

USE AND IMPACT OF DIGITAL SPACE IN NEPAL'S ELECTION 2026



Use and Impact of Digital Space in Nepal's Election 2026

Research Report
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We hope this report will be helpful for the upcoming elections in maximizing the positive use of digital platforms while mitigating associated harms.

Bhola Nath Dhungana

President

Digital Rights Nepal

Executive Summary

Nepal's 2026 House of Representatives Election represented a transformative moment in the country's democratic journey, characterized by a decisive move from traditional, physical campaigning toward a sophisticated digital-first information ecosystem. Following the 2025 Gen Z-led political movement, the electoral landscape saw the rise of new digital-native political forces. This evolution was underpinned by significant internet penetration, with social media reaching approximately 50% of the population, leading to a hybrid campaigning model where digital outreach became as critical as the physical ballot box.

A major trend observed throughout the cycle was the professionalization and outsourcing of campaign strategies in digital spaces. Traditional materials like posters and banners saw a marked decline whereas political actors turned to professional content creation and management agencies for content creation and micro-targeted messaging. Campaigning shifted from official party-centric narratives to highly personalized, candidate-led digital branding, frequently utilizing podcasts and YouTube. However, this shift also introduced significant opaqueness; many

candidates relied on IT firms to manage voter outreach and to run SMS campaigns, often with no transparency regarding how voter contact details were accessed or how much was spent on micro-targeted ads.

The integration of technology introduced severe systemic risks, most notably the significant rise of AI-enabled manipulation. Approximately 54% of identified disinformation utilized AI-generated or altered media, with manipulated videos both deepfakes and “cheapfakes” serving as the primary tool for discrediting candidates. Simultaneously, the election highlighted grave privacy vulnerabilities, exemplified by the Election Commission of Nepal’s (ECN) decision to sell digital voter lists containing sensitive information to political parties and the misuse of bulk SMS gateways to send five million unsolicited political messages in a single day. Furthermore, the digital space remained a site of significant Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV), with female candidates facing a disproportionate intensity of abuse characterized by dehumanizing attacks on their personal lives rather than their political vision.

Institutional responses demonstrated a mix of proactive leadership and significant transparency gaps. While the ECN integrated advanced tools like eMonitor+ to identify nearly 998 instances of “toxic information,” its failure to publicly disclose the nature of the flagged content raised accountability concerns. The election also exposed a growing tension between maintaining electoral integrity and upholding freedom of expression; regulatory actions, such as the suspension of 11 online platforms for opinion polling and attempts to remove international documentaries,

were criticized as potentially overbroad and inconsistent approach. Collaboration with tech platforms remained uneven, with TikTok showing proactive engagement through a formal MoU, while Meta had a limited engagement. To strengthen the integrity of future elections, the report emphasizes an urgent need for legislative and institutional reform.

Key recommendations include the enactment of a comprehensive Data Protection Act and updated electoral laws to address the risks posed by generative AI, micro-targeting, and unregulated digital campaign financing. The ECN must improve transparency by publishing regular reports on flagged content, enforcement actions, and referral outcomes, and must reassess its voter data-sharing practices to limit the sensitive personal information currently made available to political parties. Finally, moving from ad hoc to standing coordination agreements with major social media platforms, alongside sustained investment in nationwide digital literacy programs, is essential to protect the democratic process from synthetic media and coordinated manipulation.

Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CoC	Code of Conduct
CPN-UML	Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist)
CSO	Civil Society Organization(s)
DRN	Digital Rights Nepal
DVEU	Digital Voter Education Unit
EC	Election Commission
ECN	Election Commission of Nepal
EIDC	Election Information Dissemination and Coordination Center
EOCN	Election Observation Committee Nepal
FGD	Focus Group Discussion(s)
FPTP	First-Past-The-Post
HOR	House of Representatives
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IIPU	Information Integrity Promotion Unit
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization(s)

