



Election FAQs: Nepal



2026 General Elections
March 5, 2026

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Nepal 2026 General Elections: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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Election Snapshot

- Election announced: September 12, 2025
- Election day: March 5, 2026
- Registered voters: 18,903,689 (9,663,358 men, 9,240,131 women, 200 “other”)
- Polling stations: 10,967 polling locations and 23,112 polling centers
- Parliamentary seats: 275
- Candidates: 6,541 total (4,380 men, 2,160 women, 1 other)
 - First-past-the-post (FPTP): 3,406 candidates (3,017 men, 388 women, 1 other)
 - Proportional representation (PR): 3,135 candidates (1,772 women, 1,363 men)
- Domestic and international observers: Approximately 4,500 observers from 3 international organizations and 37 national organizations

Background

Nepal is a federal democratic republic governed under the constitution of 2015, which established a bicameral Federal Parliament consisting of the House of Representatives (Pratinidhi Sabhā) and the National Assembly. The House of Representatives comprises 275 members elected through a mixed electoral system – 165 members elected through first-past-the-post (FPTP) constituencies and 110 members elected through a proportional representation system. Members serve five-year terms unless the House of Representatives is dissolved earlier. The National Assembly is a permanent body with staggered six-year terms and is not subject to dissolution.

Nepal has held federal elections in 2017 and 2022 under the 2015 constitution. While these elections have marked important milestones in the country’s post-conflict democratic transition, the political landscape has remained characterized by challenges to stability, shifting alliances and debates over the implementation of federalism.

In September 2025, the House of Representatives was dissolved early as a result of large-scale public protests led primarily by youth. Under Article 76 and Article 85 of the constitution, general elections must be held within six months of dissolution. Early general elections have been scheduled for March 5, 2026. Under a normal electoral cycle, the next election would not have been due until December 2027.

Why are these elections important?

Youth demonstrations - later termed the “Gen Z” protest due to the prominent role of young leaders – quickly evolved into broader mobilization against systemic corruption, entrenched political elites and persistent economic challenges. The scale and geographic spread of the protests signaled deep public frustration with governance and accountability. On September 12, 2025, the Federal Parliament was dissolved and former Chief Justice Sushila Karki was sworn in as interim prime minister. That same day, President Ram Chandra Poudel, acting on the government’s recommendation, announced early general elections to be held on March 5, 2026, to elect members of the House of Representatives.

These elections are significant not only because they will determine the composition of the House of Representatives – the constitutional central body responsible for lawmaking, budget approval and executive oversight – but also because they will be the first formal political test of the protest movement’s influence. The key question is whether public mobilization will translate into electoral participation and the election of reform-oriented candidates capable of advancing meaningful institutional change.

When is Election Day?

On March 5, 2026, Nepal will hold a general election to elect the 275 members of the House of Representatives. This will be the third such election since the promulgation of Nepal’s constitution in 2015, which initiated the country’s decentralization process.

The election will be held in a single phase. There will be 10,967 polling locations and 23,112 polling centers across the country. Polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

What is the electoral system?

Members of the House of Representatives are elected through a mixed system, with 60 percent elected through FPTP and 40 percent by proportional representation using closed lists of candidates submitted by parties. Voters will therefore cast two ballots on Election Day – one each for an FPTP candidate and the party list.

Who are people voting for on Election Day?

Citizens will vote for all 275 seats in the House of Representatives – the lower house of the Federal Parliament. Of the total seats, 165 are elected through FPTP and the other 110 are elected through proportional representation. The number of proportional representation seats allocated to each party is proportionate to the number of votes cast for its party list.

