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Analysis

Digital Electioneering in Nepal: Innovation, Gaps, and Threats

IN THIS EPISODE

- *Analysis* of risk and misuse of digital tools affecting the election governance.

- *Major highlights* across the media including ECN's clarification demand for Code breach, and why Madhesh is a key battleground for election.

- 'Factsheet' presenting key political parties' candidate composition.

- '*Community Voices*' presenting thoughts from Nepali youths on the upcoming election.

3 4
DAYS TO GO

FEB EVENTS

- FEB 3 : Final PR Closed candidate lists published.

- FEB 15 : Official Election campaign period begins nationwide.

Digital Electioneering in Nepal: Innovation, Gaps, and Threats

With just over a month remaining until the House of Representatives elections, Nepal's electoral landscape is witnessing a significant shift: digital space has emerged as a decisive and highly contested political battleground. What was once limited to party announcements and political messaging has evolved into a sophisticated industry of professional digital electioneering. Political actors are actively purchasing bundled services marketed as election-winning tools, ranging from boosted social media campaigns, AI-driven messaging and voter funnels to digital war rooms and real-time opposition tracking systems.

This rapid expansion stands in direct tension with Nepal's election code of conduct, which contains strict provisions governing the use of social media and cyberspace during election. Although organic digital campaigning is permitted, the code clearly prohibits paid boosting and advertising, the dissemination of misinformation or disinformation, and the publication of opinion polls or surveys prior to the announcement of official election results. In practice, however, these rules are being widely and systematically violated. Data from Meta's advertising transparency tools shows that paid political advertising has continued even after the code came into force on 18 January. Between 19 and 25 January alone, multiple political actors ran boosted advertisements explicitly targeting voters, directly undermining the intent of the code to limit financial influence and ensure a level playing field.

Beyond paid advertising, social media platforms are increasingly flooded with election predictions and unofficial surveys projecting victories for specific candidates or political party, often without any disclosure of methodology or data sources. Amplified through repetition and algorithms, such content can mislead voters, shape perceptions, and create bandwagon effects, particularly in a context of uneven digital literacy. Concerns have also emerged over the use of paid services, bots, and fake accounts to artificially inflate likes, shares, and comments, distorting political discourse and disadvantage candidates who rely on organic reach.

In response, the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) which has intensified digital monitoring through tools such as E-Monitor Plus, clarified that paid boosting will count toward campaign expenditure limits, and activated multiple coordination mechanisms, including the EIDC, IIPC, and the Election Police Cyber Cell. ECN said that they have identified 302 false, misleading, and hateful posts and initiated action against them. However, capacity and coordination constraints persist, including within the Nepal Advertising Board.

The weak institutional measures, coupled with the absence of effective enforcement mechanisms, are leaving digital campaigning largely unaddressed despite its growing scale and sophistication. Monitoring remains largely reactive; covert advertising and coordinated influence networks continue unchecked, while delayed enforcement weakens deterrence during the most critical phases of campaigns. This exposes a widening gap between rapidly evolving digital tactics and regulatory capacity, with the Election Commission prioritizing rule-making over decisive enforcement and meaningful sanctions.

Equally concerning is the role of digital platforms, which continue to profit from paid political boosting while failing to prioritize election integrity. High-value political advertisements are routinely approved and amplified, while voter education, election warnings, and misinformation corrections are frequently restricted or removed, revealing a clear commercial bias over democratic safeguards. Despite platforms' central role, there is little evidence of structured coordination with the Election Commission to regulate political advertising, counter misinformation, or enforce the election code.

Safeguarding electoral integrity in the digital age demands a shift from symbolic regulation to decisive action, including real-time enforcement, clear sanctions, mandatory advertising transparency, and formal cooperation frameworks with platforms. Without robust accountability for both political actors and digital platforms, digital innovation risks becoming a tool for manipulation rather than democratic participation.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE NEWS

EC Seeks Clarification from High-Profile Candidates over Code Violations
The Election Commission has sought explanations from several high-profile candidates, including Balen Shah, Mahesh Basnet, Harka Sampang and Kamal Bhusal, over alleged violations of the election code of conduct. Complaints cite hate speech, misleading remarks, misuse of children in campaigns and election symbol violations. The Commission says it will investigate and may impose fines or cancel candidatures under election law.