JEOC	Joint Election Operations Center
KII	Key Informant Interview(s)
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NC	Nepali Congress
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization(s)
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
NHRI	National Human Rights Institute(s)
NITC	National Information Technology Center
NTA	Nepal Telecommunication Authority
OGBV	Online Gender Based Violence
PCN	Press Council Nepal
PR	Proportional Representation
RSP	Rastriya Swatantra Party
TFGBV	Technology Facilitated Gender-Based Violence
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

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Use and Impact of Digital Space in Nepal's Election 2026

1. INTRODUCTION

Background and context of elections in Nepal

Nepal's 2026 House of Representatives Election marked an important moment in the country's democratic journey. Held in the aftermath of significant political developments, including the Gen Z-led political movement and a period of political transition, the election attracted considerable public attention and carried heightened expectations regarding good governance, political accountability, and public participation. Despite initial uncertainties surrounding the electoral process, the election was conducted peacefully and provided citizens with an opportunity to exercise their democratic rights through the ballot.¹

1 ANFREL Report "Rebuilding Trust, Restoring Credibility: Accountability and Electoral Integrity in Nepal 2026" Available at <https://anfrel.org/rebuilding-trust-restoring-credibility-accountability-and-electoral-integrity-in-nepal-2026/>

The election also took place within a rapidly evolving digital environment. Over the past two decades, Nepal has experienced significant growth in internet access, mobile connectivity, and the use of digital technologies.² The expansion of affordable smartphones, increasing access to social media platforms, and the growing availability of digital communication tools have transformed how individuals access information, communicate, and participate in public life. These developments have inevitably influenced the conduct of elections and political engagement.³

Traditionally, electoral campaigning in Nepal relied primarily on physical and conventional methods such as door-to-door outreach, public rallies, posters, pamphlets, and broadcast media. While these approaches continue to play an important role, digital platforms have increasingly become integral to political communication. The election commission, political parties, candidates, supporters, media organizations, civil society groups, and public institutions now utilize a wide range of digital tools to share information, engage with voters, disseminate campaign messages, and participate in public discourse.⁴

The growing importance of digital technologies in electoral processes reflects broader global trends. Social media platforms, messaging applications, online media portals, video-sharing platforms, and other digital services have emerged as influential spaces for political communication and civic engagement.⁵ These platforms facilitate direct interaction between political actors and

2 <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-nepal>

3 <https://asianews.network/how-social-media-use-is-changing-election-outreach-including-nepal/>

4 <https://www.fiscalnepal.com/2026/03/03/24725>

5 <https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/nprcjmr/article/view/83835>

citizens, enable rapid dissemination of information, and create new opportunities for political participation, particularly among younger and digitally connected populations.⁶

At the same time, the increasing role of digital technologies has introduced new dimensions to electoral processes. Across the world, policymakers, election management bodies, researchers, civil society organizations, and technology companies have raised concerns regarding the implications of digital platforms for election integrity, democratic participation, and the protection of fundamental rights. Issues such as information integrity, online harassment, platform accountability, political advertising, data-driven campaigning, privacy, and the use of emerging technologies have become important areas of public and policy debate.⁷

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) and other advanced digital technologies has further intensified these discussions. New technologies have expanded the possibilities for content creation, political communication, and voter outreach while simultaneously creating challenges related to transparency, authenticity, accountability, and public trust. As digital technologies continue to evolve, understanding their impact on democratic processes has become increasingly important.

In Nepal, digital platforms are now embedded within the broader electoral ecosystem. Political actors use social media and digital communication tools to engage supporters and communicate

6 Cyber-Politics: Social Media's Influence on Political Mobilization, Available at <https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/JPS/article/view/62857>

7 Digital Disinformation and Electoral Integrity: Legal Responses and Democratic Implications, Available at <https://journalisslp.com/index.php/isslp/article/view/447>

political messages.⁸ Media organizations increasingly rely on digital channels to disseminate election-related information, while civil society organizations and election observers use online platforms to conduct awareness campaigns, monitor electoral developments and processes, and facilitate public engagement. Government institutions, including the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN), have also incorporated digital tools into voter education, public communication, and election administration.

