process, and contemporary political developments. This report is based on direct observation of polling centers, interaction with stakeholders, and information received from observers. Previously published materials have also been utilized for the analysis.

2

Methodology

DRCN deployed four long-term observers from February 16 to March 1, 2026 for the observation of the House of Representatives Election, 2026. Divided into two teams, these observers monitored pre-election activities in Koshi, Madhesh, Gandaki, Lumbini, and Karnali provinces. For this purpose, they closely monitored matters such as the election campaign of political parties and candidates, the security situation, the political environment, the preparations of the Election Commission Nepal (ECN), and the status of compliance with the code of conduct, and collected information and data by interviewing stakeholders. Similarly, seven short-term observers observed the political environment, election campaigning, code of conduct compliance, security situation, and the silence period across all seven provinces for seven days. In addition, both long-term and short-term observers monitored the vote counting and the post-election situation.

For election day, DRCN deployed 94 out of the 100 selected observers. The observers were selected while maintaining diversity in gender, geography, age group, ethnicity, etc. Among them, 54 were women and 40 were men. 11 observers were deployed in Sudurpashchim Province, 10 in Karnali, 10 in Lumbini, 13 in Gandaki, 27 in Bagmati, 13 in Madhesh, and 10 in Koshi Province. Through them, observation was conducted in 204 wards of 64 local levels across 34 districts. This covered 452 polling

centers across a total of 413 polling stations. The observers were oriented on the election process and observation methodology through in-person sessions in Kathmandu and Pokhara. For observers who could not attend in person, a separate online orientation was conducted. They closely observed the voting process, security situation, the participation of various groups (youth, women, senior citizens, persons with disabilities), and challenges, among other things.

All long-term, short-term, and election-day observers were provided with questionnaires and were asked to collect information by observing various dimensions of the election accordingly. The questionnaire to observe pre-election activities covered topics including the ECN's preparations, candidates' campaign activities, voter education, the security situation, and the political environment. The voting process observation questionnaire included questions regarding the opening of voting, the voting process, and the closing procedures. Information regarding vote counting, acceptance of election results, the political environment, etc., was collected through the post-election observation questionnaire. Observers interviewed election officials, Chief District Officers (CDO), Chief Returning Officers, Returning Officers, representatives of political parties, candidates, Polling Officers, representatives of security mechanisms, civil society representatives, and citizens. On election day, observers spent at least 30 minutes each polling booth.

In addition, taking into account the fact that social media was heavily utilized in this election, social media platforms were also monitored. The Facebook handles of 25 active candidates were tracked from the time of their nomination filing to qualitatively and quantitatively analyze the type of content they posted and the sentiments reflected in them. Furthermore, an overall assessment of social media usage in the election was also conducted.

3

Institution and Legal Framework

3.1. The Election Commission

Periodic, fair, and credible elections are the bedrock of Nepal’s democratic governance system. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) provides for the formation of legislatures at the local, provincial, and federal levels based on adult franchise. The ECN is the constitutional and autonomous body responsible for making this process organized, transparent, and credible. Articles 245, 246, and 247 of the Constitution of Nepal outline the formation, functions, duties, and powers of the ECN.

According to Article 245 of the Constitution, the ECN consists of a Chief Election Commissioner and four other Commissioners. Currently, the positions of the Chief Election Commissioner and one Commissioner are vacant, and Commissioner Ram Prasad Bhandari has assumed the responsibility of Acting Chief Election Commissioner. Although this was the first experience of conducting an election without a Chief Commissioner, it did not impact election management, as the decision-making process faced no hurdles under existing legal provisions.

Despite being constitutionally autonomous, voices are frequently raised that the ECN has not been able to function with complete independence in practice. The potential for political influence in the appointment process

of Commissioners, government control over economic and financial decisions, and the dependence on government approval for human resource management are the major factors challenging its autonomy.

The provision regarding the determination of election dates is another significant subject of debate. According to the House of Representatives Member Election Act, 2017, the authority to set election dates rests with the Government of Nepal (GoN). Consequently, there is a higher probability of election dates being determined based on the government's political convenience. However, from an election management perspective, the argument is strong that the authority to determine dates should be given to the ECN itself, as it is the body responsible for preparation, planning, and management. Due to the current arrangement, the ECN has been forced to make rushed preparations within short timeframes, which has affected the quality of election management.

In this context, demands for establishing a fixed election calendar for periodic elections have also been strongly raised. If election dates are secured in advance, the ECN will have adequate time for preparation, uncertainty among stakeholders will be reduced, and suspicions regarding whether an election will be held or not will be eliminated. Additionally, the government's opportunity to announce dates at its convenience will be limited. Nonetheless, such a calendar may not always apply to elections held under special political or extraordinary circumstances. For instance, this election held in 2026 was conducted under similar extraordinary circumstances.

3.2. Electoral Law

In addition to the Constitution, elections for members of the HoR are primarily guided by the Election Commission Act, 2017; Voter Roll Act, 2017; Election (Offence and Punishment) Act, 2017; Electoral Constituency Delimitation Act, 2017; Political Parties Act, 2017; and the House of Representatives Member Election Act, 2017. Beyond these,

various rules, directives, procedures, policies, and codes of conduct have also been issued to execute the elections.

Since election-related laws are scattered and numerous, they are sometimes found to be contradictory and overlapping. Therefore, drafting an integrated law was essential to simplify the electoral system, the ECN set a target to formulate an integrated election law in its Third Strategic Plan (2019/20–2023/24). Furthermore, the Supreme Court had also issued directives to draft laws on various matters. In accordance with this need, a draft of the Integrated Election Law was prepared in 2023. It contained positive and reformative provisions such as temporary voter registration, advance voting, a mandatory 33 percent female candidacy in the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) electoral system, a predetermined fixed election date, a ‘None of the Above’ (NOTA) voting provision, voting rights for Nepali citizens living abroad, a provision preventing defeated candidates from running again until five years have passed, and a provision allowing an individual to be elected through the Proportional Representation (PR) system a maximum of only two times.¹ However, the Parliament was dissolved before this bill could be tabled.

The voter list is the primary foundation of an election. To register, voters must be physically present at locations designated by the Commission. Section 4 of the Voter Roll Act, 2017 stipulates that the collection of voter lists shall be suspended once an election is announced. However, as many voters only show interest once the election process is underway and ignore it at other times, the names of many individuals used to be left off the voter lists. Moreover, this time, instead of a periodic election, a special election was announced under unusual circumstances following the Gen-Z movement. Since voter list collection was halted immediately after the sudden election announcement, a large group eligible to participate in voting was on the verge of being excluded. Consequently, the government,

¹ For a review of the provisions of this bill and their practicality, see: Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN). 2025. *Election Management Bill 2023: Provisions and Perspectives*. Lalitpur: DRCN.

through the Voter Roll (First Amendment) Ordinance, 2025, amended Sub-section 2(2) of Section 4 of the Act, enabling the ECN to collect voter lists from September 28 to November 16, 2025. In addition, due to overcrowding for registration, a provision was made allowing individuals who had already updated their details in the National Identity Card system to be registered as voters based on those details, which further simplified the process. This was because the compulsion to be physically present at registration centers to provide biometrics was eliminated. Even with these measures, severe overcrowding led to frequent server crashes, prompting the ECN, at the request of Prime Minister Sushila Karki, to extend the registration deadline until November 21.

Section 80 of the House of Representatives Member Election Act, 2017 guides the ECN in conducting elections and grants it the authority to issue necessary procedures and directives. Accordingly, the ECN formulated directives and procedures. On December 27, 2025, the ECN approved and issued the Election Code of Conduct, 2025. Similarly, the Commission approved and issued the following procedures and directives:

1. Temporary Voter Roll Procedure, 2025
2. House of Representatives Member Proportional Election Directive, 2025
3. House of Representatives Member Proportional Election (First Amendment) Directive, 2025
4. House of Representatives Member Proportional Election (including Second Amendment) Directive, 2025
5. House of Representatives Member Election Operational Financial Procedure, 2025
6. House of Representatives Member Election Directive, 2025 (First Amendment)

7. House of Representatives Member Election Directive, 2026 (Second Amendment)
8. House of Representatives Member Election (Voting) Directive, 2026
9. House of Representatives Member Election (Vote Counting) Directive, 2026
10. House of Representatives Member Election (Human Resource Management) Directive, 2026 (including First Amendment)
11. House of Representatives Member Election Campaign Bank Account (Operation and Management) Procedure, 2026
12. Vehicle Permission Procedure, 2026

These laws paved the way for major aspects of the election, such as: announcing the election schedule; appointing Returning Officers, Polling Officers, and other staff; the candidacy and nomination process for the FPTP system; the process of submitting the candidate list under the PR system; distributing election symbols; managing polling stations, ballot papers, and ballot boxes; the voting process; and announcing election results.

Sub-clause (2) of Article 84 of the Constitution of Nepal stipulates that when political parties field candidates for the HoR election under the PR system, they must ensure equitable representation through a closed list from all communities based on population, including Women, Dalits, Indigenous Nationalities (Adivasi Janajati), Khas-Arya, Madheshis, Tharus, Muslims, and backward regions. Annex-1 of the House of Representatives Member Election Act, 2017 contains clear provisions regarding the percentage of inclusive groups to be included in the closed list. In light of the population ratios from the 2021 National Census, it was necessary to revisit the percentages for the Dalit, Indigenous Nationalities, Khas-Arya, Madheshi, Tharu, and Muslim communities. In this regard, as amendments were

deemed necessary in Annex-1 related to Sub-section (5) of Section 28 and Sub-section (6) of Section 60 of the House of Representatives Member Election Act, 2017, the GoN issued the House of Representatives Member Election (First Amendment) Ordinance, 2025, which was published in the Gazette on December 19, 2025. Thus, the changes were made under the PR system as mentioned in Table 1.

Table 1: Representation Percentage of Inclusive Groups According to Population

Inclusive Group	Previous Percentage	Amended Percentage (2025)
Dalit	13.8	13.44
Indigenous Nationalities	28.7	28.72
Khas-Arya	31.2	30.28
Madheshi	15.3	16.15
Tharu	6.6	6.52
Muslim	4.4	4.89

Source: House of Representatives Member Election (First Amendment) Ordinance, 2025.

In accordance with the same ordinance, the ECN also amended the House of Representatives Member Proportional Election Directive, 2025. In the House of Representatives Member Election Directive, 2025 (Second Amendment), the representation of backward regions was also amended and adjusted to 4.02 percent, reduce from the previous 4.3 percent.

3.3. Constituencies and Representation

According to Article 84, Clause 1 of the Constitution, 275 members are elected to the HoR, out of whom 165 members (60%) are elected through the FPTP system and the remaining 110 members (40%) are elected through the PR system. The Constitution mandates political parties to ensure proportional inclusive representation of Women, Dalits, Indigenous

Nationalities, Khas-Arya, Madheshis, Tharus, Muslims, backward regions, and persons with disabilities when registering candidacies under the PR system.

Article 286 of the Constitution provides for the determination of electoral constituencies for the FPTP system through the Constituency Delimitation Commission. Accordingly, the Commission formed in 2017 designated 165 constituencies, treating population as the primary basis and geography as the secondary basis. There is a constitutional provision that once constituencies are determined, they can be reviewed only every 20 years. The Electoral Constituency Delimitation Act, 2017 mentions that data from the latest National Census must be taken as the basis of population for constituency delimitation.

In Nepal, the National Census is conducted every 10 years. Migration due to economic and social reasons is causing rapid changes in Nepal's demographic structure. Therefore, political party representatives state that the constitutional provision to review constituencies only every 20 years is neither politically nor practically appropriate. Since migration patterns change at a high velocity alongside rapid urbanization, it is logical to review electoral constituencies after every census. Furthermore, constituency delimitation is currently done based on population, whereas it ought to be done based on the number of voters. Consequently, there is an imbalance in representation matching the actual voter turnout.²

Because temporary residents are included in the census but do not participate in voting, representation has failed to remain balanced as constituencies are not determined on a voter basis. For instance, Kathmandu has been allocated 10 seats based on population. However, in Kathmandu Constituency No. 1, one member of the HoR is elected for

² Paswan, Bhola. 2026. Who Took 19 Seats from Madhesh? Statistics Say - The Heart of Representation was Cut by the Population Crowd (In Nepali). *Onlinekhabar*, January 18. Available at www.onlinekhabar.com/2026/01/1851419/who-took-19-seats-in-madhesh-statistics-say-the-heart-of-representation-was-cut-out-by-the-population-crowd; accessed on March 16, 2026.

48,489 voters, whereas Ramechhap also has only 1 seat for 187,952 voters. Going by Kathmandu's ratio, Ramechhap should have four representatives. Furthermore, the provision to maintain a minimum of one representative per district, regardless of how small the population is, means Manang has one representative despite having only 7,000 voters. Hence, there is an extreme disparity in the voter weight per elected representative.

4

Election Commission's Preparation

According to the Election Commission Act, 2017, the election period spans from 120 days prior to the election date until the publication of the final results. The Commission requires a minimum of 120 days to complete various electoral preparations. Although the ECN had adequate time for preparation, the election on March 5 was held under special circumstances, presenting equally significant challenges. The Commission released an election schedule and advanced its preparations accordingly.³

4.1. Human Resource Management and Training

The ECN Act provides that the Commission may seek necessary assistance from various agencies, offices, or entities owned by the GoN, provincial governments, and local levels for election purposes. Additionally, the Commission can create various positions and appoint personnel for election-related work. For such roles, it can mobilize employees from the GoN, provincial governments, and local governments; staff from institutions operating under government grants; or teachers and staff from universities and community schools.

³ ECN. 2025. The Election Program for the House of Representatives Elections, 2026 (In Nepali). *Press Release*. November 16. Available at https://election.gov.np/admin/public/storage/HOR%202082/003_merged.pdf; accessed on March 16, 2026.

To coordinate and facilitate human resource management for this election, a five-member District Human Resource Management Coordination Committee was formed in each district under the coordinatorship of the CDO. In almost all locations, personnel deployment was carried out in accordance with the House of Representatives Election (Human Resource Management) Directive, 2026. The directive specifies that permanent employees of local levels or permanent teachers can be deployed as Polling Officers and Assistant Polling Officers only if there is a shortage of permanent employees from the federal civil service or provincial civil service.

The Confederation of Nepalese Teacher demanded that the government stop discriminating against teachers deployed in elections, claiming that “in places where teachers were assigned to election duties, they were given junior responsibilities without considering their level and grade.”⁴ In observed districts such as Dang and Salyan, because the exact grade/post was not clearly specified when teachers’ names were submitted, personnel expressed dissatisfaction at the Office of the Chief Returning Officer, stating that the order of precedence (seniority) was mismatched. In districts like Okhaldhunga⁵ and Rautahat,⁶ employees protested, alleging that they were deployed to election duties without maintaining the proper order of precedence. The Office of the Chief Returning Officer later corrected the seniority order and deployed them. Prahlad Kumar Yogi, the Chief Returning Officer of Salyan, noted that if details regarding employees’ appointment dates and seniority rankings had been clearly included, the selection, classification, and allocation of responsibilities for personnel

⁴ Nepal Khabar. 2026. Federation Urges not to Discriminate Against Teachers Deployed in Elections (In Nepali). February 20. Available at www.nepalkhabar.com/politics/266189-2026-2-20-21-29-25; accessed on March 29, 2026.

⁵ Onlinekhabar. 2026. Election Officials Boycotted Services and Facilities, Citing Lack of Dignity (In Nepali). February 25. Available at www.onlinekhabar.com/2026/02/1878715/election-officials-boycott-services-citing-lack-of-dignity; accessed on March 29, 2026.

⁶ Thahakhabar. 2026. Allegations of Discrimination in Election Staff Deployment, Demands for Decision Review (In Nepali). February 25. Available at www.thahakhabar.com/detail/295102; accessed on March 30, 2026.

would have been systematic and conflict-free.⁷ The Human Resource Management Directive for the House of Representatives Election, 2026, issued by the ECN, states that a Polling Officer can deploy up to eight staff members in a polling station with up to 500 voters.⁸

When selecting personnel for election duties, priority was given to employees who were not working in highly essential services or associated with trade unions as executive officials. The Commission provided a one-day training session for Polling Officers and Assistant Polling Officers deployed to polling stations. This training, conducted in large groups, was found to be less effective. For instance, in Kathmandu Constituency No. 3, training was conducted simultaneously for 114 Polling Officers and 114 Assistant Polling Officers. Commenting on the effectiveness of the training, a Polling Officer deployed in that constituency said, “Because a large number of participants were kept together, the training could not be as detailed as it should have been. It was difficult for staff being deployed for the first time to understand. Although they tried to teach through practical exercises, learning was not easy due to the heavy crowding. The process of filling out the minutes (*Muchulka*) and annex forms was only discussed theoretically; it would have been better if this had also been taught using a practical method.”⁹ Therefore, to ensure effective preparation of election personnel, revisions are needed regarding the duration of training, group sizes, and methodology.

⁷ Interview with Yogi on February 26, 2026.

⁸ According to Section 9 of the House of Representatives Election Human-resource Management Directive, 2026, a total of eight staffs are to be deployed at polling stations with up to 500 voters. Under this, the provision includes one Polling Officer, one Assistant Polling Officer, three Assistant Staff (one to verify the voter list and two to distribute the ballot papers for the FPTP and PR systems), one Support Staff, and two Volunteers (one to keep records of the voters who have voted and one woman to apply ink to the voters’ nails). At polling stations with more than 500 voters, there is a provision allowing the recruitment of one additional volunteer to manage the voters’ queue and provide other assistance. Similarly, for temporary polling stations, there is a provision to deploy three staff members, consisting of one Polling Officer, one Assistant Polling Officer, and one Support Staff each.

⁹ Interview with the Polling Officer on February 24, 2026.

4.2. Election Materials

Among the materials required for the election, 14 types of items, including ballot papers and ballot boxes, were dispatched from the ECN. These materials included security seals, barriers, markers, stamp pads, stamp ink, *Swastik* stamps, and ballot box stickers required for training and operating polling stations. In addition, 37 other types of materials were managed at the local level. Some of these were purchased, while the remaining inventory in stock was utilized.

In the past, the practice was for the ECN itself to procure most election materials centrally and dispatch them to the districts. However, this time, the respective District Election Offices were authorized to procure certain materials directly. District Election Offices in Salyan, Sarlahi, Kaski, and Banke, among others, signed agreements with the Food Management and Trading Company Limited to procure election materials at government rates. This rendered the procurement process cost-effective, transparent, and efficient.¹⁰

In contrast, all materials for Siraha were requested directly from the ECN. According to Rajan Srivastava, the District Election Officer of Siraha, procuring election materials through an agreement with the Food Management and Trading Company Limited was a cumbersome process, which is why all materials were requested from the ECN.¹¹ Furthermore, whereas budget allocations to District Election Offices previously specified headings, a lump-sum budget was sent this time. Sunita Rimal, the District Election Officer of Terhathum, stated that this made it easier to purchase materials based on local needs.¹²

¹⁰ Gorakhapatra. 2026. G-to-G Agreement to Procure Election Materials (In Nepali). January 16. Available at <https://gorkhapatraonline.com/news/188147>; accessed on March 15, 2026.

¹¹ Interview with Shrivastava on February 11, 2026.

¹² Interview with Rimal on February 25, 2026.

4.3. Election Observation

Observation is crucial for making elections credible and transparent, ensuring that the results are universally accepted. It provides independent monitoring at each stage of the process, including election preparation, voting, vote counting, and the declaration of results. Moreover, it identifies weaknesses and offers evidence-based recommendations for improvement. This importance is amplified in countries like Nepal, which are transitioning politically and gradually institutionalizing democratic practices. Recognizing that observation enhances public faith in the electoral process, the ECN has consistently involved various national and international organizations in election observation.

For the House of Representatives Member Election, the ECN implemented various provisions concerning permission systems, eligibility criteria, monitoring mechanisms, and report management to streamline observation. A total of 51 organizations applied for observation permission for the election, out of which 40 organizations were granted permission. This included 36 national and four international organizations. The applications of 10 national and one international organization were rejected. While this arrangement appeared to aim for comprehensive and holistic observation, it limited the participation of smaller organizations focused on specialized sectors.