Nepal Steps Up Election Security Measures
With five weeks to go until Nepal's snap parliamentary election, authorities are tightening security nationwide by mobilising around 150,000 election police. Of the 10,967 polling booths, 4,442 have been classified as sensitive and 3,680 as highly sensitive, putting 8,122 booths under elevated security monitoring. High-profile constituencies and past flashpoints are under heightened surveillance, with election police to be deployed from February 10 under an integrated election security plan.

Madhesh Battleground: Old Guard vs New Politics: Madhesh Province, with 32 House seats and 1,054 candidates, has become a high-stakes electoral battleground. The contest features senior leaders, party-switchers, and new faces across Dhanusha, Saptari, Sarlahi, Rautahat, Parsa, and Bara, making campaigns intense with rallies, door-to-door outreach, and social media strategies. Voters are weighing frustration with traditional parties against uncertainty about emerging forces, turning Madhesh into a key test of whether established networks hold or new politics can gain ground.

Call for Accurate Information in upcoming HoR Elections: The National Information Commission has urged all stakeholders to ensure the flow of accurate and factual information ahead of the House of Representatives elections on March 5. Warning that misinformation can undermine democracy, the Commission called for responsible communication, effective monitoring, and timely public disclosure of election-related information.
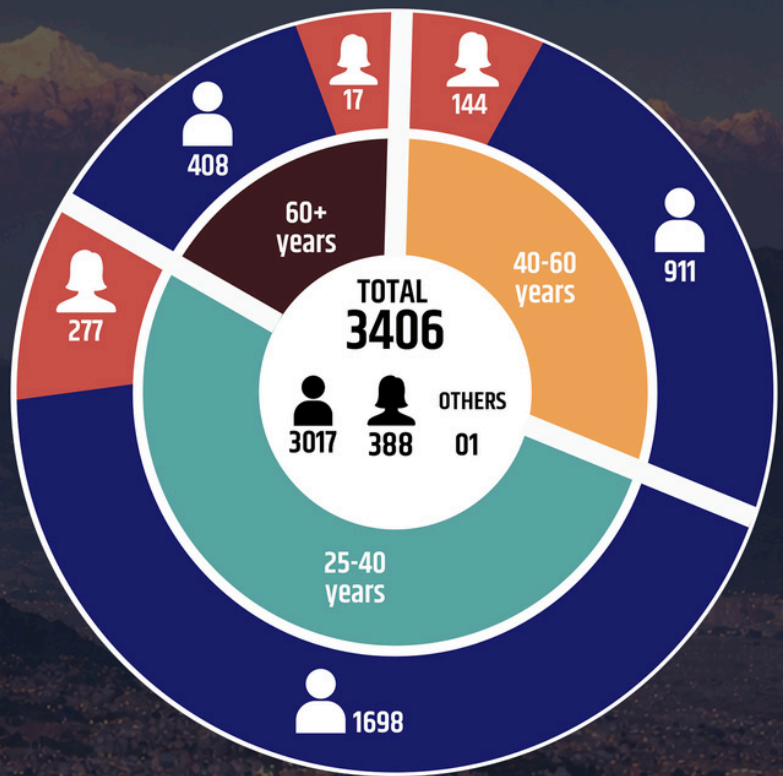Political parties, candidates, and media were asked to uphold fact-based, neutral, and ethical standards, while citizens were encouraged to verify sources before sharing information and to report misinformation.

