

EP: 01 11/ JAN /2026

Analysis

ELECTIONS

Safeguarding Nepal's Elections in the Digital Age: Challenges of Mis/Disinformation and Online Abuse

IN THIS EPISODE

- *Analysis* of digital risks affecting the election governance.
- *Major highlights* across the media including Nepal's plan to take huge loan for *Digital Nepal Transformation* project.
- 'Factsheet' presenting key facts data on the upcoming election.
- Key components of recently published 'Election Code of Conduct'
- '*Community Voices*' presenting thoughts from Nepali youths from Butwal and Kathmandu.

53 DAYS
TO GO

We aim to bring you timely updates and thoughtful analysis on the March election.
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Safeguarding Nepal's Elections in the Digital Age: Challenges of Mis/Disinformation and Online Abuse

The Election Commission's recent [warning](#) underscores how digital platforms are challenging the enforcement of Nepal's election code ahead of the March 5, 2026 election. As campaigning, political debate, and voter engagement increasingly move online, traditional regulatory tools struggle to keep pace with the rapid, large-scale, and often anonymous nature of digital communication.

While digital platforms have expanded access to information and facilitated direct voter outreach, they have also been exploited to spread propaganda, misinformation, and hate speech, especially during polarized election periods. False and misleading content often spreads faster than official corrections, eroding public trust in democratic institutions.

Recent incidents in Nepal highlight these risks: [misleading claims](#) about candidate disqualifications, [AI-generated images](#) of Ashika Tamang allegedly joining the Rastriya Swatantra Party, [gendered abuse](#) toward figures like Ranju Darshana, and [manipulated content](#) involving leaders such as Balen Shah. These examples show how digital platforms are used to shape narratives, incite hatred, and deepen divisions, disproportionately affecting women and public figures and turning elections into hotspots for online abuse rather than democratic debate.

These concerns are not unique to Nepal but are part of [a global trend](#). In 2024's global "super election year," over 70 elections saw platforms like Facebook, X, TikTok, WhatsApp, and YouTube used to spread misinformation, hate speech, and divisive content. Reduced moderation, targeted ads, deepfakes, and foreign interference fueled polarization and weakened voter trust worldwide. Though not always decisive, these tactics erode democratic trust and normalize harmful online behavior.

The Election Commission's emphasis on inter-agency coordination, regulatory oversight, and a mix of awareness-raising and punitive measures is critical. However, effective enforcement demands strong legal mandates, institutional capacity, meaningful engagement with political parties and platforms, and proactive monitoring. Without these, the gap between the [Election Code of Conduct](#) and its digital enforcement risks widening, threatening the fairness and credibility of Nepal's elections.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE NEWS

- **Security Agencies Step Up Preparations for Upcoming Elections:** Nepal's security agencies have intensified preparations for the upcoming HOR election under the Integrated Security Plan 2082. The Nepal Army will [deploy around 80,000 personnel](#) in three phases, covering pre-election security, third-tier support on polling day, and post-election ballot transport and vote counting. Similarly, Nepal Police will [strengthen](#) crime control, border security, and lawful crowd management to ensure a free and fear-free election. In coordination with Nepal Police, Armed Police Force, and local authorities, joint training and security workshops are underway.
- **Social Media Content Linked to Localised Tensions in Multiple Districts:** Incidents linked to [social media content](#) allegedly hurting religious sentiments led to tensions and unrest has been observed in Dhanusha, Birgunj, and Suddhodhan. Tensions escalated after two Muslim [youths uploaded a TikTok video](#) on Poush 19 that allegedly hurt Hindu religious sentiments, followed by response videos containing offensive remarks against Islam. The circulation of these videos led to unrest in Dhanusha and [Birgunj](#), leading to detention of multiple individuals in Dhanusha and Birgunj, and investigations into the misuse of social media content. A similar incident was reported in Suddhodhan, where authorities timely intervened.
- **Nepal to Secure World Bank Loan for Digital Nepal Transformation:** The Government of Nepal has decided to take approximately [\\$7.2 billion concessional loan from the World Bank](#) for the Digital Nepal Transformation project, following Cabinet approval on 26 December, 2025. The funding will support the implementation of initiatives to strengthen digital infrastructure and expand digital services across the country.
- **Accident Insurance arranged for Poll Staff :** Election Commission of Nepal has [arranged](#) accident insurance worth NPR 2 million for employees deployed in the upcoming elections through Rastriya Beema Company. On Poush 13, the Commission insured 213,161 election personnel for coverage periods ranging from 15 to 90 days. The move aims to ensure the safety and security of staff involved in election duties and reflects the Commission's efforts to strengthen preparedness and risk management ahead of the polls.