The growing significance of digital spaces in elections presents both opportunities and challenges. While digital technologies have the potential to enhance participation, access to information, and citizen engagement, they also raise important questions regarding electoral integrity, information integrity, transparency, accountability, and the protection of rights in online environments. Understanding these dynamics is therefore essential for strengthening democratic processes and ensuring that technological developments contribute positively to Nepal's electoral landscape.

Against this backdrop, the 2026 House of Representatives Election provides an important opportunity to examine the evolving role and impact of digital platforms and technologies in Nepal's electoral processes. By exploring how digital spaces are utilized by different electoral stakeholders and assessing the broader implications of these developments, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of Nepal's emerging digital electoral ecosystem and inform future policy, regulatory, and institutional responses.

8 <https://kathmandupost.com/politics/2022/11/09/kp-oli-boosts-uml-s-digital-campaigning>

Purpose and objectives of the research

Digital Rights Nepal (DRN) conducted this study to examine the use of digital spaces and tools during the House of Representatives election held on March 5, 2026. The study explores how digital technologies are shaping electoral discourse, campaign strategies, voter engagement, and the broader information ecosystem in Nepal.

Scope of the Study

The research examines the evolving role of digital platforms and tools in electoral processes and political communication in Nepal, with particular attention to:

- The use of social media platforms, messaging applications, and other digital tools by political parties, candidates, and electoral actors during elections;
- The nature and impact of online political advertising, targeted messaging, and data-driven campaigning practices;
- Patterns and trends in misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, harassment, and emerging forms of AI-generated or manipulated content;
- The roles, responsibilities, and practices of key stakeholders in the digital election ecosystem, including the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN), political parties, digital platforms, media organizations, and civil society actors; and
- Existing gaps in laws, policies, and institutional responses governing digital campaigning, online political communication, and information integrity.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design and approach

The study adopts a qualitative and exploratory research design to examine the use of digital spaces in Nepal's electoral processes. A qualitative approach enables an in-depth understanding of the behaviors, practices, and institutional responses that cannot be adequately captured through purely quantitative methods, given the evolving and complex nature of digital political communication.

The research follows an analytical framework combining empirical inquiry with normative assessment: it documents how digital tools and platforms are used by electoral actors while critically evaluating the implications of these practices for electoral integrity, democratic participation, and the protection of fundamental rights. A triangulation approach, integrating multiple data sources, was applied to enhance the validity and reliability of findings. The study draws on a combination of primary and secondary sources, including Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), media and platform monitoring, and a review of existing reports and documentation from the Election Commission of Nepal, election observation organizations, and other relevant research studies.

Data Sources

The study draws on the following primary and secondary data sources:

Media and Platform Observation

Systematic observation of digital platforms, including social media networks, messaging applications, and online media portals, was conducted throughout the study period. This involved

tracking political communication trends, campaign strategies, and the spread of harmful content such as misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, and AI-generated material. The observation also incorporated monitoring outputs and insights from Digital Rights Nepal's *Digital Rights Weekly* newsletter, and Nepal *Election Monitoring Weekly* newsletter by Digital Rights Nepal and Accountability Lab Nepal to identify recurring patterns and emerging risks.

Review of Laws and Policies

A comprehensive doctrinal review of relevant national legal and policy frameworks was undertaken to assess the regulatory environment governing digital conduct in elections. This includes constitutional provisions, election specific legislation, directives, policies, and other laws relevant to digital communication, media regulation, privacy and online content governance. These legal and policy documents were analyzed to map the existing governance framework applicable to digital electoral activities and to assess how current laws and policies address issues like online campaigning, voter data protection, and protection of other fundamental rights. The review enabled the identification of regulatory gaps and emerging challenges arising from the increasing role of digital platforms and technologies in electoral processes.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Focus Group Discussions were conducted with diverse stakeholders, including youth, journalists, civil society representatives, election observers, and digital rights advocates. These discussions provided qualitative insights into user experiences, perceptions of digital risks, awareness of electoral regulations, and the societal impact of online political content.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Key Informant Interviews were carried out with policymakers, election officials, legal experts, media professionals, and technology practitioners. These interviews offered expert perspectives on stakeholder responsibilities, institutional practices, and implementation challenges within the digital electoral ecosystem.