The 165 FPTP seats are divided among Nepal’s seven provinces, as follows:

Province	FPTP Seats
Province 1	28
Madhesh	32
Bagmati	33
Gandaki	18
Lumbini	26
Karnali	12
Sudurpashchim	16
Total	165

Of 6,541 total candidates, 3,406 are in the FPTP race; this includes 388 women and 1 LGBTQI person registered as “other.”¹ Of the women candidates in the FPTP race, 157 (40 percent) are running as independents, compared to 33 percent for men. This could be read as a sign that women are operating outside of formal party structures, which tend to favor men, for FPTP seats. In terms of age, of the 3,406 FPTP candidates, 1,056 are aged 25 - 40 (31 percent), 1,925 are between 41 and 60 (56 percent), and 425 are over 60 (12.5 percent).² Further breakdown shows only 583 candidates between the ages of 25 and 35 (14 percent).³ This figure is in stark contrast to the youth-led demonstrations that have led to these elections. Candidates for proportional representation total 3,135 (1,772 women).

¹ Nepal allows voters to select “male,” “female” or “other” when registering to vote.

² <https://kathmandupost.com/politics/2026/01/25/older-candidates-dominate-despite-youth-heavy-electorate>

³ <https://digitalrightsnepal.org/report/nepal-election-monitoring-issue-3/>

What is the Election Commission of Nepal and what is its role?

Elections are administered by the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN), a constitutionally mandated independent body currently headed by Chief Officiating Election Commissioner Ram Prasad Bhandari. The commission has five members, three of whom were in office at the time these FAQs were published. Two positions remain vacant. The ECN is supported in its work by a secretariat, based at the ECN headquarters in Kathmandu, and by field staff across 70 district election offices and seven provincial election offices.

The ECN is empowered to “conduct, supervise, direct and control the elections of the President, Vice-President, members of the Federal Parliament, members of the Provincial Assemblies and members of the local level. For these purposes the ECN shall prepare electoral rolls.”⁴

The ECN may also conduct referenda on matters of national importance, and has the authority to:

- Advise the Government of Nepal on appropriate dates for elections
- Request the provision of security arrangements from the Government of Nepal or provincial governments
- Monitor the election campaign, polling and counting and impose sanctions against candidates or political parties for violations of the Code of Conduct
- Authorize observation of the election
- Delegate any function, duty or power to any government employee and request necessary assistance from the Government of Nepal, provincial governments and local governments, as needed
- Obtain any government building, government school or private school for use during the elections
- Register or disqualify candidates
- Cancel an election due to violence, threats or intimidation

What is the legal framework for conducting the elections?

Elected members of the House of Representatives generally serve five-year terms. Members elected in 2022, however, served less than three years, given the dissolution of parliament in September 2025. The constitution provides for holding an election for the House of Representatives no later than six months after the expiration of the five-year term or the dissolution of parliament.

The Government of Nepal is responsible for fixing the date of the election after consulting with the ECN.

Who are the political parties?

Nepal’s political landscape is dominated by several major parties that have shaped the country’s post-conflict democratic transition since the adoption of the 2015 constitution. While coalition governments are common, three parties have historically held the largest share of parliamentary seats:

- Nepali Congress is a center-left democratic party and one of Nepal’s oldest political organizations. It has traditionally advocated for multiparty democracy, constitutionalism and a mixed-market economy. The party has led or participated in multiple coalition governments since the end of the monarchy.

⁴ Constitution of Nepal, Article 246[1].

- Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) is a leftist party that supports social democracy and national development through state-led and market-oriented policies. The party has alternated in government leadership and has played a central role in shaping federal governance structures.
- Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) emerged from the decade-long insurgency (1996-2006) and transitioned into mainstream politics following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The party has advocated for republicanism, federalism and social inclusion and has frequently served as a coalition partner in successive governments.

In addition to these major parties, two political parties – the Rastriya Swatantra Party and the Rastriya Prajatantra Party - secured a historic number of seats in 2022. The Rastriya Prajatantra Party advocates for a constitutional monarchy and Hindu nationhood. Separately, several smaller and regional parties represent specific geographic areas, ethnic communities or political platforms, including Madhesi-based parties in the southern Terai region and newer reform-oriented or anti-establishment parties that have gained support among urban and younger voters.

Nepal’s mixed electoral system, which combines FPTP and proportional representation seats, encourages coalition-building and allows smaller parties to gain parliamentary representation.

What is the nomination process and period for candidates?