In terms of policy, although the ECN updated other election-related directives and procedures, it retained the Election Observation Directive, 2021 as the primary legal foundation. Operationally, an online system was used to collect and verify observers' details, as done in the past. While this eased the process to some extent, organizations faced technical difficulties due to frequent server crashes when attempting to enter details within the deadline set by the ECN. This indicates that the preparation and capacity testing of the digital system were insufficient.

Provisions regarding the number and eligibility of observers were also vital management aspects. The ECN mandated that each organization must

mobilize at least 100 observers, which favored organizations with large networks. However, this automatically excluded smaller organizations with limited resources and human capacity. Likewise, criteria requiring observers to be at least 21 years old, possess a minimum educational qualification of a Proficiency Certificate Level (PCL) from a Nepali educational institution, and be registered on the voter list with a valid voter number created barriers to inclusive participation. This specifically restricted the involvement of Nepali citizens educated at foreign universities, individuals who were otherwise qualified but not registered on the voter list, and youth who became active following the Gen-Z movement.

Inconsistency was also observed regarding provisions for vehicle use on election day. Although the ECN stated that vehicles could be operated based on observer identity cards alone, the practice of requiring additional permits persisted in several districts. Furthermore, observers were denied entry to some polling stations or were permitted to observe only from a great distance. This points to a lack of effective dissemination and coordination of instructions and policies issued by the center.

Overall, the ECN made various efforts to institutionalize, streamline, and result-orient the management of election observation. Nevertheless, challenges such as policy ambiguities, technical flaws, and barriers to inclusive participation remain at the implementation level. Moving forward, reforms are necessary to review observation criteria, strengthen technical systems, and enhance the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms. Only through such measures can election observation be established as an impactful, credible, and useful medium for policy reform.

5

Security Management

Out of the 23,112 polling stations for the election, 3,680 were classified as highly sensitive, 4,442 as sensitive, and 2,845 as normal.¹³ Under the implementation of the Integrated Security Plan, 2025, approximately 80,000 Nepal Army personnel were deployed starting one month before the election date. The Nepal Police recruited 133,980 temporary election police, while the Armed Police Force (APF) recruited 15,110. This election marked the first time the APF deployed temporary election police. These election police personnel were deployed to the field starting February 8. The proactiveness of security personnel was evident right from the election preparation phase.

Essentially, the main cadres challenges in this election were clashes between rival party cadres, weapons looted and prisoners escaped during the Gen-Z protests, and certain anti-election interest groups. The 4,554 prisoners who escaped from prisons during the Gen-Z protests and had not yet returned, along with the missing weapons, heightened fears that the election could turn violent. Nevertheless, past elections (2008, 2013,

¹³ Ratopati. 2026. Polling Station Classification: 3,680 Sites on the Highly Sensitive List (In Nepali). March 4. Available at www.ratopati.com/story/547920/classification-of-over-10000-polling-stations-3680-sites-on-the-highly-sensitive-list; accessed on March 16, 2026.

2017, 2022) had also been successfully conducted amidst major security challenges.

Suspicious objects found in districts like Bardiya, Kaski, Dang, and Banke were disposed by security teams. As election day approached, minor clashes between cadres of different political parties were observed in a few places. In Dang, Jhapa, and Baitadi, such incidents occurred particularly between cadres of the RSP and the CPN (UML). In those locations, incidents prior to the election included burning party flags, vandalizing party's contact offices, and clashes when rallies crossed paths. In Tulsipur, Dang, a CPN (UML) flag was burned at an RSP mass meeting.¹⁴ Immediately after, a clash broke out between some RSP and CPN (UML) cadres. "The entire village is terrified that similar incidents might be repeated on election day," said Chandra Prasad Tharu, a 78-year-old *Matwa* (Tharu community leader) from Dang.¹⁵

In Kaski, groups extortionately demanding donations through intimidation during the election period were found active. However, because security agencies made timely arrests, this did not escalate significantly. Citing potential anti-election activities, members of various groups deemed security threats were arrested—while others were kept under surveillance throughout the election period. These included the *Rashtra, Rashtriyata, Dharma, Sanskriti ra Nagarik Bachau Mahabhiyan* (coordinated by Durga Prasai),¹⁶ Revolutionary Communist Party of Nepal (led by CP Gajurel), the Nepal Communist Party Bahumat (led

¹⁴ Onlinekhabar. 2026. RSS Liaison Office in Dang Vandalized, Chanting UML Slogans (In Nepali). March 2. Available at www.onlinekhabar.com/2026/02/1872250/rashtriyaswayamsevak-sangh-rss-liaison-office-in-dang-vandalized-chanting-uml-slogans; accessed on March 22, 2026.

¹⁵ Interview with Tharu on February 24, 2026.

¹⁶ Onlinekhabar. 2026. 12 Groups Active in Disrupting Elections, from Royalists to Socialists Under Surveillance (In Nepali). February 24. Available at www.onlinekhabar.com/2026/02/1878186/12-groups-active-in-disrupting-elections-from-royalists-to-socialists-under-surveillance; accessed on March 29, 2026.

by Dharmendra Bastola), and the Mahabir Group (a splinter faction of NCP Bahumat).¹⁷

Since election campaigning this time was more heavily focused on social media, clashes between party cadres were fewer compared to the past. Lokendra Subba, Ward Chair of Chhathar Rural Municipality Ward No. 6 in Tehrathum, stated, “Our party formulated a specific strategy regarding social media use. We post good content in favor of our candidate and respond to negative comments left on the posts. Due to the increasing use of social media, the friction and venting of anger among cadres has remained confined to social media walls. This has reduced the likelihood of physical clashes between rival party cadres.”¹⁸ While this reduces the possibility of physical clashes, hate speech and misleading content can easily be spread in massive volumes, and their impact can be even more intensive (for details, see the *Election and Digital Space* section).

Security officials pointed out that since digital media is becoming the primary medium for current election campaigning, effective monitoring of it is essential. Keeping this in view, a seven-member ‘Social Site Monitoring Cell’ was formed in each District Police Office to monitor social media. The cell was tasked with monitoring misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, personal defamation, and abusive digital material spread via social media, as well as initiating necessary action against individuals posting and spreading such content. However, the training provided to the teams assigned to social media monitoring was found to be relatively ineffective. Security officials noted that while online orientation was conducted by the ECN, the monitoring work could be much more effective if hands-on practical training with physical attendance were provided instead.

Election security expenditures were found to have increased compared to the previous elections. For the 2022 HoR and Provincial Assembly

¹⁷ BBC News Nepali. 2026. Security Agencies’ ‘Close Surveillance’ of Anti-election Individuals and Groups (In Nepali). March 2. Available at www.bbc.com/nepali/articles/c743v937vp4o; accessed on March 15, 2026.

¹⁸ Interview with Subba on February 24, 2026.

elections, the Ministry of Home Affairs received a resource concurrence of NRs. 8.7273 billion, while the army (via the Ministry of Defence) received NRs. 977.6 million. Out of this, the Home Ministry spent NRs. 8.70 billion and Defence spent NRs. 970 million, which accounted for 99 percent of their allocated resource concurrences. For the 2026 election security purposes, the government ensured resources of NRs. 10.39 billion for the Ministry of Home Affairs and NRs. 1.99 billion for the Ministry of Defence. The amount secured for the Home Ministry was NRs. 1.69 billion higher than the actual expenditure in the 2022 election. Similarly, the Ministry of Defence was allocated double the amount, NRs. 1.02 billion more than its actual expenditure in 2022. This continuous rise in election security expenditure has heightened concerns over whether elections are becoming increasingly challenging.

The presence and proactiveness of security personnel and security mechanisms during the election were exceptionally high. This undoubtedly played a vital role in keeping the election peaceful. However, looking ahead, it is important to remain mindful that an excessive presence of security personnel and apparatus can cause voters to perceive potential danger and induce fear. On the other hand, given the rising security expenses of elections, it is essential to open a debate regarding the number of election police and other security personnel, their necessity and utility, potential alternatives, as well as cost-effective measures for current security management and transparency in security spending.

6

Voter Education

6.1. Ward-Level Voter Education Program

The ECN conducted voter education in every ward. To ensure its effectiveness, a monitor or contact person was designated for each local municipality. They coordinated with their respective wards to select and deploy one representative from among the Female Community Health Volunteers, the Early Childhood Development Facilitators, or the Community Service Center Mobilizers for each ward. Following necessary training, these volunteers visited communities with sample ballots to teach citizens how to vote. However, because a single volunteer had to cover an entire ward within 15 days, door-to-door visits were impossible. Since the program was community-centered rather than household-targeted, its overall effectiveness remained limited.

Volunteers deployed in Bagmati, Gandaki, and Koshi provinces complained that because the number of sample ballots was extremely low, they could not provide them when voters requested them. According to them, voter education could have been much more effective if they had been able to provide sample ballots to voters who wanted to take them home to teach others. In Tehrathum, a method of teaching students in schools about voting so that they could, in turn, teach their parents was adopted. However, volunteers there also complained that the campaign could not be effective because they were unable to distribute sample ballots

to the students. In future elections, attention should be given to utilizing soft copies of sample ballots more widely; this would prevent shortages and cut down on paper consumption.

Due to the pressure of teaching voting methods in large wards within a short timeframe, coupled with the tasks of filling out forms and taking photographs, the workload proved overwhelming for single individuals. A voter education volunteer in Lalitpur shared that she ended up bringing a friend along to help, agreeing to give her half of her own pay.¹⁹ Her experience also revealed that Gen-Z youth were largely unaware of how to cast their votes. Similarly, a 26-year-old woman from Jalaura, Dang, stated that although she had registered her name on the voter list, she had not received her voter ID card and did not know whether she was eligible to vote or not.²⁰ When DRCN observers interacted with voters, they found that many lacked even the most basic information about the election.

This confusion was prevalent not only among voters but also among the voter education volunteers themselves. In Banke District, a volunteer deployed for voter education believed that she had been assigned to the job by the CPN (UML). When she met the observer, she was holding CPN (UML) pamphlets in her hand. Some voters interviewed in Koshi Province expressed the view that giving wards the ultimate authority to select voter education personnel could lead to nepotism and bias. Furthermore, some female volunteers experienced discrimination and condescension in certain areas purely due to their gender while trying to teach voting methods. “Men would dismiss us, acting as if to say, ‘Oh, so now you people are going to teach us?’” recalled Bimala Sharma Poudel, an early childhood development teacher and voter education volunteer from Salyan.²¹ A voter education volunteer deployed in a ward of Laligurans Municipality in Tehrathum shared a similar experience.²²

¹⁹ Interview with the volunteer on February 28, 2026.

²⁰ Interview with the woman on February 26, 2026.

²¹ Interview with Poudel on February 26, 2026.

²² Interview with the volunteer on February 26, 2026.

6.2. Other Dimensions of Voter Education

Apart from deploying volunteers to every ward, the ECN provided voter education through radio, television, and social media. The ECN created interactive video messages, musical messages, short videos, and jingles explaining why and how to vote, broadcasting them via its Facebook, TikTok, X, and other platforms. Additionally, in collaboration with the ECN, TikTok developed an app feature called the ‘Election Center.’ This was designed to ensure users could access official and credible election-related information. The ECN also organized a TikTok video competition, offering a prize of NRs. 50,000 to the best TikTok creators who contributed to election publicity and voter education.

Alongside this, the ECN used social media to publicize posters containing various messages, including what voters should keep in mind on election day, how to cast a vote, the penalties for seizing ballot boxes or ballots, and the code of conduct to be followed during voting. Messages encouraging citizens to participate and vote were also disseminated through ECN officials, artists, and athletes. The ECN produced various audiovisual materials, including musical messages, interactive messages, and short interactive dramas, which were broadcast across different media outlets. Messages encouraging voters to cast their ballots and urging everyone to follow the code of conduct were also delivered through mobile phone caller ringback tones.

Nevertheless, compared to the actual need for voter education, the reach of and access to these publicity materials remained very low among voters. For voters in areas lacking access to social media and other communication tools, the ward-level voter education volunteers were the only alternative, but they proved insufficient.

District-based offices of the ECN used local media significantly less for voter education this time. Pratik Ichchhuk Sharma, Station Manager of Sharada FM in Salyan, stated that the ECN and candidates spent their budgets on other digital platforms and did not place any advertisements

on his radio station.²³ Conversely, Ramesh Godar, Station Manager of Radio Syangja, acknowledged that election-related advertisements were broadcast on his station.²⁴

Various non-governmental organizations also ran programs for voter education ahead of the election. In Kathmandu, Chitwan, Gorkha, and Kanchanpur, the Nepal Disabled Women Association conducted voter education classes and mock voting programs.²⁵ Similar attempt was made by the Fatima Foundation targeting Muslim Madheshi women and youth across various wards within Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan City.

Regarding the Foundation's activities, President Maimuna Siddiqui stated, "Muslim Madheshi women are mostly occupied with household chores and do not get to go out much. Therefore, we provided voter education to more than a thousand women and youth across six wards of this Sub-Metropolitan City. There are people here who do not even know how to vote. We taught them not to use a thumbprint, but to use the *Swastik* stamp. We also taught them how to fold the ballot and explained how many ballot papers there are. We told them not to vote under anyone's pressure or coercion, but to vote for the person and party of their own choice."²⁶ A distinct voter education effort was also carried out by DRCN (see, Case Study 1). These examples demonstrate that non-governmental organizations also have a vital role to play in expanding the reach of voter education at the local level.

²³ Interview with Sharma on February 26, 2026.

²⁴ Interview with Godar on February 28, 2026.

²⁵ Nepal Disabled Women Association. 2026. Nepal Disabled Women Association Conducts Voter Education and Mock Polls Across Four Districts. March 4. Available at www.ndwa.org.np/news/nepal-disabled-women-association-conducts-voter-education-and-mock-polls-across-four-districts/; Accessed on March 15, 2026.

²⁶ Interview with Siddiqui on February 28, 2026.

Case Study 1: Voter Education on Party Manifestos

Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN), in collaboration with the Gen-Z Civic Forum and the Gen-Z Movement Alliance, studied the election manifestos of eight political parties: Nepali Congress, Janata Samajbadi Party Nepal (JSP Nepal), CPN (UML), Nepali Communist Party (NCP), Pragatishil Loktantrik Party, Ujyaalo Nepal Party, Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), and RSP. The key points of these manifestos were posted on Facebook and Instagram through videos. Additionally, these points were printed on flex banners and publicly displayed in open exhibitions across Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Mahendranagar, Dhangadhi, and Pokhara. Local voters participated in these exhibitions and interacted with one another regarding the points in the manifestos.

Participants were given the opportunity to cast a vote on sheets where agendas were printed without mentioning the names of the political parties. This was done to avoid political bias and to make it easier for people to vote purely on the basis of the agendas. In previous elections, there was no practice of conducting such comparative publicity and discussions regarding manifestos. However, in this election, the general public including Gen-Z groups showed a keen interest in the manifestos. The comments and reactions on the videos and posts shared on social media indicated that voters were eager to know what their candidates' plans were. Since voters can choose the right representatives only after being well-informed, this initiative was considered a form of voter education. This effort could only be carried out in a very limited number of locations, and its users on social media were also extremely few compared to the total number of voters. Therefore, its overall effectiveness remained limited.

The demand to provide voter education in local languages had been raised in previous elections as well, and the ECN had previously made voter education materials available in those local languages. However,

the ECN did not appear to have implemented such a concrete program this time. Vidur Khawas, President of the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) Dhankuta, pointed out that while social messages prepared locally in local languages and dialects are more effective than centrally prepared messages, the ECN paid less attention to this aspect.²⁷

According to district election offices, the volunteers deployed in the respective wards were expected to provide voter education in local languages as needed. Ranjita Jha, the District Election Officer in Mahottari, stated that proficiency in the local language was prioritized right at the time of selecting voter education volunteers.²⁸ On the other hand, Kaman Dewan, a leader of JSP Nepal, claimed that voter education was ineffective, noting that even in a place like Damak in Jhapa, people could not find out how or where voter education was being conducted.²⁹

Political parties share equal responsibility with the ECN for voter education. However, party representatives stated that due to the short campaign period and the compulsion to reach numerous locations for door-to-door campaigning, they did not have enough time to explain how to cast a vote. Another dimension of voter education involves organizing interactions among candidates to make voters aware of their goals, plans, views, and ideologies. Although there was talk of organizing such open discussions among the parties' proposed prime ministerial candidates this time, it did not materialize. Specifically, Balendra Shah of the RSP did not agree to it.

Nevertheless, in some constituencies of Kathmandu, an interaction program titled “Bahas ko Maidan: Netritwa ko Pahichan” (Field of Debate: Identity of Leadership) was conducted by the Ujjwal Thapa Foundation and Bhugol Park, with the support of the Gen-Z Movement Alliance and the Nepal Gen-Z Front. In that program, candidates faced question and

²⁷ Interview with Khawas on February 27, 2026.

²⁸ Interview with Jha on February 10, 2026.

²⁹ Interview with Dewan on February 28, 2026.

answer sessions to dissect their agendas, giving voters an opportunity to scrutinize them closely.

Although the ECN conducted voter education, it had its limitations. Because it lacked a door-to-door campaign, it failed to reach many voters. Furthermore, while termed ‘voter education,’ its core message remained limited to mere ‘voter information.’ It only provided technical details on how many ballot papers there are, how to stamp them, and how to fold them. True voter education, however, ought to encompass subjects such as the electoral system, the role of representatives, and the candidates’ agendas, allowing voters to choose their candidates and vote based on that knowledge. This has not yet been the case. Apart from the ECN, there remains an open vacuum for political parties, non-governmental organizations, and the media to work on voter education. Voter education is directly linked to invalid votes, which is discussed in detail in the Ballot Box Transportation and Counting section.

Preparations of Political Parties and Candidates

Immediately following the announcement of the election, the then-ruling parties were thrown into confusion, while other parties grew somewhat enthusiastic. Subsequently, the formation of new political parties intensified. As the election drew nearer, the formation, reorganization, and attempts at electoral alliances among parties became increasingly evident.

7.1. Party Formation, Reorganization, and Electoral Alliances

The Gen-Z movement was a clear protest against the status quo. Consequently, political parties were eager to change, or pretended that they were changed. The Nepali Congress held a special general convention, sidelining its old leadership to enter the election under a relatively new leadership. The CPN (UML) held an early convention, claiming to return with a fresh mandate, though its top leadership remained unchanged. As the election approached, the merger of political parties and the registration of new ones accelerated:

- On June 19, 2023, the CPN (Maoist Centre), CPN (Unified Socialist), and other parties had formed the Samajbadi Morcha

(Socialist Front). Right on the eve of the election, various communist factions were integrated into this front to form a new party named the Nepali Communist Party (NCP), with Pushpa Kamal Dahal as its coordinator.

- Meanwhile, the Ujyalo Nepal Party which was backed by Interim Government Minister Kulman Ghising and a group close to the then-Mayor of Kathmandu Metropolitan City, Balendra Shah, initially agreed to merge with the RSP. However, shortly after the agreement, citing ideological differences and dissatisfaction over post allocations, the Ujyalo Nepal Party split away to contest the election independently.
- Janardan Sharma (who did not join the NCP), Santosh Pariyar (who left the RSP), and the Baburam Bhattarai-led Nepal Samajbadi Party collaborated to form the Pragatishil Loktantrik Party.
- Similarly, the Upendra Yadav-led Janata Samajbadi Party Nepal and the Mahantha Thakur-led Loktantrik Samajbadi Party Nepal merged to once again reform as the Janata Samajbadi Party Nepal (JSP Nepal).
- The Mayor of Dharan Sub-Metropolitan City, Harka Sampang, formally entered party politics as the chairperson of the Shram Sanskriti Party.

Political parties had participated in the 2017 and 2022 HoR elections by forming alliances. In 2017, CPN (UML) and CPN (Maoist Centre) contested under a Left Alliance. Out of 165 FPTP seats, CPN (UML) and CPN (Maoist Centre) fielded candidates in 103 and 59 constituencies, winning 80 and 36 seats respectively. Similarly, in the 2022 election, a ruling coalition consisting of Nepali Congress, CPN (Maoist Centre), CPN (Unified Socialist), Loktantrik Samajbadi Party, and Rastriya Janamorcha fought the election together, while CPN (UML) partnered with JSP Nepal, RPP, RPP Nepal, and Nepal Pariwar Dal.