Review of Secondary Sources

The research incorporates a comprehensive review of secondary materials, including reports published by the Election Commission of Nepal, election observation organizations, academic literature, and prior research studies. These sources provided contextual grounding, comparative insights, and supplementary evidence to support the analysis.

3. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This research examines the use of digital platforms and tools in Nepal's electoral context, focusing on their use by electoral actors, emerging trends in digital campaigning and online political communication, and the corresponding legal, regulatory, and institutional responses. The study is time-bound, covering the period from January to March 2026, including the pre-election, election, and immediate post-election phases. Developments occurring outside this timeframe are not reflected in the analysis.

The rapidly evolving nature of digital technologies, platforms, and campaign strategies means that new trends and practices may emerge beyond the study period. Limited access to proprietary platform data, algorithms, and advertising systems constrained the assessment of targeted political advertising, data-driven campaigning, and content amplification mechanisms. While the

study utilized publicly available tools such as the Meta Ad Library to track political advertising and spending, these interfaces often lack sufficient granularity, completeness, and real-time accuracy. They do not provide visibility into micro-targeting criteria, user-level segmentation, or algorithmic prioritization mechanisms, particularly how emotionally charged or polarizing content is amplified compared to policy-oriented information. Additionally, given the large volume of election-related content generated across multiple platforms, some posts, interactions, or emerging trends may not have been captured through monitoring.

Finally, findings from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) are based on the perspectives and experiences of selected participants and may not fully represent all demographic groups or geographic contexts across Nepal. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the evolving digital electoral ecosystem in Nepal and highlights key trends, challenges, and areas for policy and institutional reform.

4. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research adheres to established ethical standards to ensure integrity, accountability, and the protection of participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in FGDs and KIIs, with clear communication regarding the purpose of the study and the use of collected data.

The study also adopts a rights-based approach, ensuring that the research process and outputs do not reinforce bias, discrimination, or harm. Care was taken to accurately represent participants' perspectives and to critically engage with findings in a balanced and responsible manner.

5. MAJOR LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

The governance of digital spaces in Nepal's electoral context is shaped by a combination of electoral laws, media regulations, cyber laws, and emerging digital governance instruments. Although many of these frameworks were developed before the rapid expansion of digital campaigning and platform-based political communication, they are increasingly being applied to regulate online electoral activities.

This section examines the legal and policy environment governing elections and digital spaces in Nepal, with a focus on how existing frameworks address online campaigning, political advertising, misinformation, platform accountability, and the protection of fundamental rights.

a. Constitutional Framework

The Constitution of Nepal (2015) provides the basic legal framework for governing democratic processes, including elections and the use of digital spaces for political communication.⁹ Although it does not explicitly refer to digital platforms or online campaigning, the guarantees of fundamental rights are directly applicable to digital electoral activities and online political expression.

The Preamble commits the nation to a socialism based on democratic norms and values, including a competitive multiparty democratic system, civil liberties, fundamental and human rights, adult franchise, periodic elections, full freedom of the press, an

9 Constitution of Nepal, Available at https://ag.gov.np/files/Constitution-of-Nepal_2072_Eng_www.moljpa.gov_.npDate-72_11_16.pdf

independent and impartial judiciary, and the rule of law, with the objective of building a prosperous nation. These principles form the normative foundation for free political participation and democratic expression, including in online and digital environments.

Several constitutional provisions are relevant to digital election governance. Article 17 guarantees freedom of expression and opinion, protecting the right to express ideas and engage in political communication, subject to lawful restrictions. Article 18 guarantees the right to equality and prohibits discrimination on grounds such as ideology, gender, or caste. This ensures equitable access to digital communication platforms and helps prevent bias or discriminatory censorship during elections. Article 19 protects the right to communication, explicitly shielding electronic media, the press, and digital equipment from arbitrary censorship, closure, or seizure, subject to lawful restrictions. Article 27 guarantees the right to information, ensuring citizens' access to information and supporting transparency in electoral processes and online political communication. Article 28 protects the right to privacy, covering personal and communication privacy, which is increasingly relevant to voter data protection and digital campaigning practices.