Any Nepali citizen who is at least 25 years old on the date of candidate registration, is a registered voter, is not disqualified by any law and has registered with the ECN as a candidate may run in the election. Candidates for FPTP seats may run as independents or be nominated by a political party registered to compete in the relevant electoral constituency. Candidates for proportional representation seats must be nominated by a party. Nomination papers are submitted to the relevant returning officer within the time frame established by the ECN. Candidates must provide supporting documentation, including citizenship certification and, where applicable, party endorsement. A financial deposit is also required and may be forfeited if the candidate fails to secure a minimum percentage of votes.

No candidate may be nominated in more than one FPTP constituency, nor may a candidate contest both an FPTP and a proportional representation seat. Candidates under the proportional representation system may appear on only one political party’s list. Furthermore, individuals currently serving as members of a Provincial Assembly or the National Assembly, or in elected positions at the local levels, are not eligible to stand as candidates unless they formally resign from their positions before submitting their candidacy.

For the March 5 election, the final candidate lists were published on January 23, 2026, for proportional representation balloting and on February 3, 2026, for FPTP balloting.

How was voter registration conducted?

Nepali citizens who are 18 years of age by March 4, 2026 – the day before Election Day – and are included on the voter rolls are eligible to vote. Individuals may pre-register before turning 18, allowing them to cast a ballot if they meet the age requirement by the day before Election Day.

The ECN administers voter registration in coordination with district and local election offices. Citizens may register at designated government offices after presenting proof of citizenship. Biometric data, including photographs and fingerprints, are collected to help ensure the integrity of the voter rolls. After this process is

completed, the lists are consolidated centrally and deduplicated at ECN headquarters. The final list of voters is then prepared.

For the first time in this election, data from the National Identity Card has also been directly integrated into the voter list to further enhance efficiency.

Under ordinary practice, voter registration is suspended once an election date is formally announced. However, in September 2025, the Government of Nepal issued an ordinance permitting voter registration to continue after the announcement of early general elections. This measure aimed to ensure that newly eligible voters would not be excluded from participating. The extended registration period resulted in a significant increase in new registrations, particularly among younger voters. According to the ECN, 915,119 voters were added to the voter roll following the ordinance.

The House of Representatives Election Act does permit the ECN to provide separate polling stations for “provisional voters.” This allows voters who have been sent to a district other than the one where they are registered for election such as polling or security work) to vote for proportional representation candidates, among other qualifying criteria. However, the act does not provide for provisional voting for FPTP candidates. The full list of those who may cast a provisional ballot encompasses government employees; Nepal Army, Nepal Police or Armed Police Force members residing in barracks; prisoners and detainees in prison; staff and security personnel seconded for the elections; and persons residing in senior citizen homes managed by the Government of Nepal.

How many registered voters are there?

There were 18,903,689 registered voters (9,663,3589 men, 9,240,131 women, 200 other) as of the registration deadline of November 21, 2025.

What provisions exist to promote women’s representation and marginalized groups?

Nepal’s constitution has strong inclusion provisions aimed at ensuring the representation of women and historically marginalized communities in the Federal Parliament.

The constitution requires that women comprise at least one-third of each political party’s total representation in parliament. To meet this requirement, political parties must ensure that at least 50 percent of candidates on their proportional representation lists are women. There are no reserved seats for women under the FPTP system; however, the proportional representation quota is designed to compensate for any shortfall resulting from FPTP outcomes.

In addition to gender quotas, the House of Representatives Election Act requires that proportional representation lists reflect representation from six constitutionally recognized “inclusion” groups: Dalit, Adivasi Janajati (Indigenous nationalities), Khas Arya, Madhesi, Tharu and Muslim communities. The law also mandates representation from geographically remote areas. Within each inclusion group on the proportional representation list, 50 percent of nominees must be women.

For the election on March 5, 2026, women comprise approximately 11 percent of FPTP candidates and 56 percent of proportional representation candidates. While this reflects an increase in FPTP candidacy compared to 2022, women remain underrepresented in constituency races; 31 of the 165 electoral constituencies for FPTP seats have and no women candidates were nominated for FPTP seats in 31 of the 165 electoral constituencies.