Although parties were relatively successful in winning elections through alliances in the past, the subsequent relation proved unpleasant. The parliament formed after 2022 witnessed a series of frequent government changes based purely on political power-sharing bargains among the parties. Because pre-election alliances turned out to be mere coalitions for the ruling ambitions of top leaders rather than agreements based on political values, widespread dissatisfaction simmered among party leaders and grassroots cadres.³⁰ Furthermore, pre-election alliances deprived sovereign citizens of genuine alternatives, preventing them from voting for their preferred candidate or party. It was universally perceived that this practice was weakening democracy itself.

The then-General Secretary of the Nepali Congress had proposed banning pre-election alliances during the party meeting in February 2024. However, since the then-President Deuba was not ready to accept the proposal, the meeting could not reach a decision. The proposal was ultimately passed unanimously during the Central Committee meeting on September 1, 2024. This decision was further ratified by the second special general convention of the Nepali Congress in December 2025. This strategic stance by the Nepali Congress ultimately forced other political parties to contest the the election in March independently.

In this election, the parties did not form nationwide alliances as they had in the past, but micro-alliances and seat adjustments still took place at the local level. For example, in Gorkha-2, Pragatishil Loktantrik Party's patron Dr. Baburam Bhattarai withdrew his candidacy to support the Nepali Congress. Similarly, Pragatishil Loktantrik Party supported candidates from the Shram Sanskriti Party, namely Harka Sampang in Sunsari-1 and Dhruvaraj Rai in Bhojpur. An electoral alliance was formed between Pragatishil Loktantrik Party and CPN (UML), with a primary focus on Karnali Province. An agreement was reached where CPN (UML) would

³⁰ DRCN. 2024. Political Update: Electoral Coalition. Lalitpur: DRCN. Available at www.democracyresource.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/political-Update_electoral-coalition_Engilsh-2.pdf; accessed on March 24, 2026.

support Pragatishil Loktantrik Party's candidate Janardan Sharma in Rukum West and Pragatishil Loktantrik Party's Sandip Pun in Rukum East. In Rukum East, NCP coordinator Pushpa Kamal Dahal was a candidate.

In Karnali, Pragatishil Loktantrik Party agreed to support CPN (UML) in all districts except Humla and Jumla. In Rukum West itself, the Ujyalo Nepal Party endorsed Pragatishil Loktantrik Party's candidate Janardan Sharma. In Baglung, Rastriya Janamorcha and the NCP contested the election by forming an alliance. Rastriya Janamorcha fielded a candidate in Baglung-1, while the NCP fielded a candidate in Baglung-2. Apart from that, 10 small parties formed four separate alliances, and each of those alliances also shared a common election symbol.

In previous elections, CPN (UML) had backed RPP Chair Rajendra Lingden in Jhapa-3, and RPP had supported CPN (UML) Chair KP Sharma Oli in Jhapa-5. Although no formal agreement was reached for this election, an informal understanding took place in Jhapa-5. Ram Kumar Thapa, who was elected Mayor of Damak Municipality from the RPP, informally agreed to support CPN (UML) candidate KP Sharma Oli. According to JSP Nepal leader Kaman Dewan, looking at past election data, Mayor Thapa holds significant influence over Damak's voters. An informal understanding was struck between Mayor Thapa and the CPN (UML) leadership to help channel his influential votes toward CPN (UML).³¹

Since CPN (UML) holds a two-thirds majority in the Damak Municipal Executive, CPN (UML)'s backing is mandatory for any executive decision. Recently, various municipal executive decisions were tailored to favor Mayor Ram Kumar Thapa. For instance, after his house was arsoned during the Gen-Z protests, the Mayor had been living in a rented property. On February 23, 2026, the Municipal Executive meeting decided to provide him with a monthly house rent allowance. However, following public backlash, this decision was not officially certified, according to local

³¹ Interview with Dewan on February 28, 2026.

journalist Chiranjibi Ghimire.³² Although Thapa was keen to continue, CPN (UML) had initially resisted; yet, the position, which had been vacant for 11 months, was handed to him right on the eve of the election.³³ Notably, a CPN (UML) Ward Chair (Ward No. 6), Tek Bahadur Thapa, had also been claiming that position for a long time. Such strategic administrative decisions made right on the brink of the election strongly signal a calculated, election-targeted consensus between CPN (UML) and Mayor Thapa.

7.2. Manifestos and Agendas

In the past, election manifestos used to be full of abstract dreams and vague commitments. Consequently, as they were limited to mere formalities, there was little interest in them. At the general grassroots level, citizens did not show a major concern for them in this election either. However, public interest, anticipation, and debate regarding manifestos increased significantly among civil society, the media, and a few other sections. In this election, held after the Gen-Z movement, the younger generation showed a particular interest in party manifestos.

Although Section 37 of the Election Code of Conduct 2025 mandates that manifestos must be made public within a specified deadline, the major parties released their manifestos only after crossing the designated date of February 15, 2026. Political parties gave various names to these documents. For instance, Nepali Congress termed it as *Pratigyapatra* (Paper of Promises) and RSP brought it with its name as *Wachapatra* (Paper of Commitments). Candidates did not limit these documents to paper flyers but promoted them heavily as ‘digital manifestos’ via social media. Candidates made concerted efforts to deliver their agendas to voters using ‘sponsored’ advertisements, particularly on TikTok and

³² Interview with Ghimire on March 2, 2026.

³³ Naya Patrika. 2026. Damak Hospital Got Management Committee After 11 Months (In Nepali). March 4. Available at www.nayapatrikadaily.com/news-details/189699/2026-03-04; accessed on April 17, 2026.

Facebook Reels. At the central level, parties prioritized the issues of good governance, prosperity, and accountability. The Nepali Congress made ‘Dignified Citizens and Good Governance’ its primary agenda, while the CPN (UML) chose ‘Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali,’ and the RSP focused on the ‘Right to Recall’ and property/asset investigations.

Although policy issues like good governance and infrastructure development took priority at the center, they were transformed according to local geography and context when reaching the local level. Local candidates raised issues directly tied to daily life, ranging from ‘maintaining land revenue records’ to ‘wild animal control.’ In Tehrathum, issues raised included the highway and the Tamor reservoir while in Banke and Dang, river control and ‘dung-free Tharu villages’ were prioritized. Similarly, dry port construction and a medical university were promised in Kanchanpur while ‘Marijuana cultivation’ and ‘wild animal control’ were key talking points in Dhankuta. Some new issues also emerged in the manifestos during this election. The Shram Sanskriti Party took the agenda of ‘Labor, Production, and Innovation’ down to the ward level, while some independent candidates raised overlooked issues such as environmental destruction and road accidents.

Voters were found seeking solutions to their small daily problems. In remote settlements of Rolpa, voters shared that due to the lack of mobile phone signals, they were forced to walk far from their homes just to have a basic conversation. They also recounted having to walk for several hours to reach the district headquarters and stay overnight at a hotel just to pay their electricity bills. Despite the talk surrounding good governance after the Gen-Z movement, ‘infrastructure and development’ maintained an evergreen priority in the manifestos. Sarita Chalaune, the Salyan correspondent for Kantipur TV, stated that the expectations of the youth were not incorporated into the election manifestos. She said, “The main concern of the youth is particularly linked to employment opportunities. The Kapurkot area is a major hub for vegetable production, but farmers are facing problems due to the absence of a pesticide testing laboratory there.

Although Salyan is famous for oranges, production dropped drastically this year due to a pest outbreak. Such local and practical issues have not been included in the candidates' election agendas.”³⁴

It was also observed in this election that voters chose change without even bothering about infrastructure development issues. Rajendra Dahal, a political analyst from Damak, noted that the issue of development failed to attract voters this time in Jhapa district, which was one of the major centers of the election.³⁵ Jhapa's voters had very little concern not just about the issues, but even about who the candidates were in their respective constituencies. Sagar Shivakoti, a sociology lecturer from Jhapa, similarly argued that voters in this election sought an alternative to the old parties without even caring what the election agendas were or who the candidates were.³⁶

In summary, although the House of Representatives Election, 2026 saw a thematic expansion, digital presentation, and an increase in public debate regarding political party manifestos, the gap between policy commitments and local needs remained unaddressed. This “imbalance between central agendas and local realities” raises questions about the effectiveness of manifestos. It can be concluded that voters' priorities still remain focused on basic services, employment, and issues directly linked to their livelihood.

7.3. Changed Campaigning Style

The ECN had designated the period from February 16 to March 2 for political parties and candidates to conduct election campaigns. However, candidates had already become active in door-to-door visits and meetings immediately after their nominations. The nature of election campaigning had been evolving since recent elections, and a similar pattern was observed

³⁴ Interview with Chalaune on February 26, 2026.

³⁵ Interview with Dahal on February 28, 2026.

³⁶ Interview with Shivakoti on February 26, 2026.

in this election as well. The traditional style of campaigning was found to be progressively transforming into a dialogue-oriented, restrained, and cost-effective methodology. Compared to the past, a notable difference was seen in the style and mediums of campaigning during this election.

In the hill and mountain districts, extravagant activities common in previous elections were largely absent. In the past, practices such as hoisting party flags on every house, putting up banners and festoons at every intersection, covering walls with candidate posters, and distributing pamphlets from vehicles while blaring speakers through settlements were common. However, such styles were rarely seen this time, and security personnel even removed posters and flags that were put up in some places. Although the use of flags, banners, and pamphlets was comparatively higher in the Tarai-Madhesh regions, such as Sunsari in Koshi Province and Banke in Lumbini Province, such glamorous campaign style was minimal in hill districts like Dhankuta and Tehrathum.

Political parties and candidates prioritized small corner meetings and door-to-door programs over large mass rallies. In this context, NCP candidate from Rolpa, Barshaman Pun ‘Ananta’, stated, “This time, we are reaching out to as many people as possible directly at their doorsteps... We are visiting every neighborhood and ward to meet the people, understand their problems, and explain our agenda.”³⁷ This indicates that candidates prioritized direct voter contact. In line with the political psychology that developed after the ‘Gen-Z movement,’ small, targeted, and interactive programs were considered more effective than massive rallies. An economic factor also drove this shift. Organizing large rallies incurs massive expenses for transporting, accommodating, and feeding party cadres. On the other hand, parties have begun to accept the reality that voters cannot be attracted merely by showcasing crowds.

Large mass rallies did not disappear altogether. Some parties continued to organize province-level gatherings; for example, the RSP and the

³⁷ Interview with Pun on March 1, 2026.

Nepali Congress held rallies in different locations. Nevertheless, several developments indicated a declining preference among parties for large-scale rallies. The CPN (UML), for instance, refrained from organizing major election-focused mass rallies, although it conducted a few programs before candidate registration. Likewise, the Nepali Congress and the CPN (UML) chose not to hold rallies in Tehrathum despite obtaining permission, while the RSP cancelled its scheduled mass rallies in Rupandehi and Kaski.³⁸

The RSP organized roadshows in major cities featuring its proposed prime ministerial candidate, Balendra Shah, and party Chair, Rabi Lamichhane. The RSP's mass meetings were not lengthy like those of the older parties, nor did they involve seating numerous leaders on stage for formal greetings. The meetings concluded promptly after brief speeches by Balendra Shah and Rabi Lamichhane. Voters appreciated this informal style of campaigning.

During this election, voters fearlessly asked numerous questions to candidates who visited their doorsteps. They questioned older candidates about past promises and new candidates about future assurances. Candidates seemed unprepared for such blunt and direct questions from voters. Shankar Dangi, District President of the Nepali Congress in Dang, acknowledged that voters asked harsh and critical questions to the candidates.³⁹

In the altered political environment following the Gen-Z movement, varying trends were observed among parties regarding the use of national-level leaders' images in campaign materials. Promotional materials and programs prominently featured the image of President Gagan Thapa in Nepali Congress. Since a new leadership had been chosen through a special general convention, campaign materials were designed with the slogan "Badaliyo Congress, Badalchhaun Desh" (Congress has Changed, We will

³⁸ Thaha khabar. 2026. This is Why the Election Rallies were Cancelled in Bhairahawa and Pokhara (In Nepali). February 20. Available at www.thahakhabar.com/detail/294753; accessed on March 25, 2026.

³⁹ Interview with Dangi on February 24, 2026.

Change the Country) to project that message and attract voters. However, due to internal friction, a few candidates avoided using President Thapa's photo. A Nepali Congress leader from Morang stated that candidates like Minendra Rijal in Morang-2 did not use President Thapa's image.⁴⁰

Older figures continued to dominate the leadership in CPN (UML) and NCP. Questions had been raised regarding the role of CPN (UML) Chair KP Sharma Oli, who led the government during the Gen-Z movement. Consequently, fearing that his image might create a negative impression among voters, candidates refrained from using Oli's photo on election materials.⁴¹

Thus, several shifts were observed in the dimensions of election campaigning during the 2026 election. The attraction towards mass rallies declined, while roadshows, corner meetings, and door-to-door visits were utilized extensively. The most definitive reflection of this transformed campaigning landscape was seen in the use of social media, with candidates forming dedicated teams specifically for managing social media operations (for details, see the *Election and Digital Space* section).

⁴⁰ Interview with the leader on February 28, 2026.

⁴¹ Tamang, Netra. 2026. UML Candidate did not See the Votes Coming by Selling Oli's Name, was Afraid to Put His Picture in the Election Campaign (In Nepali). *Bizmandu*, February 24. Available at <https://bizmandu.com/content/20260224125329.html>; accessed on April 2, 2026.

8

Code of Conduct

A code of conduct is crucial for free, fair, and transparent election. Generally, it is not a law in itself, but rather a method to regulate the moral behavior of individuals or organizations. However, the election code of conduct holds the same weight as law, and there are provisions to penalize those who do not comply with it. The Election Offenses and Punishment Act, 2016 provides measures ranging from fines and penalties to the cancellation of candidacy for those who violate the code of conduct. There is a provision for a fine of up to NRs. 200,000 or imprisonment for up to three years, or both, for anyone who, during the campaign period, affects the independence, sovereignty, or national integrity of Nepal, undermines the federal democratic republican system of governance, or instigates conflict among any religion, caste, class, region, or community. Additionally, the code of conduct advocates for the respect of senior citizens, as well as gender-diverse individuals and persons with disabilities. The primary objective of the code of conduct is also to prevent political parties in power and positions of authority from abusing resources to influence voters. It intends to provide a level playing field for every candidate alongside an opportunity for free competition.

8.1. Historical Evolution (2008–2026)

The election code of conduct has undergone continuous revisions from the Constituent Assembly election held in 2008 up to 2026. Although the

2008 code of conduct contained general provisions regarding the election expenses of candidates, the monitoring of electoral expenditures was tightened during the 2013 election. The 2013 code of conduct stated that if an audit revealed improper spending, the candidate would be disqualified from contesting any election for up to six years, and if already elected, the election would automatically be annulled. The spending limit was also raised from NRs. 459,500 to NRs. 1 million. The Election Code of Conduct, 2022 introduced provisions requiring the opening of a separate bank account for the transparency of campaign expenses and the designation of a specific individual responsible for handling the expenditures.

In 2017, the election expense limit for a member of the HoR was set at NRs. 2.5 million. In 2022, the ECN set differing expenditure limits for constituencies based on geography and population. Accordingly, the limit was set at NRs. 2.5 million for five constituencies, NRs. 2.7 million for 17 constituencies, NRs. 2.9 million for 65 constituencies, NRs. 3.1 million for 52 constituencies, and NRs. 3.3 million for 26 constituencies. Under the PR system, the spending limit was set at NRs. 200,000 per candidate. It was mandatory to accept any donation exceeding NRs. 25,000 solely through a bank. Chief Treasury Controllers in all seventy-seven districts were assigned the responsibility of monitoring election expenses.⁴² The same provisions from 2022 regarding spending limits were maintained for the 2026.

In 2008, the use of helicopters and airplanes for campaigning was completely banned. However, during the 2013 election, this restriction was lifted for Solukhumbu, Manang, Dolpa, Humla, Jumla, Mugu, Kalikot, Bajhang, Bajura, and Jajarkot districts. The 2008 provision that allowed the use of one light vehicle and two horses was amended to allow two vehicles and four horses in 2013, and four light vehicles, four motorcycles, and four horses in 2026. While the 2008 code of conduct merely stated

⁴² ECN. 2026. Regarding Actions Taken Regarding Violations of the Code of Conduct (In Nepali). *Press Release*, January 29. Available at <https://election.gov.np/admin/public/storage/HOR%202082/Press%20Release/2082-10-15.jpg>; accessed on March 27, 2026.

that children ‘should not be used’ for election campaigning, the 2013 code of conduct ‘completely prohibited’ it.

The 2017 Election Code of Conduct was made even more organized by adding new provisions concerning expense control, digital media, and the federal structure. Prior to that, election campaigns were focused on traditional styles such as rallies, processions, and door-to-door visits. Therefore, the codes of conduct were also designed to regulate traditional electoral activities. Provisions regarding the use of social media were introduced into the code of conduct starting with the 2017 election. The Election Code of Conduct, 2008 had banned the sale, distribution, and use of caps, bags, stickers, and logos featuring the election symbols of political parties or candidates. In 2017, these campaign mediums were expanded further, banning the use, sale, and distribution of items with election symbols, such as shirts, t-shirts, traditional towels, and masks. This restriction continues to be implemented in recent code of conduct.

The code of conduct in 2022 election clearly defined social media issues, introducing provisions for the surveillance, control, and penalization of those spreading misleading information.⁴³ In 2026 election, Discord was added to the list of social media platforms. Similarly, a provision was added to completely prohibit the creation and promotion of character-assassinating material using Artificial Intelligence (AI). This sends a clear message that the code of conduct is being updated in line with changing times and the growing digital era.

Likewise, the concept of a green election appears to have been added to the Election Code of Conduct, 2025, which was absent in previous elections. Keeping the environment in mind, this code of conduct bans the use of plastic materials and prioritizes electric vehicles for campaigning. It encourages avoiding musical bands, cultural pageants, and other forms

⁴³ BBC News Nepali. 2026. How can the Penal Provisions in the Election Code of Conduct be Effectively Implemented? (In Nepali). January 15. Available at www.bbc.com/nepali/articles/c5yxkpeywzzo.lite; accessed on March 27, 2026.

of noise, water, and air pollution during campaign events. The Election Code of Conduct, 2025 also introduced a new provision requiring parties or candidates to make their manifestos public and campaign solely on that basis. Furthermore, this code of conduct mandates that a work progress report based on the commitments made in the manifesto must be published annually for public information. Both of these are novel practices.

8.2. Compliance with the Code of Conduct

The code of conduct is implemented to ensure that elections are free, fair, impartial, transparent, cost-effective, and free from fear. To monitor the implementation of the election code of conduct, the ECN forms an 11-member Central Code of Conduct Monitoring Committee. This committee is coordinated by an Election Commissioner designated by the ECN and includes secretaries from various ministries as well as the chiefs of the Nepal Police and the Armed Police Force (APF). This committee can receive complaints regarding violations of the election code of conduct and demand explanations from the individuals against whom complaints are filed. Furthermore, this committee holds the authority to issue orders to immediately halt violations of the code of conduct and to recommend action to the ECN against those who breach it. To monitor compliance, the ECN can form and deploy a monitor or monitoring team consisting of one or more members, coordinated by a Gazetted First Class or senior government official of the GoN. Similarly, a seven-member District Code of Conduct Monitoring Committee operates at the district level under the coordination of the Chief Returning Officer. This setup includes the CDO along with the district chiefs of the Nepal Police and the Armed Police Force as members. The Assistant CDO and the Treasury and Accounts Controller are assigned responsibilities as the District Election Code of Conduct Monitoring Officers.

However, political parties and candidates did not appear fully committed to complying with it strictly. Numerous examples of code of

conduct violations were uncovered during the observation. The ECN had specified a total of 15 days for campaigning, from February 16 to March 2, 2026. Nevertheless, candidates had already engaged in meetings and campaigning immediately after the publication of the final candidate list and receiving their election symbols. This reflected a gap between the legally designated ‘campaign period’ and the ongoing ‘campaign practice’ occurring in reality.