While these provisions establish a strong constitutional basis for online political participation, their practical application in digital spaces depends on enabling legislation and regulatory interpretation.

b. Electoral Governance Framework

Nepal's electoral governance framework is primarily shaped by a set of election-specific laws and directives issued by the Election

Commission of Nepal. While these laws were enacted before the rapid expansion of digital campaigning, they are increasingly applied to regulate online electoral activities.

Key legislative instruments include:

Election Commission Act, 2016

The Election Commission Act, 2016 sets out the legal framework governing the duties, powers and functions of Nepal's Election Commission.¹⁰ It authorizes the Commission to monitor elections and electoral activities, including determining procedures and areas of monitoring,¹¹ which now in practice extends to overseeing digital campaigning and online electoral conduct. The Act also allows the Commission to permit any domestic and international person or organization to observe election-related activities.¹²

The Commission is mandated to formulate and implement election-related policies and strategies, manage voter identification systems, conduct research on electoral reforms, and maintain election data and archives. It also promotes coordination with international election bodies and supports the development of electoral infrastructure and expertise.¹³

Importantly, the Act empowers the Commission to issue and enforce an Election Code of Conduct applicable to government bodies, political parties, candidates, media (including digital

10 Preamble, Election Commission Act, 2073 (2017), Available at https://giwmscdnone.gov.np/media/app/public/275/posts/1721031447_8.pdf

11 Id., Section 5

12 Id., Section 6

13 Id., Section 11

media), and other stakeholders.¹⁴ The Commission can monitor compliance, investigate violations, and impose sanctions such as fines or even cancellation of candidacy in cases of repeated breaches of the election code of conduct.

The Act regulates election financing by giving election commission power to set expenditure ceilings, requiring timely disclosure and auditing of campaign expenses, and penalizing non-compliance.¹⁵ This provision aims to ensure free, fair, and impartial elections in terms of clarity about electoral expenditures.

While the Act does not explicitly regulate digital platforms, social media, online political advertising, or other forms of digital electoral campaigning, it provides the legal foundation for the Election Commission to formulate rules, directives, and codes of conduct governing electoral activities in digital spaces. The Commission's powers to monitor election-related activities, issue and enforce codes of conduct, investigate violations, regulate campaign financing, and take enforcement actions have served as the basis for subsequent regulations and policies addressing online campaigning, misinformation, digital political advertising, and the use of social media during elections. However, the rapid evolution of digital technologies has exposed gaps in the existing legal framework, particularly in relation to micro-targeted advertising, platform accountability, algorithmic amplification, AI-generated content, and the transparency of online campaign financing, areas that remain only partially addressed under the current legislation.

14 Id., Section 22-23

15 d., Section 24-26

Election Offence and Punishment Act, 2016

Election (Offences and Penalties) Act, 2016 defines election-related crimes and punishments.¹⁶ The Act lists the actions not to be carried out during election period and punishment in case of violation.

Key provisions include several restrictions aimed at protecting the integrity of the voting period. Voter influence or disruption during the sensitive voting period is prohibited, including through SMS, social networks, or similar means. Rallies, gatherings, or disruptive activities are also banned during this period (Section 19). Intimidation, coercion, hate speech, or inducement of voters through threats, financial incentives, or religious appeals is criminalized (Section 20). Campaigning is prohibited during the official silence period (Section 24). Campaign financing violations, such as exceeding expenditure limits, receiving foreign or unauthorized funds, and failing to properly report income and expenses, are treated as serious offences, carrying fines equal to the amount involved and possible disqualification of candidates for up to six years (Section 29). Any other act not specifically listed but found to have an adverse effect on the election process can also be penalized (Section 35). Violations of these restrictions may result in fines, imprisonment, disqualification, or cancellation of candidacy depending on severity.