325,000

Security personnel
to be mobilized

149,090

Election Police
Officers to be recruited



40

Observer
Organizations



Eligible voters

18,903,689

Male: 96,63,358

Female: 92,40,131

Others: 200



93

Total political parties
contesting for election:
representation category)



NEPAL ELECTION 2026 A SNAPSHOT REVIEW



Total number of seats:

275

(165 constituencies under
FPTP and 110 under the
proportional representation)



6.73 billion

Estimated budget
for Election
Commission for
conducting election



10,967

Polling stations

23,112

Polling Centre

Photo: The Nepal News

DECODING THE 'ELECTION CODE OF CONDUCT'

The Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) has [approved](#) the [Election Code of Conduct, 2082](#) for the House of Representatives elections scheduled on March 5, 2026, aiming to ensure clean, free, fair, transparent, impartial, and cost-effective elections. The Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) has notified the [government that the Election Code of Conduct](#) will take effect on January 17, 2026. The Code applies to all stakeholders in the electoral process, emphasizing neutrality and the strict prohibition on misuse of state resources. Below are some of the major components of the published Code of Conduct :

- **Prohibition of Symbolic Materials:** Production, use, or sale of vests, t-shirts, caps, stickers, or logos featuring election symbols is prohibited.
- **Use of Private Property:** Political activities or campaigning on private land or houses require the owner's prior consent.
- **Child Protection:** Children must not be used in any election-related campaigning or activities.
- **Public Order:** Rallies and meetings must not obstruct public movement or take place in prohibited areas/times.
- **Misinformation:** Disseminating false, misleading, or hateful information on social media is strictly prohibited.
- **AI Usage:** Artificial Intelligence (AI) must not be used to insult, defame, or spread hate speech against candidates or to influence the election.
- **Fake Accounts:** Operating fake accounts or sites to adversely affect the election is forbidden.
- **Campaigning Restrictions:** Ministers and local executive members cannot participate in campaigns unless they are candidates themselves (in their own constituency) or have obtained Commission approval for specific locations.
- **Inaugurations and Grants:** Foundations stone-laying ceremonies, inaugurations, or the distribution of new grants and rewards are prohibited.



Israphil Gadi

(Youth Activist, Butwal Sub-Metropolitan City -12)

The election mood in Butwal is mixed. While many eagerly await the election, I observed that many conversations within the community are dissatisfied with how the Gen Z movement or martyrs' sacrifice are not addressed and honored. Also, while the formal campaigns haven't started, social media has become the main information source. I see that there is a clear need for stronger community-level awareness campaigns to encourage participation and explain the mandate of the House of Representatives election and its representatives.



kabita bahing

(Advocate, Co-Founder of Aalawya, Kathmandu)

This election is unfolding amid exceptional political conditions marked by widespread public frustration and a strong demand for meaningful structural change. The interim government and election have generated hope. Yet, I am concerned that genuine inclusion and representation remain elusive, as the proportional representation mechanism is clearly being misused, continuing to favor established power holders rather than marginalized communities as envisioned by Nepal's Constitution.



This weekly newsletter is a joint initiative of Accountability Lab Nepal (ALN) and Digital Rights Nepal (DRN), specifically launched to provide comprehensive coverage and analysis of the 2026 elections in Nepal. During this time, this publication consolidates their regular newsletters, ALN's ***Nepal Governance Weekly*** and DRN's ***Digital Rights Weekly***. Consequently, those will not be produced separately until the election cycle concludes.

This material aims to promote electoral integrity and enable informed citizenry by delivering non-partisan, evidence-based analysis, and rights-oriented perspective. It does not endorse or oppose any political party or candidates.

The data presented here is synthesized from diverse credible sources, including government agencies, international organizations, news media, social platforms, and our extensive local networks. The topic selection are based on their prevalence, relevance, and potential societal impact, ensuring all information is accurate and verified at the time of publication.

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