Varying forms of code of conduct violations were observed based on geographical location and the presence of political parties. In the Tarai districts, party flags and large rallies dominated. In Dharan, posters were seen pasted onto tempos, while in Sunsari and Banke, the Nepali Congress and the RSP staged a show of strength using hundreds of e-rickshaws and motorcycles equipped with large loudspeakers. In Janakpur, even before the formal campaigning period began, large photos of RSP candidate Manish Jha requesting votes were found pasted onto several city rickshaws.

Similarly, in the settlements of Salyan, in violation of the ECN’s rule mandating monochrome pamphlets, colorful posters of the Nepali Congress and National Republic Nepal were found pasted onto public walls. In Salyan, the mayors of Baghchaur Municipality and Bangad Kupinde Municipality were even found using government vehicles to travel to election rallies. In Banke, human rights activist Maimuna Siddiqui confirmed that children aged 14–15 were used in Nepali Congress campaigns and that biased publicity was broadcast over the radio.⁴⁴

Despite restrictions in the code of conduct, cadres campaigning in various locations wore caps, scarves, and t-shirts bearing election symbols. In Pokhara, t-shirts bearing the image of Balendra Shah were placed on sale for the Holi festival. Although the administration confiscated them, effective action was not observed regarding complaints filed against loud blaring of microphones. Even though the code of conduct contains a provision stating that only up to 25 people can gather for activities like roadshows

⁴⁴ Interview with Siddiqui on February 28, 2026.

from candidate nomination up to election campaigning, it was not followed. Rabi Lamichhane and Balendra Shah went further during such roadshows, campaigning while popping out of vehicle sunroofs and waving to voters. The Central Security Committee meeting had decided to ban this activity as it was deemed risky from a security standpoint. In Siraha, the administration erased election slogans written by candidates in public spaces and banned the sale of t-shirts and caps bearing election symbols.

It was noted that a total of 1,076 complaints were filed across the country before the District Code of Conduct Monitoring Committees, out of which 1,061 (99%) were settled.⁴⁵ The ECN sought explanations from four political parties and 33 candidates. The ECN fined NCP candidate Shakti Bahadur Basnet NRs. 25,000 in Jajarkot Constituency No. 1 following allegations of distributing money during campaigning. Similarly, candidate Kamal Bhusal (Nicholas Bhusal) from Rupandehi Constituency No. 2 was fined NRs. 25,000 for using bloody white shoes which became a symbol of resistance after the Gen-Z movement, without authorization. Additionally, RSP's Banke candidate Khagendra Sunar and Nepal Janasewa Party's Bhaktapur Constituency No. 2 candidate Januka Pathak (Shobha) were warned regarding code of conduct violations.⁴⁶

The code of conduct applies to many stakeholders besides parties and candidates. Numerous examples of code of conduct violations by these stakeholders also came to light. The ECN demanded explanations after complaints were filed against journalists, government employees, and local level representatives for violating the code of conduct. Even well-known, established candidates failed to follow the code of conduct, illustrating the widespread nature of the issue.

⁴⁵ Prasashan. 2026. House of Representatives Election: Clarifications Asked to 94 Violators of Code of Conduct, 57 Replied (In Nepali). February 26. Available at <https://prasashan.com/2026/02/28/745420/>; accessed on April 19, 2026.

⁴⁶ Kantipur. 2026. ECN Asked 88 Clarifications for Violating Election Code of Conduct (In Nepali). February 27. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/politics/2026/02/27/election-code-of-conduct-violation-commission-asks-for-88-clarifications-26-25.html>; accessed on April 19, 2026.

Assigning monitoring responsibilities to the Assistant CDO and the Treasury and Accounts Controller to ensure the effective implementation of the election code of conduct appears tied to the objective of reinforcing administrative control and maintaining financial transparency. In practice, however, its enforcement did not appear effective. The fact that written complaints regarding code of conduct violations were zero or negligible in districts like Kanchanpur, Kaski, Lalitpur, Mahottari, and Dhankuta does not indicate that violations did not occur; rather, it raises questions concerning citizens' access to, trust in, and security sensitivity regarding the complaint system. This context is made clear by statements from Salyan's Treasury and Accounts Controller, Udaya Dangi. According to him, fear of security challenges and procedural complexities may have discouraged the complaint registration process.⁴⁷ This demonstrates that the monitoring mechanism was reactive rather than proactive, indicating that formal mechanisms alone are insufficient and that an environment ensuring safe and easy access for citizens is necessary.

In line with this, civil society and media representatives also commented that the ECN remained confined to complaint-based actions and appeared weak in active surveillance. In their view, allegations that the ECN stayed silent in certain situations due to the influence and reach of political parties raised questions regarding institutional impartiality. To keep candidates' expenses transparent, the ECN mandated this time that candidates open a single bank account to be operated throughout the election period, and all election-related income and expenses had to pass through this account. However, this rule was only partially followed.

The ECN determines the expenditure ceiling that parties and candidates are permitted to spend according to their constituency. Monitoring officers state that candidates may have shown a reluctance to open accounts out of fear that routing donations and assistance through legal channels (banks) would expose the actual limits of their spending. This shows the gap

⁴⁷ Interview with Dangi on February 27, 2026.

between legal obligations on one side and political defiance on the other. Not opening a bank account directly implies keeping financial transactions outside the banking system, meaning limited to ‘cash’. When transactions do not appear within the system, it becomes technically difficult to gather proof that expenditure limits have been breached during monitoring.

Monitoring officers hold the authority only to demand explanations or make recommendations to the ECN rather than taking immediate, strict action against violators. Mahendra Kumar Sapkota, the CDO of Salyan, mentions that this results in less legal fear among those who violate the code of conduct.⁴⁸

8.3. Candidate’s Election Expenditures

It is observed that candidate expenditures in elections have been steadily increasing. Although political parties practiced facilitating election expenses immediately following the restoration of the multi-party system, it is said that this responsibility gradually shifted toward the candidates, who must now arrange all expenses on their own in recent elections. Following the demise of the Panchayat system and the restoration of the multi-party system, party cadres placed immense trust and faith in their political parties. Consequently, cadres voluntarily supported candidates during elections. However, after the initiation of a transactional cycle where candidates win elections to accumulate wealth and return to spend it in the subsequent election, providing meals and handling other logistics for cadres and supporters became necessary, requiring candidates to raise substantial funds for elections. Today, as facilities like roads, restaurants, and hotels have expanded everywhere, managing cadres has become even more expensive.⁴⁹ Therefore, whether or not a person has the financial capacity to spend has become a decisive factor when selecting candidates

⁴⁸ Interview with Sapkota on February 26.

⁴⁹ Giri, Anbika and Maxim Sherstha. Forthcoming. *The Cost of Politics in Nepal: A Challenge to Inclusive Political Participation*. The report of a study conducted by DRCN with the support from Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

for elections. To control this rising expenditure, the ECN has imposed a spending ceiling. While this is a commendable effort, the fact that it is not being followed and that those who violate it are not being penalized remains a concerning issue.

To ensure that all election-related income and expenses of parties and candidates are operated through formal channels, the ECN issued the “House of Representatives Member Election Campaign Bank Account (Operation and Management) Procedure, 2026.”⁵⁰ However, only about half of the candidates opened a separate account and informed the ECN. According to Dharendra Bhandari, the District Election Officer of Salyan, critical notifications, including instructions to open bank accounts, were repeatedly shared with all candidates by creating a Candidate Coordination Group on WhatsApp.⁵¹ Nonetheless, only 6 out of 14 candidates opened an account. Bhandari stated that while the main competing parties opened accounts, other small parties and independent candidates failed to do so despite taking the official recommendation letters.

With the changes in the medium and style of election campaigning this time, it was anticipated that candidates’ election expenditures would be lower than or equal to past levels. A CPN (UML) leader claimed that in the previous election in Tehrathum, CPN (UML) candidate Bijay Subba spent NRs. 15 million.⁵² Similarly, Arjun Bahadur Tumbahamphe, the Nepali Congress District President stated, “The expenditure limit for a HoR candidate in this district is 3.3 million rupees. When I was a mayoral candidate in Myanglung, 10 million rupees was spent. Therefore, believing that I should not submit false details to the ECN, I did not submit my election expenditures at all. There used to be a competition among

⁵⁰ ECN. 2026. House of Representatives Member Election Campaign Bank Account (Operation and Management) Procedure (In Nepali). Available at [https://election.gov.np/admin/public/storage/HOR%202082/निर्वाचन%20अभियान%20बैंक%20खाता%20\(Final\)%20\(1\).pdf](https://election.gov.np/admin/public/storage/HOR%202082/निर्वाचन%20अभियान%20बैंक%20खाता%20(Final)%20(1).pdf); accessed on April 16, 2026.

⁵¹ Interview with Bhandari on February 26, 2026.

⁵² Interview with the leader on February 25, 2026.

candidates here to crush opponents with money. However, candidates have not spent much money this time.”⁵³

Bhim Lwagun of the CPN (UML) also mentioned that this time, the local committee managed the election preparations and campaigned by staying at the houses of local cadres.⁵⁴ In Dhankuta, Tehrathum, Sunsari, and Jhapa, it was found that candidates did not spend money on organizing grand feasts as they used to do in the past. Interviewed political party representatives and citizens noted that candidates spent less because spending money in this election would not alter votes, and organizing feasts could lead to public backlash or defamation if videos leaked online.

According to a media professional from Kaski, phrases like ‘one candidate, five journalists’ alongside *digital masu-bhat* (digital meat and rice) were widely discussed during the election.⁵⁵ He argued that it was labeled *digital masu-bhat* because, while spending on physical food and drinks was lower in this election, candidates had to spend heavily on social media campaigns. Candidates also shared with observers that a substantial amount of money was being spent on social media. Due to the heavy burden of election expenditures that candidates must bear, there is a high risk of women, Dalits, and other marginalized communities being entirely pushed out of this process. Sarita Devkota, a candidate under the PR system from Dang, said, “It is difficult to balance time, money, and family all three together.”⁵⁶ She is still repaying a loan of NRs. 1.5 million taken when running for mayor in the 2022 local level elections, demonstrating that financial risks for women can be long-lasting.

⁵³ Interview with Tumbahamphe on February 25, 2026.

⁵⁴ Interview with Lwagun on February 26, 2026.

⁵⁵ Interview with the media professional on February 17, 2026.

⁵⁶ Interview with Devkota on February 24, 2026.

9

Election and Digital Space

There are 16.6 million (56%) internet users in Nepal, and 14.8 million people (50%) use social media.⁵⁷ The population using Facebook is also 14.8 million. Following a shutdown initiated by the then-government with the objective of regulating social media, the Gen-Z movement took place utilizing social media itself. Subsequently, voting was conducted on a social media platform named Discord, through which Sushila Karki was selected as the Prime Minister of the country. In this election conducted by her government, social media became the real battleground for competition. With the rise of social media, not only have individuals' behaviors and activities changed, but the very rhythm of social life has also transformed. Therefore, it has played a significant role in the election as well. Elections primarily involve two parties: those who ask for votes, meaning political parties and candidates, and those who cast votes, meaning voters. The third party is the ECN, which makes the voting process fair, free of fear, transparent, and impartial. Social media is significantly assisting all three of these parties.

Due to the existing feudal culture in Nepali society, information is controlled by the elite class, and content spoken by the elites is accepted as truth. Because education and literacy rates are weak, individuals tend

⁵⁷ Datareportal. 2026. Digital Nepal: 2026. Available at <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2026-nepal>; accessed on April 16, 2026.

to place more trust in things they see with their own eyes. However, not everyone may possess the equal understanding that those visible materials were crafted specifically to be shown.

Social media has brought about a remarkable change in election campaigning. Previously, the press and broadcasting media played a major role in the exchange of information between candidates and voters, acting as the intermediaries. Today, however, social media has become a medium for direct dialogue between candidates and voters. This has provided campaign teams with the facility to tailor messages according to target groups. Therefore, different messages can be disseminated based on age, interest, geography, and other factors. Because candidates can react immediately to contemporary events, they can address voters' questions and concerns quickly. Moreover, social media is an easy, simple, swift, and reliable medium to reach and influence voters. Previously, the communication between competing candidates used to take place through speeches. However, in the altered context, social media itself has become that medium. An example of this is the context where KP Sharma Oli declared he was ready for a debate among the proposed prime ministerial candidates, while Balendra Shah flatly rejected it.

It was found that candidates used Facebook, Tik Tok, X, and Instagram not only to ask for votes for the election but also to solicit financial assistance. Candidate Nisha Adhikari from the Gatishil Loktantrik Party, Ranju Darshana and Ganesh Karki from the RSP, Prem Bahadur Thapa from the Mongol National Organisation, Nara Narayan Shah from the Nepali Congress, and independent candidate Mahabir Pun are a few such examples. Some of them even made their bank accounts and QR codes public on social media. Following an enforcement complaint filed against candidate Nisha Adhikari for sending financial requests to Nepalis living abroad for the election, the ECN had also demanded a clarification from her.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Bhandari, Prakash. 2026. Candidates Asking for Donations Along with Votes, QR Codes and Bank Accounts on Social Media to Raise Money (In Nepali). *Bizmandu*, January

Social media has become a source of information about the election for voters. They can easily obtain information through social media regarding what the candidates are like, what their ideas, objectives, goals, and plans are, and what their past was. Such information helps them choose the right candidate. Social media has also provided remarkable support to the ECN for providing voter education as well as disseminating all kinds of information. However, alongside these benefits, social media has also brought forward certain challenges.

9.1. Challenges Brought by Social Media

Social media platforms have not only provided numerous opportunities but have also brought serious challenges along with them. In particular, they have been misused to spread misinformation. The tendency of false or misleading content to spread rapidly during election periods has become a growing problem. Because the number of users is vast, the volume of information is immense, and its velocity is so rapid that controlling it is not easy. Misinformation can influence voter perceptions and even affect election outcomes before facts can be verified. Fact-checking organizations like NepalFactCheck.org and TechPana revealed during the election that hundreds of viral posts contained false information.⁵⁹ However, there is no assessment of the kind of impact those already viral materials had made or how many people the verified facts managed to reach.

On the other hand, because algorithms recommend content based on previous activity, people often end up viewing only content that aligns with their own interests. Consequently, this drives political polarization and creates an ‘echo chamber’ that spreads uniform ideas, keeping individuals isolated from differing viewpoints. During election campaigns, candidates also adopt strategies to deliver highly partisan messages to

29. Available at <https://bizmandu.com/content/20260129183813.html>; accessed on March 23, 2026.

⁵⁹ For such examples, see: <https://nepalfactcheck.org/news/page/6/> <https://techpana.com/factcheck/?tab=nepali&page=12>

voters through social media. Thus, while social media has eased individual access to political information, it has also created new challenges for the transparency and inclusivity of the democratic process. In particular, the risk of negative impacts spreading has increased due to weak digital literacy, the active efforts of political parties and candidates to misuse technology to spread messages in their favor and against their competitors, and ineffective regulation and monitoring mechanisms.

Because social media posts can be ‘boosted,’ their reach can be extensive, but the expenditure for boosting is incurred in dollars, and its volume can be quite large. Reports emerged that candidates spent up to NRs. 20,000 to boost a single post and even outsourced such digital management to commercial entities.⁶⁰ It was also found that digital marketing companies used new promotional techniques to create artificial popularity for candidates through fake likes and comments.⁶¹ However, since expenditures made through digital mediums cannot be easily monitored, there is a risk that this will not be included in the expenditure statements submitted by candidates to the ECN.

Vulgar and hate-filled comments were found in the responses to the social media posts of several female candidates. Nisha Adhikari, a candidate from Kathmandu Constituency No. 5, shared such comments made against her directly on Facebook.⁶² According to Premwati Rana, a Nagarik Unmukti Party candidate from Kanchanpur Constituency No. 2, negative comments and ‘trolling’ on social media platforms leave them

⁶⁰ Kantipur. 2026. Candidates Pay Up to 20,000 Per Post for Their Campaign (In Nepali). January 28. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/technology/2026/01/28/candidates-pay-up-to-20000-per-post-for-their-campaign-33-21.html>; accessed on April 3, 2026.

⁶¹ Baral, Sajana. 2026. Election-winning ‘Package’ on Social Media (In Nepali). *Kantipur*, January 28. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/news/2026/01/28/election-winning-package-on-social-media-53-00.html>; accessed on April 3, 2026.

⁶² Darji, Archana. 2026. Women’s Dignity is being Violated on Social Media (In Nepali). *Himalkhabar*, February 12. Available at www.himalkhabar.com/144777/hate-speech-to-women-candidate-in-social-media; accessed on April 3, 2026.

mentally demoralized.⁶³ This confirms that digital platforms are not merely a medium for publicity but are also becoming a source of mental pressure and ‘cyberbullying’ for candidates.

The ECN made every possible effort to regulate abuse, hatred, and misinformation spread through social media. The Code of Conduct, 2025 included a provision stating that individuals must not make or encourage misleading comments, such as degrading remarks, disinformation, dissemination of misleading information, insults, and hate speech on social media with the intent to influence the election. The code of conduct also carried a message stating that information or content must not be distorted, or caused to be distorted, to be shared, tagged, commented on, or replied to on social media with the intent to influence the election.

The UNDP supported the ECN through a monitoring mechanism called E-Monitor Plus.⁶⁴ In addition, the ECN deployed teams from the Cyber Security Directorate of the Nepalese Army and the Cyber Bureau of the Nepal Police. The Information Integrity Promotion Unit, operating under the ECN’s Election Information Dissemination and Coordination Center, detected a total of 612 harmful pieces of information between February 20 and February 26. Among them:

- 545 cases attracting the Electronic Transactions Act, 2006 were forwarded to the Nepal Police for action.
- 121 cases attracting the Election Code of Conduct, 2025 were forwarded to the Central Code of Conduct Monitoring Committee.
- 74 cases attracting the Press Council Act, 1992 were forwarded to the Press Council.

⁶³ Interview with Rana on March 1, 2026.

⁶⁴ UNDP. 2026. “This Time I Voted for the New” (In Nepali). March 18. Available at www.undp.org/stories/time-i-voted-new; accessed on April 1, 2026.

- 1 case attracting the Advertisement (Regulation) Act, 2019 was forwarded to the Advertisement Board.⁶⁵

Of those forwarded, by February 26, the Nepal Police had taken action on 132 cases (39%), the Central Code of Conduct Monitoring Committee on 90 cases (74%), and Press Council Nepal on 32 cases (43%).

The Kathmandu Post daily studied 4,754 posts published between December 23, 2025, and January 22, 2026, across 24 highly followed and active Facebook pages, including Routine of Nepal Banda, Taja Khabar, Naz Entertainment, Meme Nepal, and LOL Nepal.⁶⁶ The study revealed that among the political content, more than half (54.1%) was in favor of the RSP, a number significantly higher than the combined coverage of the Nepali Congress and the CPN (UML). The content regarding the RSP did not feature policy debates but focused heavily on the RSP, its leadership, and the imagery of a new party. These pages, which are not formally affiliated with any political party, mostly post and share news and entertainment content. Thus, claims have been made that algorithms exerted a widespread influence in favor of the RSP during the 2026 election.⁶⁷

Smooth internet access was not available in the northern mountain and hill districts. The low influence of the RSP in those locations in the election results can be linked to the party's digital campaigning. Undoubtedly, social media was one medium for public attraction toward the RSP. However, this did not occur solely due to activities carried out on social media

⁶⁵ ECN. 2026. Major Activities Completed from February 19, 2026 to February 25, 2026 (In Nepali). February 27. Available at <https://ebulletin.election.gov.np/2026/02/2982/>; accessed on April 3, 2026.

⁶⁶ Dudraj, Daya. 2026. How Facebook's Algorithm is Amplifying One-party Over-all Others (In Nepali). *The Kathmandu Post*, February 23. Available at <https://kathmandupost.com/politics/2026/02/23/how-facebook-s-algorithm-is-amplifying-one-party-over-all-others/>; accessed on April 1, 2026.