What are the arrangements for electoral security?

The ECN has seconded approximately 340,000 security personnel from the Nepal Police and Armed Police Forces, including 149,000 temporary recruits. Security forces are coordinated by the Joint Elections Operations Center, which is led by the ECN's secretary and includes senior representatives of the Nepal Army, Armed Police Forces, Nepal Police, National Investigation Department and the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Security forces will be deployed to protect the perimeters of polling locations. Unarmed security personnel will directly supervise sealed ballot boxes at all times. In previous elections, these personnel have remained with the ballots until counting is completed.

Who can observe during Election Day?

International and national organizations and individuals registered with the ECN may observe elections. Applicants who provided evidence of expertise and records of previous election observation and monitoring experience have been accredited for election observation.

For March 5, the ECN accepted applications from international and national organizations. Three international and 37 national organizations plan to observe the polls on Election Day. These organizations are expected to collectively mobilize around 4,500 observers in total – a significant reduction from the more than 20,000 observers present for the 2022 national elections.

Is out-of-country voting allowed?

While approximately 2.2 million eligible Nepali voters are abroad, the legal framework does not provide for out-of-country voting for these elections.

How are counting and tabulation conducted and when will official results be announced?

At the close of polling, ballot boxes are sealed and transported by each polling station's polling officer to the relevant returning office. A security officer accompanies the polling officer; candidate agents may do so as well. After receiving all ballot boxes from all the polling locations of the respective federal constituency, the returning officer publishes a notice specifying the date, place and time for the counting of votes.

Although there is no regulation specifying the exact time when counting must commence, returning officers typically begin the process as soon as possible after receiving all ballot boxes from the constituency.

Candidates or their agents may be present during vote counting. Ballots are counted under the returning officer's direct supervision. Before vote counting begins, the ballots are counted and the total number is recorded on a tally sheet. The total numbers of valid and invalid votes for each candidate are also recorded on a tally sheet.

FPTP ballots and proportional representation ballots are counted simultaneously. The returning officer announces the winners of the FPTP contests to all those present for the vote count. After proportional representation ballot counting is complete, all results are entered into the Election Results Information Software system, which transmits the results to the ECN. At the ECN, results tabulation software aggregates the results.

Once the results have been verified, the ECN's chief returning officer announces the vote count for each party and the number of seats won by each party. Parties then officially nominate the winning candidates from their closed lists according to the criteria established by the ECN.

In previous elections, vote counting has taken anywhere from one day to two weeks.

How will election disputes be adjudicated?

Before an election, the ECN forms an eight-member Election Dispute Resolution Committee composed of five members of the ECN; the secretary of the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs; the secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs; and the attorney general. Complaints regarding election disputes, violations or irregularities must be made in writing (including electronically) to district or provincial election officers, polling officers, returning officers or monitoring officers – or directly to the Election Dispute Resolution Committee – as soon as an alleged violation is known. Any member of the committee has the authority to determine the validity of a complaint and impose remedies and sanctions.

Candidates filing election results petitions must do so within 15 days of the announcement of results. All appeals to decisions made by the adjudicating authority must be made within 35 days of the announcement of results. Certain offenses – such as forgery of ballots, vote buying, requests for recounting of votes or acts of violence – must be referred directly to the relevant high court to issue rulings and impose sanctions.

What are the campaign expenditure limits?

Campaign expenditure limits have been set according to existing laws, the number of voters in constituencies and the number of polling centers. For FPTP races, the highest expenditure ceiling is NPR 3.3 million (about \$22,600) and the lowest expenditure ceiling is NPR 2.5 million (about \$17,100). The ceiling for proportional representation candidates is NPR 200,000 (about \$1,370).

About IFES in Nepal

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has been supporting the implementation of inclusive elections, building the capacity of election professionals and strengthening the integrity of the electoral process in Nepal since 2006.

Disclosure

These FAQs reflect decisions made by the Election Commission of Nepal as of February 27, 2026, to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any International Foundation for Electoral Systems policy or technical recommendations.