Civil Society Calls for Rights-Focused Election Manifestos: Sixteen civil society organisations led by the NGO Federation of Nepal have urged political parties to adopt people-centred and rights-based agendas in their manifestos ahead of the March 5 House of Representatives elections. Calling the polls a key democratic moment, they stressed the need for accountable governance, inclusive democracy, and effective implementation of constitutional rights. The joint appeal highlights constitutional reform, stronger federalism, protection of freedom of expression and digital rights, access to justice, and guaranteed health and education as core priorities for political parties.
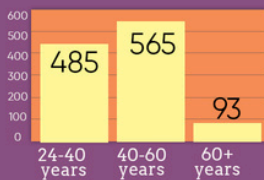
FPTP Candidates of Key Political Parties

TOTAL 3406

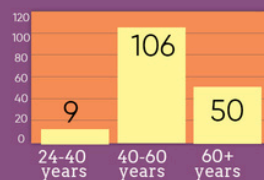👤 3017   👤 388   OTHERS 01

- 60+ years: 👤 408 | 👩 17
- 40-60 years: 👩 144 | 👤 911
- 25-40 years: 👩 277 | 👤 1698

Source : Election Commission Nepal

Independent

1143 | 👤 986 | 👤 157

24-40 years	40-60 years	60+ years
485	565	93

Nepali Congress

165 | 👤 154 | 👤 11

24-40 years	40-60 years	60+ years
9	106	50

Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist)

164 | 👤 154 | 👤 10

24-40 years	40-60 years	60+ years
13	107	44
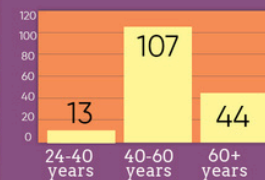
Nepali Communist Party

164 | 👤 152 | 👤 12

24-40 years	40-60 years	60+ years
19	108	37
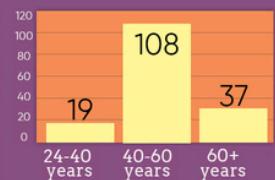
Rastriya Swatantra Party

164 | 👤 148 | 👤 16

24-40 years	40-60 years	60+ years
70	92	2
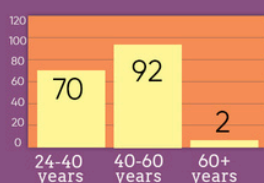
Rastriya Prajatantra Party

163 | 👤 155 | 👤 8

24-40 years	40-60 years	60+ years
33	95	35
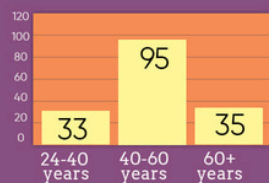
Shram Sanskriti Party

109 | 👤 109 | 👤 7

24-40 years	40-60 years	60+ years
38	65	6
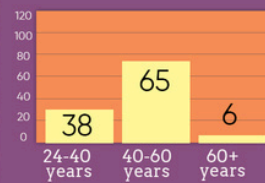
Ujyalo Nepal Party

105 | 👤 99 | 👤 6

24-40 years	40-60 years	60+ years
43	54	8

Saroj Jaigadi
Student, Dhangadhi-5

The election environment feels different from past cycles. After each major political movement whether in 2046 or 2062/63 emerging political forces were given the opportunities, yet we did not see lasting meaningful changes. Following the recent Gen Z movement, I see a growing public sentiment of providing space to new and younger leadership, with the hope that they will expand employment opportunities, reduce poverty, and improve infrastructure. Beyond these expectations, there is also a strong desire for change in everyday governance. People are hoping for combating irregularities, greater transparency, and stronger action against corruption. In this election, I will be looking for leaders who act as guardians of the public interest, those who understand people's concerns and are courageous enough to speak out against wrongdoing, and can hold members of their own parties accountable when necessary.

Gitika Suman

Former chair of Province level adolescence girl network;
Lamkichuha, Kailali

Many in Gen Z had hoped for more transformative outcomes following the Gen Z movement. Among such, one of the expectations was constitutional amendments or a system with the direct election of the Prime Minister. While those demands were not realized, we are adapting in the existing system, holding on to the hope that change is still possible through this election. The frustration with the traditional politics and desire to bring change in the leadership is very evident. But we already see the old practices persisting particularly in relation to women's leadership. Women remain largely absent from top decision-making roles within political parties, but are visible during campaign activities. Whether this is due to a lack of political will, limited platforms, or barriers to participation remains unclear, but the gap is evident.

In this election, I will look beyond party affiliation and focus on candidates' vision and credibility. My vote will also be based on party manifestos on how they include people from diverse backgrounds and how seriously past commitments have been implemented.

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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