⁶⁷ Dahal Gopal. 2026. The Dangerous Game of Algorithms (In Nepali). *Nepal News*. April 14. Available at <https://nepalnews.com/2026/04/14/the-dangerous-game-of-algorithms/>; accessed on April 15, 2026.

during the election campaign period itself. It was rather the manifestation of long-term social media interactions and reactions regarding sympathy toward the then RSP and Balendra Shah, as well as disillusionment with the performance of other major parties.

9.2. IT Groups for Election Campaigning

During DRCN's observation, it was found that political parties in districts such as Dang, Sunsari, Tehrathum, and Kanchanpur mobilized separate 'media teams' and even 'social media committees' down to the ward level to promote positive content and counter negative comments. Candidates stated that they intensified personal communication through WhatsApp and Viber groups. During the election period, most candidates used their personal Facebook accounts to post photographs of door-to-door campaigns and corner meetings, as well as to share information about campaign schedules. Journalists affiliated with party organizations were often involved in committees responsible for managing social media. In Sunsari, the CPN (UML) mobilized information technology students affiliated with the party for this purpose.

Although candidates understood that being more active on social media and posting attractive content could increase visibility among voters and improve their chances of securing votes, not all candidates were equally active on these platforms. Some candidates managed their social media accounts themselves in a basic manner. Ushalakshmi Tumbahamphe, a candidate of the Rashtriya Parivartan Party in Tehrathum, and Anisha Nepali, a candidate of the RPP in Salyan, stated that they personally posted content on social media.⁶⁸ Acknowledging that his party had not been able to use social media effectively, Nepali Congress Dang President Shankar Dangi remarked, "We have developed a habit of not looking back at history and instead following social media. The older parties are

⁶⁸ Interview with Tumbahamphe on February 25, 2026 and with Nepali on February 26, 2026.

becoming victims of digitalization. The election campaign is taking place more on social media than in physical sphere. I feel that we have not been able to transform ourselves according to the times and embrace this era of digitalization.”⁶⁹

9.3. Study of Candidates’ Posts on Facebook

DRCN conducted a study on electoral activities on social media. For this purpose, the Facebook posts of 25 candidates were closely observed (See Table 2). Among them, six were from the RSP, five from the NCP, four from the Nepali Congress, four from the CPN (UML), and one each from the Ujyaalo Nepal Party, RPP, Janamat Party, Shram Sanskriti Party, Samabeshi Samajbadi Party, and an independent candidate. The study analyzed what kind of political messages these candidates presented and how they presented them during the period from the registration of nominations (January 19) to the day of the election (March 5).

Among the candidates included in the study, the candidate with the highest number of followers was Balendra Shah. He posted a total of 25 pieces of content on his Facebook page during this period. Except for a photo of him casting his vote on election day, there was no content directly related to the election in his posts. Therefore, looking solely at his social media, it is not even clear which party he was contesting the election from. Both top leaders of the RSP, Rabi Lamichhane and Balendra Shah, did not seem to actively conduct any election campaigning through their personal Facebook accounts. However, the official Facebook page of the RSP was actively used to campaign for the party and its candidates during this period, highlighting details ranging from the candidates’ educational qualifications to the work they had done in the past.

⁶⁹ Interview with Dangi on February 24, 2026.

Table 2: Details of Candidates' Posts on Facebook

S.N.	Candidate's Name	Political Party	Number of Posts	Highlights of the Posts
1	Amaresh Kumar Singh	RSP	113	Door-to-door campaign photos/videos, identity-based politics, vote for RSP because a Madheshi will become the Prime Minister.
2	Balendra Shah	RSP	25	Photos of himself visiting various districts, festival greetings, high number of likes, shares, and comments on them, but no video content, no posts regarding his political party, its policies, or election campaigning.
3	Bishwadeep Pandey	NCP	138	Door-to-door visit, videos/photos, heavily video-dominant content, branding change through the message of 'youth/new face', assurances to resolve the problems of landless squatters.
4	Chandra Kant (CK) Raut	Janamat Party	303	Political appeals based on Madheshi identity, farmers' issues, claiming to be different from other Madheshi leaders through the 'Why CK Raut' series.

5	Gagan Kumar Thapa	Nepali Congress	116	Efforts to build trust by showcasing achievements (especially during his tenure as Health Minister), use of the slogan “ <i>Badaliyo Congress, Badalchhaun Desh</i> ” (Congress Has Changed, We Will Change the Country), simultaneous party promotion along with policies and plans, use of youth-oriented content.
6	Gyanendra Shahi	RPP	63	Building trust with the public through door-to-door visits, video-dominant content showcasing Jumla’s landscapes and villages, emphasis on regional identity with a highly positive message.
7	Harka Sampang	Shram Sanskriti Party	3846	Highly active with the highest number of posts, nationalist and anti-foreign interference content, materials related to door-to-door campaigns and the party's election rallies across various districts.
8	Juli Kumari Mahato	CPN (UML)	139	Video-dominant door-to-door campaigns and worship/temple activities, self-promotional materials, identity-based messages like ‘ <i>Mithila ke Beti</i> ’ (Daughter of Mithila), low response/engagement on posts.

9	KP Sharma Oli	CPN (UML)	56	Self and party-centric campaigning, emotional storytelling, nationalist appeals through videos declaring ‘UML to save the country’, emphasis on experienced leadership and stability, materials on the Jhapa-centered door-to-door campaign.
10	Kulman Ghising	Ujyaalo Nepal Party	14	Content regarding his achievements in the energy sector, appeals to vote for those who work rather than those who give speeches. Minimal content related to election campaigning, no posts regarding door-to-door visits or election rallies.
11	Madhav Kumar Nepal	NCP	55	Materials on constituency-focused door-to-door campaigns, videos with emotional background music, special emphasis on his previous work, efforts to connect with locals and build credibility through the Bhojpuri language.
12	Mahabir Pun	Independent Candidate	143	Unrefined video-dominant content, door-to-door visits (including at night) and direct public contact, conversational and informal style rather than formal campaigning, appeals stating ‘vote only if you have trust’.

13	Nishkal Rai	Nepali Congress	82	Active by running a separate Facebook page for the election, Ilam-centered policies (agriculture, tourism), policy messages alongside self-promotion, sharing of party posts, messages emphasizing youth leadership.
14	Numa Limbu	Samabeshi Samajbadi Party	182	Identity politics focused on the inclusion of gender and sexual minorities, religious and self-motivational posts, low response/engagement on posts.
15	Pradeep Paudel	Nepali Congress	117	Used Facebook Events for door-to-door campaigning, policy messages aligned with party policy, support and trust toward Gagan Thapa, shared posts related to party policies.
16	Prithvi Subba Gurung	CPN (UML)	134	Materials on door-to-door campaigns, a ‘work straight from the village’ perspective, infrastructure project-based policy messages, efforts to build credibility by showcasing his previous work.
17	Pushpa Kamal Dahal	NCP	53	Long videos of his own speeches and materials from visits to various districts, materials on party campaigning and coordination programs, messages calling NCP the ‘true new party’.

18	Rabi Lamichhane	RSP	12	Criticism of traditional parties/leaders, presenting RSP as the carrier of change.
19	Ranjit Tamang	NCP	248	Self-promotion centric content, explanations of why he is a qualified candidate, campaign videos, efforts to connect with the youth generation, policy-related messages, door-to-door visit, dominant activities, vows to move forward by winning the public's trust.
20	Ranju Darshana	RSP	282	Short reel/clip-dominant content, photos of her visits to temples, videos of others supporting her, messages promoting the 'Bell for Change', youth-oriented, emotional branding such as motherhood.
21	Renu Dahal	NCP	76	High use of door-to-door visit, centered posts/videos, messages about taking the experience gained as a mayor to the parliament.
22	Shekhar Koirala	Nepali Congress	13	A few posts regarding policy and a few for self-promotion. However, nothing on party promotion; he did not make the claims made by others regarding a 'changed Congress'.

23	Sobita Gautam	RSP	157	Video-dominant door-to-door visit content, self-promotional materials created with the intent of gaining trust, content explaining government procedures/information, low negativity, a few posts became highly viral.
24	Suhang Nembang	CPN (UML)	32	Door-to-door visit centered videos, policy messages regarding farmers and Ilam's development, self-promotional materials created with the intent of gaining trust, emphasis on personal identity over the party, use of nationalist music.
25	Tashi Lhanzom	RSP	192	Door-to-door visit dominant videos/photos, materials that brought the party forward rather than herself, emotional community interactions, zero criticism, limited policy messages.

Other RSP candidates including Ranju Darshana, Sasmit Pokharel, Amaresh Kumar Singh, and Tashi Lhanzom actively conducted their election campaigning through Facebook. A major narrative found in the posts of RSP candidates is change. Expressions ranging from ‘Now let’s change our vote’ to the use of the slogan ‘Let’s vote for RSP for the future,’ and declarations that RSP is the ultimate party for the country can be seen in the candidates’ posts. In Madhesh, the issue of identity has been raised. The intent that one should vote for RSP because ‘a son of Madhesh’ will become the Prime Minister, and that its victory means a victory for

Madhesh, is evident in the posts of Amaresh Kumar Singh, the candidate from Sarlahi Constituency No.4.

The promotional materials of RSP candidates were relatively attractive because graphic design was well utilized in them. This trend can be observed to some extent in the posts of a few Nepali Congress candidates and on the official Facebook page of the Nepali Congress as well. However, less uniformity is visible in the poster designs of CPN (UML) and NCP candidates, and the use of graphics is quite minimal.

While RSP candidates asked for votes by presenting themselves as ‘new’, candidates from other parties asked for votes by claiming to be experienced leaders. Nevertheless, because the narrative of ‘new is better’ was widespread on social media, it is found that candidates tried to establish themselves as favorably and ‘new’ as possible. Candidates from older parties campaigned by saying they possessed new ideas alongside experience, and it appears established parties attempted to use a few posts targeted specifically at the youth.

Policy-oriented messages on Facebook were quite minimal compared to other content. The top candidates who posted the highest number of such materials were Suhang Nembang, Nishkal Rai, Gagan Thapa, Ranju Darshana, and Bishwadeep Pandey, respectively (See Figure 1). Among them, Gagan Thapa placed separate policies regarding the overall country’s education, health, economy, environment, and inclusion in his posts. On the other hand, Suhang Nembang and Nishkal Rai uploaded posts clarifying their policies and plans for the development of Ilam. Additionally, Ranju Darshana appears to have prioritized policies and plans related to mental health, motherhood, and the environment.

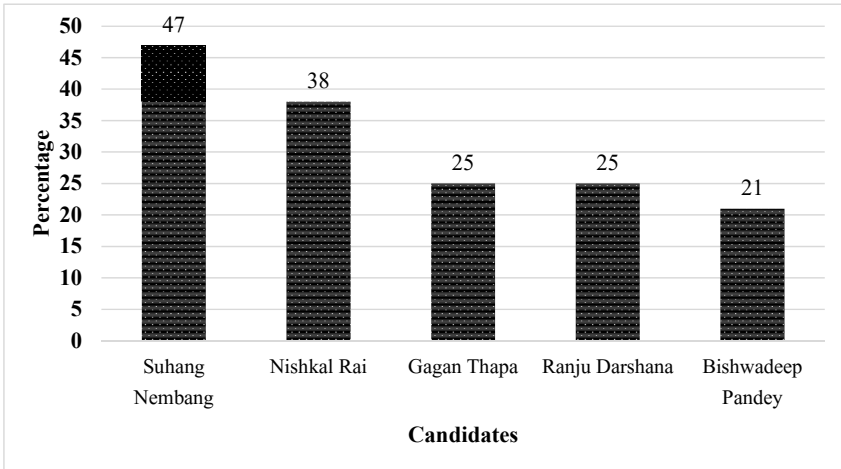


Figure 1: Top Five Candidates with the Highest Number of Policy-oriented Posts

Among the leaders who highly utilized nationalism during the election campaign period, Harka Sampang appears at the forefront (see Figure 2). In his posts, ‘American imperialism’ is widely opposed. For instance, his materials claim that if his party wins, they will repeal the MCC, prevent the SPP from passing, and protect the country from being sold out, arguing that voters should cast their ballots for him. He has attempted to create a sense of fear through his posts that nationalism is in crisis. Furthermore, Sampang also made the highest number of posts (3,846) during this period. The narrative of nationalism is also visible in the posts of CPN (UML) Chair KP Sharma Oli. His posts, however, highlight September 9, arguing that votes should be cast for those who save the country rather than those who burn it down. Similarly, in the posts of NCP leaders, a message is found stating that since their party is also new, voting for it will benefit the country. Additionally, Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s Facebook posts contain long videos of speeches he delivered at election rallies across various districts.

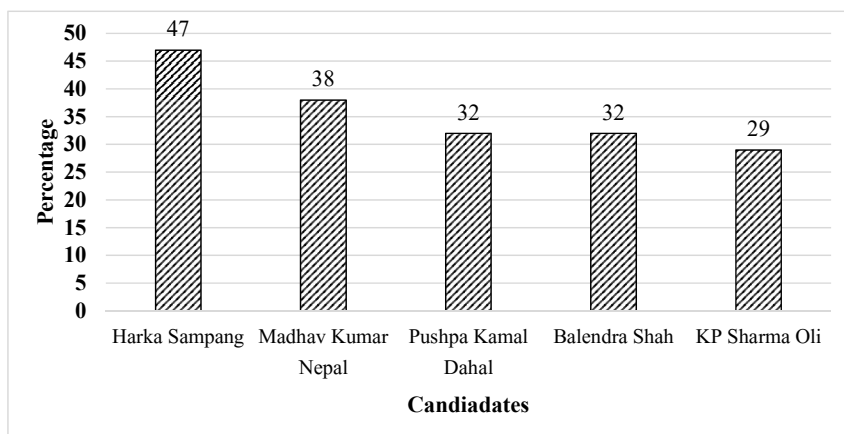


Figure 2: Top Five Candidates with the Highest Number of Posts Conveying Messages of Nationalism

President of Nepali Congress Gagan Thapa has sought to showcase his work during his tenure as Health Minister while also aiming to establish the slogan “*Badaliyo Congress, Badalchhaun Desh*” (Congress Has Changed, We Will Change the Country). His posts reveal that he asked for votes not just for his own candidacy with specific policies and plans, but for the party as a whole. Similarly, Janamat Party Chair CK Raut has extensively used content related to identity politics. Arguing that he is different from and more capable than other Madheshi leaders, he requested voters to ensure victory for him and his party, asserting that Madhesh’s issues can only be properly understood and raised in the parliament by leaders who have emerged from the struggles and movements of Madhesh itself. Posts reflecting Madheshi identity were also shared by Juli Kumari Mahato and Amaresh Kumar Singh. Likewise, the issue of gender and sexual minorities received priority in the posts of Samabeshi Samajbadi Party candidate Numa Limbu.

It is clearly visible that social media is no longer just a medium for providing information; it has become a digital arena for building emotional support and creating narratives. Therefore, the number of comments,

shares, and likes a post receives also carries significance. A wide variation in such engagement is evident in the Facebook posts of the candidates studied by DRCN. Factors such as the candidate's age, political experience, gender, language of the post, emotional tone, and personality-building were found to influence their engagement. Beyond that, an individual's style, speech, image of resistance, and emotional language determined the level of engagement rather than political parties, ideologies, or policies.

A massive gap in social media effectiveness is visible between leaders contesting elections for the first or second time and those who have run numerous times. While the average reaction on posts of leaders who have participated in elections multiple times remained limited to around 2,600, the average reaction on posts of new leaders like Balendra Shah, Rabi Lamichhane, Harka Sampang, and Sobita Gautam exceeded approximately 4,900. New-generation leaders were found using emotional and colloquial language rather than formal and institutional language in their posts. For instance, this status by Harka Sampang can be taken as an example, "There seems to be a lot of fluttering and arrogance! It will become clear in the next 5 days! A government of Shram Sanskriti Party will certainly be formed! Hail the soil! Hail the nation!" Without any formality, he expressed his views directly, just like an ordinary person.

Mahabir Pun also posted in a simple style alongside a video of election campaigning at 7 PM in Darbang Bazar, Myagdi, stating, "Life has been a lot of fun." Balendra Shah wrote a post in the local dialect of the Far-West: "*Sudur aba door nai, jhikkai jhikkai maya tamlai*" (The Far-West is no longer far; immense, immense love to you). Conversely, leaders who have repeatedly been election candidates in the past used formal language. Nepali Congress General Secretary Pradeep Paudel repeatedly shared cliché posts such as, "The contribution of your vote will be important to change the country!" Similarly, CPN's Madhav Kumar Nepal repeatedly shared posts to the effect of: "I will always maintain this trust of the voters of Rautahat. This time's vote is for the "Star" symbol."

Candidates generally gave maximum priority to photos and videos. As a result, the use of short videos, reels, and live videos became widespread. Ample scenes of programs, speeches, and meetings are also found there. This demonstrates that the influence of visual and attractive content on social media is steadily rising. Furthermore, the highest numbers of likes, comments, and shares are also seen on photo and video content. In terms of engagement, Balendra Shah appears at the very forefront. The average engagement on his posts is much higher than that of other leaders. His post containing the phrase “*Jhikkai jhikkai maya tamlai*” received 812,300 likes, 94,300 comments, and was shared 86,000 times. Numerous responses are visible particularly on his short posts written in symbolic and simple language. Shah used the religious and cultural identities of various regions as a medium to indirectly project his emotions. Looking at it directly, he made the festivals, sports, and touristic beauty of all communities the subject matter of his posts without mentioning any specific party. It is understood that this was done precisely because he recognized the importance of the politics of ethnic and regional identity.

Rabi Lamichhane, on the other hand, repeatedly used terms like ‘struggle’, ‘injustice’, and ‘public support’. He linked his political image with the story of a personal battle. His emotional tone called not just for support, but for companionship. Consequently, the number of comments and shares on his posts is remarkably high. Pushpa Kamal Dahal also shared a similar emotional post. On the occasion of Valentine’s Day, dedicating a post to his late wife Sita, he recalled their struggle-filled journey, mentioning his wife’s support through ‘the many ups and downs of life and death’ and walking together even in ‘the ascents, descents, corners, and alleys.’ He also added a commitment there stating, “I will continuously fight for women’s rights and the rights and welfare of the oppressed class.”

While the presidents of the Nepali Congress, NCP, and RSP conducted election rallies by traveling to various districts of the country and posted related materials, CPN (UML) Chair KP Oli did not visit other districts,

keeping his posts centered around Jhapa. Formality is highly prevalent in the posts of leaders like KP Oli, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, and Madhav Kumar Nepal. Institutional words like ‘nation-building’, ‘development’, ‘democracy’, ‘the public’, and ‘trust’ are repeated in their posts. Such formal political language feels dull in today’s digital environment. Compared to informal language, those posts went less viral. Older leaders are still speaking the language of the ‘institution’, whereas new leaders are speaking the language of ‘personal connection’. This has succeeded in appealing to and connecting with citizens directly.

The data also indicates another important trend. Social media users have shown unprecedented interest in candidates’ posts driven by emotional arousal. Likes, comments, and shares are extremely high on posts containing elements of resistance, injustice, attacks, or anti-establishment undertones. For instance, aggressive and confrontational language is visible in the posts of Harka Sampang and Gyanendra Shahi. Supporters actively responded to and shared them. On the other hand, information-centered posts, such as festival greetings, event details, meetings, encounters, and policy information, received only average responses. This shows that the political trend in the digital space tilts toward aggressive emotion rather than information.

A completely different picture emerges when comparing female and male leaders. The posts of female leaders covered in the study such as Sobita Gautam, Renu Dahal, Ranju Darshana, Juli Mahato, and Tashi Lhansom are less aggressive than those of men, despite being emotional. Relatively, words like ‘community’, ‘collaboration’, ‘inclusivity’, ‘representation’, ‘thank you’, and ‘participation’ were used more frequently in their language. In the posts of male leaders, however, signs of confrontation such as ‘fight’, ‘attack’, ‘system’, ‘corruption’, ‘injustice’, and ‘reply’ were used more often.

Responses were somewhat lower on the posts of female candidates like Juli Mahato and Numa Limbu. One commonality found in the posts

of Ranju Darshana, Juli Mahato, and Numa Limbu was religious posts. The use of the hashtag ‘#HarHarMahadev’ and photos of them visiting shrines and temples are frequently found in their posts. Such posts also signal an attempt to influence voters by indirectly connecting with religious sentiments.

When looking at engagement trends, posts by male candidates received far more responses than those of female candidates. The primary reason for this is the lower number of posts by female leaders and their smaller follower base. Another reason is that topics like controversy, anger, resistance, and personality clashes attract users more, and social media algorithms play a special role in spreading and amplifying them. The posts of female leaders are comparatively balanced. This also indicates that they are exercising caution in the digital space.

The primary and most widely used implicit narrative was to project oneself as right and win others’ trust. The influence of personality-centered politics is highly dominant on social media over policy-based, ideological, or institutional political settings. Clear trends and differences have emerged from this study of over 6,500 total posts. The social media atmosphere during the election had already signaled a significant shift. This indicates that the attraction created through digital mediums will become decisive in the future. Social media is asserting dominance over traditional organizational mechanisms. However, a strong probability remains that lighthearted, populist content will prove more effective than deep thoughts, ideologies, and policy debates, and individual influence will grow stronger than the party itself. Such a trend ultimately risks weakening democracy.

10

Inclusivity and Access

Ensuring the meaningful participation of every class, community, and region of the state constitutes true democracy. For that to happen, equal access for all in elections is essential. In this 2026 election, efforts toward inclusivity appeared both positive and challenging. Initiating efforts to make polling stations disability-friendly, prioritizing pregnant women, nursing mothers, and senior citizens, along with the organized candidacy of the sexual and gender minority community and the subsequent representation of a transgender woman in parliament, stand out as significant achievements this time. Additionally, the substantial participation of youth among the candidacies gave the electoral process an inclusive appearance. However, the inability to achieve the expected numbers of women, Dalits, and Janajatis among the candidacies remains a challenge this time.

To institutionalize inclusivity in accordance with Articles 38(4) and 42(1) of the Constitution and Section 57 of the Political Parties Act, 2017, the ECN issued a 20-point directive shortly before this election.⁷⁰ This directive called on parties to field at least one-third women candidates under the FPTP system, and overall, to arrange candidate nominations in

⁷⁰ ECN. 2025. Regarding Giving Instructions to Political Parties Registered with the Commission (In Nepali). *Press Release*, December 5. Available at <https://election.gov.np/admin/public//storage/HOR%202082/Press%20Release%208.19.pdf>; accessed on April 15, 2026.

a manner that aligns with the policy of raising women’s representation in the Federal Parliament to 40 percent by 2030, in compliance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The ECN also directed parties to make their assemblies, training programs, manifestos, and publicity materials gender-sensitive and inclusive. The ECN’s directive carried a message that the meaningful participation of women, Dalits, minorities, and persons with disabilities must be ensured. Furthermore, strict measures were put in place against using language that hurts the dignity of women and targeted communities.

During the observation, persons with disabilities in Dang and Salyan pointed out fundamental problems regarding accessibility. Krishna Bahadur Budha, the President of the Welfare Disability Service Association Salyan, stated, “For visually impaired individuals like me, casting a vote is a problem. It cannot be done without taking someone else’s help. When doing so, confidentiality is not maintained. There should at least be an alternative voting system for individuals like us.”⁷¹ Other stakeholders complained that persons with disabilities faced difficulties because polling locations lacked even simple ramp structures for wheelchairs. The lack of basic accessibility in political participation stands as a challenge to the democratic system. Addressing this swiftly is imperative.

Although the Constitution of Nepal, 2015 prepared a clear foundation for equality and inclusivity, achieving inclusivity during the candidacy phase itself remains complex. In this election as well, parties were not found to have adopted a democratic method in selecting candidates. Generally, the tradition within parties of local constituency-level committees recommending three names including one woman and the top leadership taking discretionary decisions upon them continued this time too. In such a selection process where the whims and biases of top leadership dominate, examples were observed where individuals who were not even recommended by lower bodies received candidacy tickets,

⁷¹ Interview with Budha on February 26, 2026.

and others received such tickets after changing parties on the very day of nomination. Due to such practices, inclusivity did not become a priority.

The 2021 census shows 647,744 individuals (2.2 percent) as persons with disabilities in Nepal. In the House of Representatives Election, 2026, there were very few persons with disabilities as candidates. Out of a total of 86 such candidates, one was under the FPTP system and the remaining 85 were under the PR system. There is no separate ‘cluster’ for persons with disabilities, however. In this election, the representation of the sexual and gender minority community appeared in a new light. For the first time, this community filed 6 candidates under the FPTP and 15 candidates under the PR system in an organized manner through its own party called the Samabeshi Samajbadi Party. Mainstream parties, however, did not give sufficient space to this community. Bhumika Shrestha, representing the sexual and gender minority community under the PR system from the RSP, has become a Member of the HoR. In this section, further discussion is carried out regarding the inclusivity of women, Dalit, and youth candidates.

10.1. Female Candidates

Female candidacy in elections is directly linked to accessibility, competitive capability, and independence in decision-making. However, the method through which political parties select candidates is not democratic. Because the top leadership choosing the candidates is often dominated by men from influential classes, inclusivity has been overshadowed. Despite the provisions for gender equality guaranteed by Articles 18 and 38 of the Constitution, female candidacy under the FPTP system was limited to around 11 percent, reflecting the gap between legal provisions and actual practice. Furthermore, in 2022, female candidacy in FPTP hovered around 9 percent of the total number of candidates. In 2022, female candidates under the PR system stood at around 54 percent, which has currently risen slightly to around 57 percent.

As election expenditures continue to rise, female candidates have been heavily impacted. Article 38(9) of the Constitution provides that all women shall have equal lineage rights without any discrimination, and Article 18(5) ensures equal rights to ancestral property without gender discrimination. In practice, however, deep-rooted patriarchal norms still prevail. While male candidates can take risks such as selling house and land or taking out loans for elections, it is not easy for women to do the same. Consequently, they are less trusted with candidacies. According to Anisha Nepali, an RPP candidate from Salyan, unseen expenses during elections are higher than visible ones. On top of that, being a woman means putting in extra effort to prove one's capability, which has also impacted the competitive capacity of women.⁷²

Sajida Khatun Siddiqui from Dang, whom the CPN (UML) placed at the top of the PR list for Muslim women, states that she is more capable than many FPTP candidates. Drawing attention to the structural inequality within political parties, she says, "There is hesitation within the party itself to give us candidacy tickets for the FPTP system. When attending mass meetings and conferences, our names are called after the men, and we hear comments like 'she overtook us'."⁷³ Her experience shows that when women achieve positions, the tendency to question their capability by linking it to personal or sexual relationships creates an even more derogatory environment.

There was not a single female candidate under the FPTP system in districts including Banke, Dolpa, Rolpa, Syangja, and Myagdi. According to the ECN, female candidacy was zero in 31 out of 165 electoral constituencies. "It is not that women do not want to come forward; they are simply not given the opportunity," says human rights activist and President of the Fatima Foundation, Maimuna Siddiqui.⁷⁴ According to her, even when women's names are recommended from the district level, those

⁷² Interview with Nepali on February 26, 2026.

⁷³ Interview with Siddiqui on February 25, 2026.

⁷⁴ Interview with Siddiqui on February 28, 2026.

names do not make it into the final list coming from the center. Because this situation makes it even harder for women to sustain and advance in politics, she is of the opinion that a quota for women must be ensured under the FPTP system as well.

10.2. Dalit Candidates

This time, a total of 243 candidates from the Dalit community were in the competition. However, 107 of them were independent candidates. Only Khagendra Sunar of the RSP from Banke Constituency No. 3 managed to emerge victorious. In direct calculations, the success rate is only around 0.4 percent, which is not only minimal but signals a very weak representation. The candidacy of Madheshi Dalits was even lower. Political parties did not field Dalit candidates in the electoral constituencies of Madhesh, Sudurpashchim, and Karnali, where Dalit voters are highly concentrated. Not only that, Madheshi Dalits were not even elected through the PR system, leaving them completely without representation in the HoR.

Devika Nepali, a PR candidate of the Nepali Congress from Dang, has experienced that competition is even more challenging for women from Dalit and oppressed classes. The experience she faced during the door-to-door campaign clearly highlights the double discrimination faced by Dalit women. She says, “Firstly being a woman, and on top of that, due to being a Dalit, I have also had to face behavior like ‘why do we need to greet (*namaskar*) her?’ when going door-to-door.”⁷⁵ Major political parties did not prioritize Dalits in the candidate selection process itself.

Due to expensive campaign styles, Dalits were not chosen as candidates. Even the Dalits who managed to secure candidate nominations could not compete in expensive campaigning due to a lack of financial resources. Because the social structure and the benefits derived from it continue to

⁷⁵ Interview with Nepali on February 25, 2026.

be enjoyed by the dominant class, Dalit candidacy and representation fell victim to it.

10.3. Youth Candidates

The House of Representatives Election, 2026 was conducted in a changed political environment generated after the Gen-Z movement (September 8–9). That movement created a widespread debate regarding generational shift, leadership renewal, and the direct participation of youth in Nepali politics. In this sense, this election was not merely a regular constitutional process, but also a ‘reactive election’ that took place as a result of political dissatisfaction and generational demands.

To be a candidate for the election of a member of the HoR, one must have completed 25 years of age. On the other hand, the National Youth Policy, 2025 considers the 18–35 age group as ‘youth,’ while the generation born between 1997 and 2012 is referred to as Gen-Z, whose age falls around 14–29 years by 2026. Bringing these criteria together, the Gen-Z group legally eligible to file a candidacy consists only of individuals aged 25–29 years. The data also confirms this reality. Under the FPTP election system, there were only 201 candidates (6 percent) in the 25–29 age group. Since this is the age group capable of representing the Gen-Z, their presence among the total candidates was extremely low. Under the PR system as well, the 25–29 age group was limited to just 6 percent. Nevertheless, indications have emerged that the debate over a generational shift, which has been raised for a long time in Nepali politics, is now taking a practical form.

Out of a total of 3,406 candidates under the direct election system, the number of candidates in the 25 to 39 age group was notable (950 individuals, or 28%). Among them, 201 individuals (6%) were in the 25–29 age group, 296 individuals (9%) in the 30–34 group, and 453 individuals (13%) in the 35–39 group (See Table 3). Thus, the combined presence of candidates under 40 years of age reaching approximately 28 percent stands

as an important fact showing an increase in youth participation. However, the highest number of candidates belonged to the 40–54 age group.

Youth participation is even higher among male candidates. While there were 178 individuals (5%) in the 25–29 group, 259 individuals (8%) in the 30–34 group, and 384 individuals (11%) in the 35–39 group as male candidates within the youth age bracket, the participation of women was relatively lower. The highest number of young female candidates was in the 35–39 age group, with 69 individuals (2%). This shows that multidimensional inequality persists in political opportunities.

The trend of youth participation is almost identical under the PR system. Out of a total of 3,135 candidates, 168 individuals (5%) were aged 25–29, 285 individuals (9%) were aged 30–34, and 401 individuals (13%) were aged 35–39. Here, approximately 27 percent of the total candidates were under 40 years old. The fact that the 40–44 age group (17%) held the highest share (535) shows that opportunities are gradually shifting to the new generation. Under the PR system, the number of female candidates was 117 individuals (4%) in the 25–29 age group and 201 individuals (6%) in the 30–34 group (See Table 4). This demonstrates that although the total candidacy of women stands at 57 percent under the PR system, the proportion of young women remains weak, just like under the FPTP system.

Table 3: Age-wise Distribution of Candidates Elected in the FPTP System

Age Group	Male	%	Female	%	Other	%	Total	%
25–29	178	5	23	1	0	0	201	6
30–34	259	8	36	1	1	0	296	9
35–39	384	11	69	2	0	0	453	13
40–44	458	13	85	2	0	0	543	16
45–49	467	14	67	2	0	0	534	16

Age Group	Male	%	Female	%	Other	%	Total	%
50–54	439	13	62	2	0	0	501	15
55–59	367	11	26	1	0	0	393	12
60–64	239	7	14	0	0	0	253	7
65–69	137	4	5	0	0	0	142	4
70–74	71	2	0	0	0	0	71	2
75–79	12	0	0	0	0	0	12	0
80+	6	0	1	0	0	0	7	0
Total Candidates	3,017	88	388	11	1	0	3,406	100

Source: Election Commission Nepal

It was found that the RSP gave the most opportunities to youth candidates. Out of the 164 candidates it fielded under the FPTP system, it stood up 70 young candidates (up to 40 years of age). Following that, the Shram Sanskriti Party fielded 38, the Pragatishil Loktantrik Party 30, the RPP 33, the CPN 20, and the CPN (UML) 13 young candidates up to 40 years of age.⁷⁶ Because ‘new’ parties like the RSP and the Shram Sanskriti Party gave higher priority to the youth, older parties like the Nepali Congress and the CPN (UML) also came under pressure. Public pressure, particularly the political awareness generated after the Gen-Z movement, can be credited with successfully pushing political parties toward youth-friendly candidacies.

⁷⁶ Bajagai, Raghunath. 2025. 31 Percent of Candidates Under 40 Years of Age (In Nepali). *Onlinekhabar*, January 22. Available at www.onlinekhabar.com/2026/01/1855360/31-percent-of-candidates-under-40-years-of-age; accessed on April 16, 2026.

**Table 4: Gender, Age Group, and Number of Candidates
under the PR System**

Age Group	Female	%	Male	%	Total	%
25–29	117	4	51	2	168	5
30–34	201	6	84	3	285	9
35–39	268	9	133	4	401	13
40–44	341	11	194	6	535	17
45–49	294	9	162	5	456	15
50–54	220	7	166	5	386	12
55–59	155	5	200	6	355	11
60–64	103	3	158	5	261	8
65–69	44	1	114	4	158	5
70–74	19	1	67	2	86	3
75–79	9	0	23	1	32	1
80+	1	0	11	0	12	0
Total Candidates	1,772	57	1,363	43	3,135	100

Source: *Election Commission Nepal*

Overall, youth participation in the House of Representatives Election, 2026 appears to be on the rise compared to the past. The increasing presence of youth among candidacies is a positive aspect. Nevertheless, the overwhelming number of candidates over 40 years of age (72%) is also worth noting. Furthermore, the need to increase the participation of young women even further remains obvious. Therefore, in the coming days, transforming youth participation from mere numbers into effective political leadership will require institutional reforms, democratic practices within parties, and the expansion of inclusive opportunities.

11

Voting

Voting was overall peaceful and acceptable from a management perspective. In most of the observed polling centers, voting commenced and concluded within the scheduled time. However, there were instances where voting was somewhat delayed due to the late arrival of candidates' agents, delays by staff, and procedural ambiguities.

DRCN deployed a total of 94 observers for the observation of the House of Representatives Election, 2026. They observed the election at 452 polling centers across 413 polling stations nationwide. For this purpose, a questionnaire was prepared by dividing the voting process into three parts: opening, voting, and closing.

11.1. Opening of Voting Process

94 observers from DRCN monitored the pre-voting procedures at the same number of polling stations and centers. Based on this, although the election process was technically satisfactory, it appeared to be of a mixed nature in terms of execution capacity, coordination, transparency, and procedural clarity. Voting commenced on time (7:00 AM) in 73 polling centers, while it could not start on time in 17 polling centers (See Figure 3). The primary reasons for this were the absence of candidates' agents

at the polling centers on time, and confusion or sluggishness among the staff (See Figure 4).

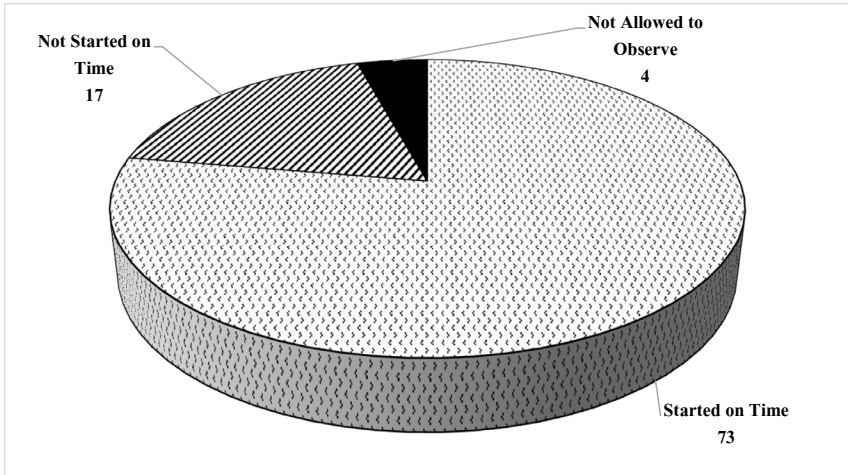


Figure 3: Polling Centers Where Poll Opening was on Time

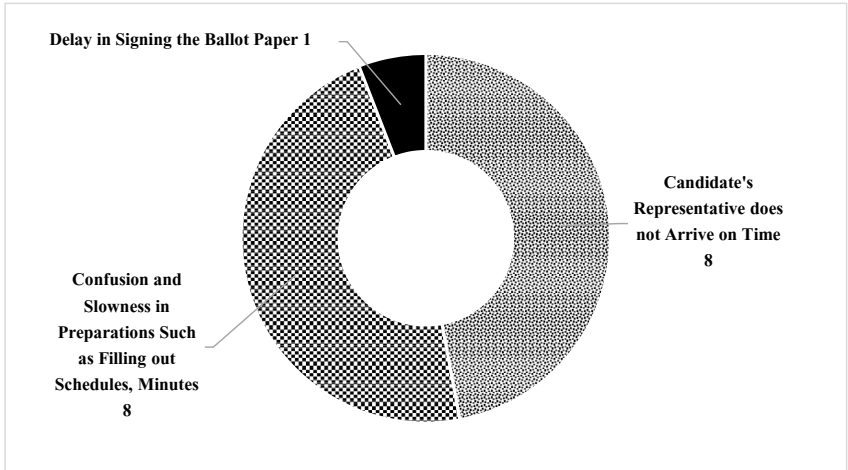


Figure 4: Reason for Delayed Poll Opening

The legal and administrative procedures required before the commencement of voting such as verifying that the ballot boxes were empty, filling out

various official minutes (*muchulka*) and schedules, and sealing the ballot boxes so that only ballots could be inserted, proved to be challenging for the staff. They were confused about whether the numbers written on the seals should face inward or outward. As noted by an observer who monitored the voting commencement process at Basudevi Secondary School, Raghunagar in Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City, agents caused a dispute when the staff attempted to proceed without certifying that the ballot box was empty, which the Polling Officer later had to resolve by providing a clarification. Similarly, at the Sano Gaucharan ‘Kha’ center of Kathmandu Metropolitan City, the staff’s confusion over the exact meanings of ‘unit’ (*thaan*) and ‘packet’ while filling out the schedules was a clear example of a lack of administrative efficiency. During the staff’s discussion regarding this confusion, it was finally clarified and recorded that a bundle of every one hundred ballot sheets would mean a ‘unit’ and a package of those units would mean a ‘packet’.

At the Paropakar Secondary School polling station in Kathmandu Metropolitan City-20, Bhimsenshan, the initial procedures were completed on time in two out of the three polling centers, but could not be completed in the third. Due to a decision to start voting simultaneously across all centers, voting at those two centers was also delayed by nearly half an hour. On the other hand, observers at Shivashakti Secondary School in Pokhara Metropolitan City and Shree Bal Subodhini Secondary School in Mechinagar Municipality, Jhapa, were barred from observing the process, exposing the election staff’s ignorance regarding transparency and accountability. At the ‘Kha’ polling center of Nilkantha Balmandir Secondary School in Nilkantha Municipality, Dhading, the ballot papers were opened and signed by the Polling Officer of the ‘Ka’ center. Consequently, 37 ballot papers were invalidated. Since this error was identified before voting commenced, those ballot papers were invalidated without any dispute, and the remaining ballot papers were continued according to their serial numbers.

Nevertheless, some positive aspects were also observed. As highlighted by the observer deployed at the polling center of Nuwakot Adarsha Multiple Campus in Bidur Municipality, instances of excellent coordination between the administration, security agencies, and political parties, as well as the creation of a cooperative environment for observers, indicated that good practices were equally present.

The overall analysis shows that although the voting commencement process was technically successful, there was an inequality in its quality. Excellent management was visible in some centers, while basic procedural shortcomings were distinct in others. Therefore, it appeared essential in future elections to ensure robust training for staff, procedural simplification, and an observer-friendly environment.

11.2. Voting Process

During the House of Representatives Election, 2026, 94 DRCN observers observed 266 polling centers across 227 polling stations. Voter identification, roster verification, ballot distribution, and secret voting were conducted in accordance with the specified procedures. On average, after a voter's identity card was verified, it took anywhere from a minimum of 4 minutes to a maximum of 10 minutes to cast the ballot and exit. In several centers, delays in locating names, mismatched details, or a lack of coordination among staff caused unnecessary hassle for voters. Among the observed locations, the voter rolls were not posted outside 106 polling stations. However, outside some of these polling stations where voter rolls were absent, representatives of political parties were stationed as volunteers with copies of the voter lists to assist voters. They would note down the serial numbers from the voter roster on separate slips of paper and send the voters inside. This process was adopted as an informal step. Doing so made it easier and faster to locate and verify names inside. However, problems arose when this practice was treated almost as mandatory. Voters who went straight to the polling center without obtaining the slip were turned back,

causing them to face unnecessary hardship and hassle. In particular, voters who had already entered the line should not have been turned away solely due to the lack of such a slip; nevertheless, that is exactly what happened.

The most serious aspect was the challenge to the privacy of voting, which was observed in 17 polling centers. Due to the cramped space at the polling centers, proper arrangements to maintain privacy had not been managed. For example, the center at the Ward Committee Office of Kathmandu Metropolitan City-5, Bhimsensthan, Handigaun, was set up on a small open lawn by the roadside without any fencing. The voting booths at the 'Ga' center faced the road, and a black plastic barrier of about one to two meters in length was placed just a few meters away. However, if someone wished to peek from the left or right of that barrier, it was entirely possible to see the cast vote. On top of that, since the exit route after voting was also designated through that same path, privacy was compromised even further.

At the Moti Secondary School polling center in Janaki Rural Municipality, Kailali, police personnel stood just behind the booth. Similarly, at the Kamala Multiple Campus 'Ga' center in Dudhauri Municipality, Sindhuli, the Polling Officer sat extremely close to the booth in a way that made the stamping visible. At the centers of Ward Office (Ward No. 14) and Mahendra Adarsha Secondary School in Ward Number 15 of Lalitpur Metropolitan City, the white cloth partitions were so flimsy that individuals inside could see votes being cast from adjoining centers. Likewise, observers noted that the privacy of voting was compromised at locations such as the Community Development Center Building (Nakhipot center) in Lalitpur, Shree Rameshwari Secondary School center, Nabin Secondary School center, Akala Basic School 'Ga' center in Pokhara Metropolitan City, Bal Mandir Primary School center in Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City, Sunsari Sports Building center in Dharan Sub-Metropolitan City-9, and Shree Sharada Secondary School center in Shankharapur Municipality, Kathmandu.

In 32 of the observed polling centers, political party cadres were seen active within the prohibited 300-meter perimeter. Serving as volunteers, they managed lines and noted down voter serial numbers. At Mukuteshwar Secondary School in Phulching, Dolpa, six individuals whose names were on the voter list were barred from voting because they only possessed photocopies of their identity cards rather than the original documents. The same approach was taken at Shivapur Secondary School in Rupandehi. Conversely, at several other polling centers, voting was permitted based on photocopies of identity documents.

At the Chhorepatan Higher Secondary School ‘Ka’ center in Pokhara Metropolitan City-17, some voters were deprived of voting because their names were missing from the physical voter register used on-site. However, their names were present on the ECN’s website. A similar incident occurred at Paropakar Secondary School, Bhimsensthan ‘Ga’ center in Kathmandu Metropolitan City-20. At that center, two voters brought printed copies of their details, including photos, from the ECN’s website. Although this document was initially not accepted as valid proof, the Returning Officer noted that the information was based on the ECN’s official data. Once it was confirmed that the respective voters’ names were on the official voter list, and with the consensus of the political party representatives, those voters were permitted to cast their ballots.

In terms of inclusivity, the presence of women and senior citizens at the polls appeared satisfactory. The presence of the youth group was not as notable. The youth comprise the majority of individuals who have migrated out of their electoral constituencies in search of opportunities such as higher education and employment. Due to the lack of voting arrangements for out-of-district residents and citizens abroad, numerous voters were unable to cast their ballots. This directly and visibly impacted the expected participation of the youth.

All polling centers featured separate lines for men and women. Female staff and security personnel were also present at those centers. Out of the

observed centers, 52 polling centers were not easily accessible for persons with disabilities and frail individuals. Relatives, volunteers, election police, or family members assisted them by carrying them, holding their hands, utilizing wheelchairs, or setting up separate paths. At a few polling stations, infrastructure such as toilets, drinking water, and women- and disability-friendly structures was completely absent. The Deukhel polling center in Kirtipur Municipality serves as one such example.

Security management was effective and peaceful overall. While Nepal Police and election police were deployed inside the polling centers, patrolling by Armed Police Force and Nepalese Army personnel was equally visible across most locations. In most centers, the proportion of female security personnel was quite low (ranging from 1:4 to 1:5). In many places, it was the security personnel who exhibited rigid behavior by prohibiting observers from taking photos, instructing them to stand far away, and permitting them to remain on-site for only short durations.

Case Study 2: Booth Capturing Was Prevented, But Voters Were Deprived of Their Right to Vote

In the then House of Representatives Electoral Constituency No. 1 of Dolakha, currently Provincial Assembly Electoral Constituency No. (Ka), violence had occurred in every election since the 1991 House of Representatives election. Activities such as clashes between political party cadres, obstructing voters from reaching the polling stations, capturing voter identity cards, smashing ballot boxes, forcing polling officers to sign ballot papers and official minutes (*muchulka*), and chasing away opposition party agents as well as voters from the polling locations had been taking place. As violence erupted, physical property was vandalized and set on fire, individuals were injured, and lives were even lost. No political party was untouched by such actions. Every political party had been carrying out these activities in areas where they held a strong grip. Consequently, voters could not even

reach the polling stations with a free and fearless mindset to exercise their right to vote.

In the 2026 election too, there was suspicion and fear that violence might erupt. However, except for the Golmeshwar Secondary School, Malu polling station in Tamakoshi Rural Municipality-4, the voting process concluded peacefully across other polling locations. Election observer Arjun Dahal states that the heavy proactiveness of the Nepalese Army played a significant role in making this happen.⁷⁷ Keeping past incidents in mind, the Nepalese Army had prepared a list of potential individuals who could incite violence and capture booths in highly sensitive areas from a security standpoint.

The Nepalese Army had been patrolling villages 15 days prior to the voting day. According to a teacher from Baiteshwar Rural Municipality, because the potential individuals who could incite election violence had already been identified, the army personnel deployed for patrolling had spread information across villages that orders had been issued to shoot individuals engaging in such activities during the election.⁷⁸ He claimed that this was precisely why no one dared to capture a booth. In past elections, the army only patrolled from the third perimeter, but in this election, the Nepalese Army was deployed directly inside the polling stations. The army had cordoned off the polling location of Baiteshwar Rural Municipality-1 with wire fencing. In Baiteshwar-2, patrolling was done via helicopter, while in Baiteshwar-3, the army itself stood armed right next to the ballot boxes for security. A leader of the Nepali Congress Dolakha interpreted the army's proactiveness by stating that the army worked just like the Nepal Police.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Interview with Dahal on March 7, 2026.

⁷⁸ Interview with the teacher on March 6, 2026.

⁷⁹ Interview with the leader on March 6, 2026.

However, at Golmeshwar Secondary School, Malu in Tamakoshi Rural Municipality-4, someone snatched a bundle of ballot papers signed by the Polling Officer shortly after voting commenced. After some of the snatched ballot papers could not be found, the voting process was suspended for a brief period. The RSP and CPN (UML) accused the NCP and the Nepali Congress of carrying out that act. Although voting resumed at that polling location after some time, the CPN (UML) and RSP did not send their candidate agents. The people standing in line had already returned home. Therefore, even when voting resumed, many did not return to vote again. At that polling station, out of 2,561 voters, only 698 individuals cast their ballots. In the 2022 HoR election, 1,396 out of 2,388 voters had turned up and voted there. Precisely because the polling station remained tense throughout the day, the voter turnout dropped significantly this time compared to 2022. While this polling location was prevented from being booth-captured, citizens were ultimately deprived of their right to vote.

The ECN had made arrangements allowing staff and security personnel deployed at polling centers to cast their votes under the PR system. However, some inconsistent practices were observed in its management. Polling Officers, assisting staff, and volunteers cast their votes for the PR system based on letters received from the ECN (which explicitly stated the names of the respective individuals). However, the voting process appeared less systematic for security personnel (including the election police). Although the ECN had arranged for security personnel to vote under the PR system at their deployed polling stations, it was found that they had received no advance information about it. Even though some found out they could vote at the last moment, they were unable to do so due to the lack of an identity card in their possession. At some polling locations, staff and security personnel were found casting their votes by showing a photo of their identity card on their mobile phones, whereas

for ordinary voters, the ECN had made the original copies of recognized identity cards mandatory.

Shortcomings in the voter identification and ballot handling processes were visible at several polling centers. Even voters who were capable of signing were made to put their thumbprints on the counterfoil of the ballot papers. Furthermore, some voters were observed going to vote holding the ballot paper right after stamping their thumbprint without wiping the ink off their hands, which carried a risk of increasing the possibility of smudging the ink, spoiling, and invalidating the ballot paper. Once a voter places a thumbprint on the counterfoil, there is a higher probability that they might use a thumbprint on the ballot paper as well. This had not been explained to them. A woman met in Banke district admitted to having used thumbprints on ballot papers in the past as well, which indicates a long-term deficiency in voter education. Information was received that an explicit number of such invalid votes were also found during the vote-counting process. Therefore, it appeared necessary to clearly inform voters who put a thumbprint on the counterfoil about the method of casting a vote using the *Swastik* stamp immediately.

An incident reflecting a lack of voter education was also observed at the Paropakar Secondary School polling center in Kathmandu Metropolitan City-20, Bhimsensthan. An elderly woman from the Newar community had come to vote alone at that center. During the voting process, she placed a thumbprint on the ballot paper for the FPTP system instead of using the *Swastik* stamp, and then, without folding the ballot paper, walked toward the ballot box holding it in her hand for others to see the thumbprint. Upon seeing this, the Polling Officer advised her to cast her vote using the *Swastik* stamp. However, due to a language barrier, she could not comprehend the instructions. Ultimately, after another voter from the same community assisted her, she cast her vote under the PR system using the *Swastik* stamp. She was not even aware that there would be two ballot papers. These examples signal that the effectiveness of voter education remains limited and that further facilitation is required at polling centers.

Nevertheless, while voting continued regularly across most parts of the country, incidents of election boycotts occurred at polling centers in a few districts due to local dissatisfaction and distrust toward the state. At certain polling centers in Darchula, Dang, Okhaldhunga, and Dolakha, voters refrained from participating in the voting, stating that the state and political leadership had ignored development, service delivery, and their local demands. Voters at two polling centers in Darchula, namely Gaurishankar Secondary School (Nagu) in Naugad Rural Municipality-1 and Dudhila Basic School (Jhusku) in Apihimal Rural Municipality-3 boycotted the election. Locals of the Nagu area had announced the election boycott with the construction of the Dallekh-Nagu-Sina road as their primary demand. The locals complained that various assurances given during past elections had not been fulfilled. Similarly, there was a grievance that the ward division carried out in 2017 placed the ward office in an inconvenient location for most settlements of Apihimal Rural Municipality-3. They boycotted the election, stating they would not vote until the ward division was restructured. Expressing dissatisfaction over the lack of development infrastructure and insecurity caused by the national park, locals also boycotted the election at the Deuti Secondary School polling center in Lower Malaikhola, Babai Rural Municipality-7 of Dang.

In protest against the Koshi Provincial Government's failure to build a hospital, voters at the Toksel polling station in Manebhanjyang Rural Municipality-7 of Okhaldhunga also boycotted the voting. After the provincial government requested land management to build the hospital, the locals made the land available. However, since the provincial government failed to initiate the hospital construction, it appeared that the locals used the voting boycott as a medium of protest. The locals of Beding in Gaurishankar Rural Municipality-9 of Dolakha also boycotted the voting. Because Beding shares a border with the Tibet Autonomous Region of China, the GoN had banned helicopter flights there. Although the locals had been demanding the lifting of the ban, their demand was not met, leading them to boycott the voting as a form of protest. However, the

empty ballot box from that polling location was brought to the counting venue in Charikot via helicopter.

In conclusion, while the voting process ensured basic infrastructure and a peaceful atmosphere, improvements are required at the local level regarding privacy, inclusivity, procedural uniformity, voter education, addressing local public dissatisfaction, and building long-term trust. These field-based examples clarify the gap between the ECN's directives and actual practice, which can impact the quality of the democratic process and voter confidence.

11.3. Closing of Voting Process

DRCN observers observed the voting closing process of the House of Representatives Election, 2026. Overall, the closing process appeared peaceful, systematic, and lawful. At all polling locations, the entry of voters was stopped precisely at 5 PM. Allowing all voters who had already entered the center, whose names were on the roster, and who were present with an original copy of any of the designated documents to cast their ballots demonstrated positive aspects of procedural uniformity, inclusivity, and the protection of rights. The sealing and verification process of the ballot boxes was also completed systematically across all centers.

It was verified across all centers that the seals placed on the ballot boxes at the opening of voting remained intact until the closing, and the ballot boxes were kept secure in plain sight of everyone. Similarly, the presence of candidates' agents in all but three observed polling centers was meaningful from the standpoint of monitoring and transparency. The absence of disputes or serious problems at any center during the conclusion phase stood as a positive achievement of the overall management. Nevertheless, a few minor but meaningful incidents were observed.

In some centers, there was minor confusion regarding the reconciliation of the numbers of FPTP and PR ballot papers; in a few centers, a small dispute arose between the staff and party agents regarding the sealing of

materials and filling out the official minutes (*muchulka*), but it did not lead to any major problem. At one center, a dispute arose when party agents were not allowed to board the vehicle transporting the ballot boxes, but it was resolved under police supervision. Although these incidents showed minor vulnerabilities within the system, their resolution occurred immediately and within the established procedures. On a positive note, a cordial cooperation was observed among the staff, security agencies, and party agents across most centers. In several locations, the Polling Officer concluded the process by thanking all participants, and details regarding the voter turnout percentage as well as gender-wise breakdowns were mentioned and recorded. This signaled the development of a culture of accountability and transparency, rather than just administrative execution.

In conclusion, the poll closing process can be considered a comparatively robust aspect among the various components of this election management. Despite some inequalities or shortcomings observed during the opening and voting periods, the system appeared to be implemented reliably during the closing phase due to procedural clarity, security coordination, and multi-party monitoring. Ongoing improvements are essential in the future to strike a balance with the issues observed during the earlier phases.

12

Ballot Box Transportation and Counting

In most electoral constituencies, ballot boxes were transported to the counting venues immediately after voting concluded. During the Gen-Z movement, many government vehicles were set on fire. Due to the lack of sufficient vehicles, security officials in several districts stated that observing polling locations, transporting election materials, and bringing in ballot boxes stood out as challenging tasks. At the request of the District Administration Office, private schools in districts like Morang, Dang, and Kaski assisted by providing their buses to transport the ballot boxes. According to Dilli Ram Adhikari, the Principal of Karunanidhi Education Foundation in Kaski, the buses were provided to assist the election following requests from the District Administration and Private and Boarding Schools' Organization, Nepal (PABSON).⁸⁰

Since all ballot boxes in easily accessible areas had already arrived by evening, counting commenced that very night. Because the counting was conducted at separate locations for each electoral constituency, vote counting took place in a total of 165 locations. The Acting Chief Commissioner of the ECN, Ram Prasad Bhandari, had claimed that results for the direct system would be made public within 24 hours of the

⁸⁰ Interview with Adhikari on March 9, 2026.

completion of voting, and the ECN had prepared accordingly. Since the election was held solely for the members of the HoR, the counting was also relatively simple. Nevertheless, the results could not be made public within 24 hours. By March 9, results for 161 locations had already been made public.

Because transporting ballot boxes in remote areas took time, counting commenced late. In remote parts of districts including Rasuwa, Dolakha, Bajhang, Bajura, Gorkha, and Dolpa, ballot boxes were transported to the district headquarters via helicopter. However, due to adverse weather conditions, transport by helicopter did not prove easy either. For instance, even though helicopters were used, the ballot boxes from the Thudam polling center of Bhotkhola Rural Municipality in Sankhuwasabha and from the Chumnubri area of Gorkha were delayed due to bad weather, which subsequently caused a delay in the vote counting.

An all-party meeting was held prior to the vote counting to make decisions on matters such as what kind of vote markings would be considered valid or invalid, and the number of candidate agents allowed at the counting venue. Kaski District's Chief Returning Officer, Him Lal Belbase, stated that the all-party meeting decided that a marking would be considered valid and counted as a vote for the party or candidate if a single *Swastik* stamp was placed in the box containing the election symbol, and a stamp was placed anywhere outside the symbol box.⁸¹ It was also decided that the number of ballot papers found inside the ballot box would be considered the total number of ballot papers, even if it was less than the number mentioned in the official minutes (*muchulka*). Decisions of a similar nature were made by all-party meetings elsewhere. The decisions made by the all-party meetings were guided directly by the House of Representatives Election Vote Counting Directives, 2026 of the ECN.

In the election of Ilam Constituency No. 1, because competition among candidates was intense, political parties pressured to count votes at only one

⁸¹ Interview with Belbase on March 7, 2026.

specific spot. Furthermore, frequent disputes arose among candidate agents regarding valid and invalid votes, causing the vote counting to progress at a slow pace. The ECN had annulled the candidacy of RSP candidate Kishori Sah Kamal in Dhanusha 1 due to a banking offense. Since the candidacy was annulled just two days before the election, his election symbol was already on the ballot papers, and it received an overwhelming number of votes. Although the Office of the Returning Officer in Dhanusha 1 decided that votes cast for the bell symbol would be invalidated, a decision was made to count the votes for the bell symbol and keep them confidential after protests by RSP leaders and cadres indicated that the vote-counting process would be disrupted. These procedures caused delays in the vote counting. However, even during subsequent counting, confusion and delays in announcing the results persisted because the votes for the RSP's bell symbol remained high. Ultimately, the results were made public by treating the votes cast for the bell symbol as invalid.

Disputes were found at very few counting locations during the vote counting. Those disputes were primarily centered around valid and invalid votes, and they did not require the vote counting to be halted. At a few venues, however, disputes also arose when more votes were discovered than what was recorded in the official minutes. For instance, counting was halted for a brief moment after three more votes than the recorded minutes were found in some polling centers of Putha Uttarganga Rural Municipality in Rukum East. Similarly, in Dhading-2, vote counting was halted briefly after the NCP protested, claiming they were not invited to the all-party meeting. However, these disputes did not prolong.

In accordance with the House of Representatives Election Vote Counting Directives, 2026, it is mentioned that ballot papers from more than one polling center should be mixed together and counted when emptying them. Yet, in several locations, at the request of candidates' agents, the votes of specific centers were counted without mixing them with others. Doing so increases the risk that the vote results of a specific

location might expose biases or prejudices held by certain parties and candidates toward that location.

Previously, because the HoR and Provincial Assembly elections were held together, the probability of voters getting confused due to many candidates and four types of ballot papers was very high. Since this election was held only for the HoR, voters only had to cast votes on two ballot papers, one for the PR system and one for the FPTP system. Therefore, a lower rate of invalid votes than before was expected this time. Even so, an excessive number of invalid votes were discovered during the counting process. According to data made public by the ECN, compared to the HoR and Provincial Assembly Election, 2022, invalid votes increased this time under the FPTP system and decreased under the PR election system. According to the ECN, 5.45 percent of votes under the FPTP system and 3.95 percent of votes under the PR system were invalidated this time.⁸² In the HoR election held in 2022, 5.06 percent of votes under the FPTP system and 5.09 percent of votes under the PR system had been invalidated.

Regarding the reasons for votes being invalidated, it was mostly found that the *Swastik* stamp was placed on two symbols. On some, it was stamped on more than two. Instances of using a thumbprint or stamping right in the middle of two boxes were somewhat less frequent. Apart from that, some votes were invalidated because the *Swastik* stamp was smudged beyond recognition, left blank, or dropped into the wrong ballot box. While a vote was invalidated if the *Swastik* stamp fell on two symbols, if it occurred due to folding the paper, it was treated as a folding smudge and considered valid, provided that checking the back of the ballot paper revealed there were not two distinct prints and one of the two stamps was inverted.

⁸² ECN. 2026. The Election Commission Submits a Report Including the Results of the House of Representatives Election to President Ram Chandra Poudel (In Nepali). *House of Representatives election 2026, e-bulletin*, March 19. Available at <https://ebulletin.election.gov.np/2026/03/3043/>; accessed on April 1, 2026.

The high rate of invalid votes indicated that voter education remained weak. Regarding voter education, Dang’s Chief Returning Officer, Prakash Prasad Pandit, stated,

“I have also visited many polling locations and met with voters. We must accept that voter education has not been as effective as we expected. In many places, a state of confusion and misunderstanding on how to cast a vote is still visible.”⁸³

Among the invalid votes, some were stamped on all symbols or left completely blank. Stamping all symbols or leaving a ballot paper blank can be inferred as an expression of dissent toward the election candidates. Since the ballot paper does not include a NOTA provision, it appears that voters who did not like any candidate may have deliberately invalidated their votes.

The security situation was tight across all vote-counting venues. A large presence of Armed Police Force and Nepal Police personnel was maintained. Wire mesh fencing was installed to arrange a setup where observers and candidate agents could sit outside but still view the process. In several places, bringing mobile phones was not permitted, and although bringing mobile phones was allowed at many counting venues, taking photos was prohibited. Although sitting behind wire mesh and barricades felt natural due to security sensitivities and past incidents, that sight was not at all appealing for a civilized society. It would be appropriate to seek alternatives to this in the coming days.

⁸³ Interview with Pandit on February 25, 2026.

13

Conclusion and Recommendations

This report is based on DRCN’s direct observation of various phases of the House of Representatives Election 2026 as well as interactions with stakeholders and analysis of the collected data. The election was conducted peacefully despite the complex political and security challenges that emerged following the Gen-Z movement. The participation of political parties in the election, despite significant political disagreements and suspicions, further reinforced their faith in democratic methods and processes. The election also helped resolve the constitutional and political crisis that arose after the Gen-Z movement.

Despite structural dependencies and legal complexities, the ECN made the necessary preparations to conduct the election on time. However, inconsistencies in workforce management and shortcomings in the effectiveness of training created challenges for the ECN’s overall performance. These issues highlight the need for long-term improvements in the ECN’s institutional independence and operational capacity.

From a legal perspective, overlaps and ambiguities among various election-related laws appear to have complicated implementation. The absence of an integrated and clear electoral legal framework has made election management more challenging. Furthermore, issues such as voter

roll management, out-of-district voting, voting rights for Nepalis living abroad, and the implementation of ‘NOTA’ provisions remain unresolved, indicating the need for further reforms to ensure a more inclusive and fully participatory electoral system.

A notable shift was observed in election campaigning practices, particularly in the extensive use of social media. While this facilitated rapid and wider dissemination of information, it also increased the risk of misinformation and the spread of unverified content. Although overall compliance with the code of conduct appeared satisfactory, instances of violations were observed, highlighting the need for more effective monitoring and enforcement mechanisms.

Despite security-related challenges, the election was concluded peacefully overall. Nevertheless, heavy security deployment, increasing election-related expenditures, and sporadic clashes in some locations indicate the need to reconsider election security strategies and associated costs. It is equally important to assess the psychological impact of an overwhelming security presence in a sensitive and balanced manner. From the perspective of inclusivity, challenges persist in the effective implementation of existing legal provisions. Both policy-level and practical efforts remain necessary to ensure balanced representation and meaningful participation of diverse social groups in candidacy, representation, and the broader electoral process.

Overall, the House of Representatives Election, 2026 can be considered procedurally successful and satisfactory from a management perspective. However, legal reforms, institutional strengthening, the systematic use of technology, and stronger political commitment remain essential to making the electoral system more credible, transparent, inclusive, and sustainable.

Recommendations

1. Election Commission

- Increase the duration of training for election personnel and conduct training in smaller groups. Along with theoretical aspects of the voting process, practical exercises should also be included in the training.
- It was observed that polling staff other than the polling officer and assistant polling officer were often unclear about their roles, which also contributed to delays in the commencement of voting. Therefore, all election personnel should receive role-specific training to clearly understand their responsibilities.
- Election personnel and security staff deployed at polling stations should be instructed to interact with voters in a courteous and respectful manner.
- Election personnel and security staff were found to lack clear understanding regarding the importance of election observation. They should therefore be informed that observers must be allowed to observe all polling processes freely, except for the privacy of voting inside the voting booth, without obstructing the work of polling staff.
- Polling stations should be accessible to all voters. Temporary accessible pathways should be arranged at polling stations for persons with disabilities, senior citizens, and pregnant women. Polling stations should also provide facilities such as toilets, drinking water, and breastfeeding rooms.
- Religious sites should not be used as polling locations.
- Educational institutions are currently used extensively as polling stations, which has disrupted children’s education. Therefore,

polling locations should be shifted elsewhere whenever alternatives are available.

- The Polling Station and Polling Center Determination Procedure, 2024 states that polling stations should generally not be located more than two kilometers one-way in urban areas and four kilometers one-way in rural areas. This disparity between urban and rural areas should be removed, and additional polling stations should be established to ensure equal and convenient access for all voters.
- Polling officers and police personnel should be positioned in a manner that fully preserves the privacy of voting. Voting booths should be designed so that no one can observe how a voter marks the ballot.
- To facilitate voter participation, transportation services should not be restricted on election day except in the immediate vicinity of polling stations.
- A system should be introduced whereby any citizen who turns 18 years old on election day, based on citizenship or national identity card records, is automatically registered in the voter roll.
- Campaigns should be conducted to correct errors in voter rolls and remove duplicate and deceased voters from the registry.
- The ECN should be technologically strengthened to prevent the spread of misinformation and disinformation. A strong and impartial mechanism should be established to control such activities.
- The authority to determine the election date should either be granted to the ECN or fixed by law. In special circumstances, festivals and weather conditions should also be taken into account while setting election dates.

- To reduce delays and financial burdens caused by ballot transportation and centralized counting, vote counting should be conducted at polling stations themselves.
- The current practice of voter education has been relatively ineffective; therefore, its scope and duration should be expanded. Simple, clear, and practical voter education campaigns should be conducted through mass media, social media, and digital platforms. At the ward level, local voter education volunteers should carry out door-to-door voter education campaigns. To enhance public trust in these volunteers, they should be provided with official identification cards and their work should be publicized in coordination with local governments. Volunteers should receive strict instructions to remain impartial and neutral. Adequate brochures, sample ballots, and audio-visual materials should be made available on time. Voter education should also be widely disseminated in local languages, sign language, and Braille. Areas and communities with low literacy rates should be identified, and more intensive voter education programs should be conducted there.
- Strict instructions should be issued to ensure compliance with the code of conduct, and violations should be subject to appropriate action.
- Since poor-quality election materials such as ballot papers, stamps, ink, and stamp pads can contribute to invalid votes, no compromise should be made regarding the quality of election materials.

2. Political Parties

- Women, Dalits, youth, and minorities should not be included through PR merely to ‘make up the numbers’ in elections; they must also be field as candidates under the FPTP system to bring them into leadership positions.

- To make the candidate selection process democratic, transparent, and fair, provisions should be made in the party statute to select candidates through primary elections.
- Parties themselves must take responsibility for complying with the code of conduct, encouraging their cadres to remain disciplined and avoid disputes or clashes.
- Election campaigning should not be extravagant; instead, it should be made low-cost, eco-friendly, and utilized as a medium for direct interaction with citizens.
- Parties must remain vigilant in preventing activities that spread abuse, falsehoods, and hate speech on the internet in the name of campaigning.
- To ensure that manifestos are not just documents sharing grand, unachievable dreams, they should be prepared based on local needs, and parties must be held accountable for their manifestos.
- Keeping the spirit of the Constitution in mind, the integrated election law bill, which consolidates scattered electoral laws, must be passed by the Parliament.

3. Policy and Legal Reforms (Government, Political Parties, ECN, Parliament)

- Since voter education is intrinsically linked to the political system, information regarding the political and electoral systems should be integrated into the secondary school curriculum.
- If voters do not support any of the candidates, a provision should be made to allow them to select a NOTA option directly on the ballot paper.

- Electoral laws and acts should be amended to guarantee voting rights for Nepali citizens located in other districts or residing outside the country.
- Constituencies should be reviewed by taking into account the number of voters and geography. Since the national census takes place every 10 years, the Constitution should be amended to ensure that the review of constituencies is also conducted every 10 years. Constituencies should be determined by focusing on the number of registered voters rather than the overall population size.
- New legal and policy reforms should be introduced to curb the rising election expenses of candidates and to make the electoral system more inclusive.
- Voters in certain settlements publicly announced their decision to boycott voting ahead of time due to disagreements with government policies, conduct, or public services, and ultimately followed through with the boycott. Consequently, those polling stations recorded zero voter turnout. In such scenarios, the government should maintain flexibility and address their demands as much as possible, or provide reasonable explanations if the demands cannot be met, thereby encouraging those voters to participate in the voting process.
- To make security more effective, robust coordination among security agencies must be ensured during elections. Additionally, initiatives should be taken to reduce mounting security costs, and election security expenditures must be made transparent.

4. Civil Society Organizations

- Coordinate with the ECN to conduct voter education and civic education programs.

- Impartially monitor the implementation of election manifestos committed to by political parties, keeping citizens informed and putting pressure on the ruling party.
- Closely observe the electoral process, conduct extensive research and debates, and advocate for necessary reforms.

Annex 1

List of Observers for the House of Representatives Election 2026

S.N.	Name	Gender	Province Observed	District Observed	Local Level Observed
1	Aanbika Giri	Female	Koshi	Sunsari	Inaruwa Municipality
2	Aas Kumar Limbu	Male	Koshi	Taplejung	Phaktanglung Rural Municipality
3	Alok Pokharel	Male	Bagmati	Kathmandu	Kathmandu Metropolitan City
4	Amita Sarki	Female	Sudur-pashchim	Kanchanpur	Bedkot Municipality
5	Amrita Chaudhary	Female	Sudur-pashchim	Kailali	Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City
6	Anish Lal Das	Male	Madhesh	Dhanusha	Dhanushadham Municipality
7	Anjana Purbe	Female	Madhesh	Siraha	Siraha Municipality
8	Anju Gurung	Female	Bagmati	Lalitpur	Lalitpur Metropolitan City
9	Ankalal Chalaune	Male	Bagmati	Kathmandu	Kathmandu Metropolitan City
10	Anupa Shahi	Female	Sudur-pashchim	Doti	Badikedar Rural Municipality
11	Aruna Limbu	Female	Koshi	Sunsari	Dharan Sub-Metropolitan City
12	Ashok Khadka	Male	Lumbini	Dang	Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City
13	Bebi Shrestha	Female	Gandaki	Kaski	Pokhara Metropolitan City
14	Bhaba Sagar Ghimire	Male	Gandaki	Kaski	Pokhara Metropolitan City
15	Bhagirathi Subedi	Female	Gandaki	Kaski	Pokhara Metropolitan City

S.N.	Name	Gender	Province Observed	District Observed	Local Level Observed
16	Bhawana Gurung	Female	Bagmati	Sindhuli	Dudhouli Municipality
17	Bhawani Bhusal	Female	Lumbini	Rupandehi	Tilottama Municipality
18	Bibek Silwal	Male	Gandaki	Kaski	Rupa Rural Municipality
19	Bijaya Parajuli	Female	Gandaki	Kaski	Pokhara Metropolitan City
20	Bimal Shrestha	Male	Madhesh	Saptari	Kanchanrup Municipality
21	Bishnu Bahadur Thapa	Male	Bagmati	Kathmandu	Kirtipur Municipality
22	Bishnurupa Bohora	Female	Karnali	Dolpa	Tripurasundari Municipality
23	Chandani Shah	Female	Madhesh	Dhanusha	Janakpurdham Sub-Metropolitan City
24	Chandra Shekhar Parajulee	Male	Gandaki	Kaski	Pokhara Metropolitan City
25	Chandra Kumari Gurung	Female	Bagmati	Dhading	Nilkantha Municipality
26	Chhapi Lal Chaudhary	Male	Sudur-pashchim	Kailali	Janaki Rural Municipality
27	Chhiring Palmu Lama	Female	Karnali	Humla	Namkha Rural Municipality
28	Chiran Manandhar	Male	Bagmati	Dolakha	Bhimeshwor Municipality
29	Dhanarup Budha	Male	Karnali	Humla	Sarkegad Rural Municipality
30	Dil Bahadur Mahara	Male	Bagmati	Kathmandu	Kirtipur Municipality

S.N.	Name	Gender	Province Observed	District Observed	Local Level Observed
31	Dipa Dhungana	Female	Bagmati	Nuwakot	Bidur Municipality
32	Dipak Bhatta	Male	Sudur-pashchim	Baitadi	Melauli Municipality
33	Dwarika Thebe	Female	Bagmati	Lalitpur	Lalitpur Metropolitan City
34	Gopal Kusari	Male	Karnali	Jajarkot	Nalagad Municipality
35	Gorakhnath Acharya	Male	Karnali	Surkhet	Lekbeshi Municipality
36	Gunja Tharu	Female	Lumbini	Kapilvastu	Bijaynagar Rural Municipality
37	Harka Bahadur Nepali	Male	Karnali	Jajarkot	Chhedagad Municipality
38	Hemanta Bohora	Male	Bagmati	Bhaktapur	Bhaktapur Municipality
39	Hemchandra Chalaune	Male	Bagmati	Kathmandu	Kageshwari Manohara Municipality
40	Hisi Dolma Lama	Female	Karnali	Humla	Sarkegad Rural Municipality
41	Indra Kumari Adhikari	Female	Bagmati	Nuwakot	Bidur Municipality
42	Ishwor Subedi	Male	Bagmati	Makwanpur	Manahari Municipality
43	Jites Kumar Karn	Male	Madhesh	Siraha	Siraha Municipality
44	Kailash Rani Rai	Female	Bagmati	Kathmandu	Budhanilkantha Municipality
45	Kamala Budha Magar	Female	Lumbini	Rolpa	Rolpa Municipality
46	Kiran Usha Pun Pratiksha	Male	Bagmati	Lalitpur	Lalitpur Metropolitan City

S.N.	Name	Gender	Province Observed	District Observed	Local Level Observed
47	Kuber K.C.	Male	Karnali	Rukum West	Musikot Municipality
48	Kuldeep Niraula	Male	Lumbini	Bardiya	Gulariya Municipality
49	Kunsang	Female	Bagmati	Kathmandu	Budhanilkantha Municipality
50	Mamita Ghising	Female	Madhesh	Dhanusha	Chhreshwarnath Municipality
51	Manita Bhattarai	Female	Bagmati	Sindhuli	Golanjor Rural Municipality
52	Manju Khadka Saud	Female	Sudur-pashchim	Kanchanpur	Bhimdatta Municipality
53	Menaka Kshetri	Female	Sudur-pashchim	Kanchanpur	Bedkot Municipality
54	Narayan Lama	Male	Madhesh	Dhanusha	Mithila Municipality
55	Nisha Moktan	Female	Madhesh	Dhanusha	Ganeshman Charnath Municipality
56	Nisha Tamang	Female	Bagmati	Kathmandu	Dakshinkali Municipality
57	Pashupati Lama	Female	Madhesh	Dhanusha	Bateshwar Rural Municipality
58	Pramit Acharya	Male	Lumbini	Dang	Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City
59	Pramod Dhungana	Male	Bagmati	Kathmandu	Shankharapur Municipality
60	Puja Sapkota	Female	Koshi	Jhapa	Mechinagar Municipality
61	Rabindra Oli	Male	Sudur-pashchim	Doti	Badikedar Rural Municipality
62	Rachana Budha Magar	Female	Lumbini	Dang	Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City

S.N.	Name	Gender	Province Observed	District Observed	Local Level Observed
63	Raja Hussein Safi	Male	Madhesh	Mahottari	Sonama Rural Municipality
64	Rajkumari Thapa	Female	Gandaki	Kaski	Pokhara Metropolitan City
65	Ramesh Kumar Sunam	Male	Karnali	Surkhet	Birendranagar Municipality
66	Rinku Yadav	Female	Madhesh	Dhanusha	Laxminiya Rural Municipality
67	Rita Sanwa Limbu	Female	Koshi	Taplejung	Athrai Tribeni Rural Municipality
68	Robin Tharu	Male	Lumbini	Bardiya	Rajapur Municipality
69	Ruma Rijal Dahal	Female	Koshi	Sunsari	Ramdhuni Municipality
70	Samamyang Angdembe Limbu	Female	Koshi	Ilam	Ilam Municipality
71	Saman Shrestha	Male	Koshi	Ilam	Ilam Municipality
72	Sambhavi Baral	Female	Gandaki	Kaski	Pokhara Metropolitan City
73	Samiksha Shrestha	Female	Gandaki	Gorkha	Palungtar Municipality
74	Sangita Das	Female	Madhesh	Dhanusha	Mithila Bihari Municipality
75	Sangita Dhimi	Female	Sudur-pashchim	Kanchanpur	Shuklaphanta Municipality
76	Sanjila Moktan	Female	Bagmati	Kathmandu	Kathmandu Metropolitan City
77	Sanju Thapa Magar	Female	Bagmati	Kathmandu	Kageshwari Manohara Municipality

S.N.	Name	Gender	Province Observed	District Observed	Local Level Observed
78	Santosh Khadka	Male	Sudur-pashchim	Kailali	Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City
79	Sarita Pariyar	Female	Bagmati	Kathmandu	Gokarneshwor Municipality
80	Shalikram Poudel	Male	Gandaki	Baglung	Jaimini Municipality
81	Shanta Thapa	Male	Bagmati	Dolakha	Bhimeshwor Municipality
82	Shanti Sharma	Female	Gandaki	Baglung	Jaimini Municipality
83	Sharad BK	Male	Lumbini	Dang	Ghorahi Sub-Metropolitan City
84	Sonika Shrestha	Female	Gandaki	Gorkha	Palungtar Municipality
85	Sujata Shahi	Female	Bagmati	Ramechhap	Manthali Municipality
86	Sumitra Bhatta	Female	Bagmati	Dhading	Nilkantha Municipality
87	Sunita Magar	Female	Bagmati	Ramechhap	Ramechhap Municipality
88	Sunita Shrestha	Female	Koshi	Jhapa	Damak Municipality
89	Sunita Sinal	Female	Lumbini	Kapilvastu	Shivaraj Municipality
90	Sushila Chaudhary	Female	Sudur-pashchim	Kailali	Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City
91	Tejraj Ghimire	Male	Gandaki	Kaski	Pokhara Metropolitan City
92	Thaneshwar Yadav	Male	Madhesh	Mahottari	Gaushala Municipality
93	Tirshana Budha	Female	Karnali	Dolpa	Tripurasundari Municipality
94	Yubaraj Ghimire	Male	Koshi	Jhapa	Mechinagar Municipality

The House of Representatives Election 2026 was held at a crucial moment in Nepal's democratic journey. To assess the electoral process, the Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) conducted a comprehensive election observation mission across the country.

Based on this observation, the *House of Representatives Election 2026: Observation Report* presents an in-depth analysis of key aspects of the election. This deals with the ECN's preparedness, campaign practices, voter education efforts, political party activities, compliance with the code of conduct, digital campaigning, and the growing influence of social media. The report also examines the participation of women, Dalits, youths, and other marginalized groups; election security and management; and the overall democratic environment surrounding the polls.

In addition to documenting findings, the report offers practical recommendations aimed at improving the credibility, inclusiveness, transparency, and effectiveness of future elections in Nepal. It serves as a valuable reference for policymakers, election stakeholders, researchers, civil society actors, and all those interested in strengthening democratic governance and electoral integrity.



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