Although not explicitly designed for digital environments, these provisions are broadly interpreted to cover online political activity, including social media campaigns and digital messaging.

16 Election (Crime and Punishment) Act, 2016 Available at <https://lawcommission.gov.np/content/11971/11971-election-offence-and-punishme/>

Political Parties Act, 2017

The Political Parties Act regulates the formation, registration, operation, and accountability of political parties in Nepal.¹⁷

The Act allows parties to publicize their policies and programs (Section 20), which in practice extends to modern communication tools such as websites and social media platforms. Similarly, the Act prohibits the parties from engaging in activities that undermine sovereignty, promote hatred, or disturb social harmony, including through digital content (Section 21). Similarly, the Act requires parties to comply with ECN directives and Election Codes of Conduct, including rules governing digital campaigning (Section 22).

These provisions imply that the content shared by the political parties through social media pages, websites, or any digital platform must also comply with the restrictions mentioned under Section 21, and parties are responsible for ensuring lawful online political communication.

Voter Registration Act, 2016

The Voter Registration Act, 2016 provides the legal foundation for Nepal's voter registration system.¹⁸ It designates the ECN as the central authority responsible for compiling and maintaining an accurate voter list. Procedurally, the Act covers voter registration, including submission of personal details, verification through citizenship or other official documents, and validation by registration officers. Updated voter lists are publicly published

17 Political Party Act, 2026, Available at <https://lawcommission.gov.np/content/11977/11977-political-party-act-2073/>

18 Id., Preamble

for transparency, and individuals can file complaints or request corrections for errors or omissions.¹⁹

In Nepal's digital electoral environment, these provisions are increasingly significant as voter registration is gradually linked with digital databases and online verification systems. Digitalization improves the efficiency, accuracy, and accessibility of voter data, but also raises concerns about data security, privacy, algorithmic exclusion, and misuse of electoral information. The Act therefore plays a key role in governing digital voter identity systems and safeguarding election integrity in an increasingly digitized democratic space.

House of Representative Member Electoral Act, 2017

House of Representative Member Electoral Act, 2017 establishes the legal foundation for the election of 275 members to the House of Representatives, utilizing a mixed electoral system: 165 members elected through the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system and 110 members through the Proportional Representation (PR) system.²⁰ It sets clear qualifications for candidates, requiring them to be Nepali citizens, at least 25 years of age, and registered on the voter list, while also listing specific criminal and ethical disqualifications. A central feature of the Act is its mandate for inclusive representation in the PR system; political parties must ensure their candidate lists include specific percentages for Dalit (13.8%), Indigenous Nationalities (28.7%), Khas Arya (31.2%), Madheshi (15.3%), Tharu (6.6%), and Muslim (4.4%) groups, with a requirement that 50% of the candidates on the list be women.

19 Id., Section 20

20 House of Representative Member Electoral Act 2017, Available at: <https://election.gov.np/source/%>

Regarding financial accountability, Section 72 mandates that all candidates and political parties submit their election expenditure details to the Election Commission in a prescribed format and within limits set by the Commission. While the Act provides a broad legal basis for preventing undue influence and unauthorized control over the electoral process, it does not contain digitally specific terminology or provisions. Instead, the detailed regulation of digital campaigning, social media, and AI-generated content is primarily addressed through Election Commission guidelines and the Code of Conduct rather than the explicit text of the Act.

Election Code of Conduct, 2026

The Election Code of Conduct for the 2026 House of Representatives election, enforced from January 19, 2026, aims to ensure an independent, fair, transparent, impartial, cost-effective, and fearless election environment.²¹ The Code applies to all stakeholders, including government bodies, political parties, candidates, media, voters, private sector actors, and development partners.²²

A major highlight of the Code is its strict regulation of social media, digital platforms, and Artificial Intelligence (AI). The Commission had strict regulation of paid election promotion, sponsorship, boosting, or targeting on foreign social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and X (Twitter).²³

21 Election Code of Conduct 2026, Available at: <https://election.gov.np/admin/public/storage/HOR>

22 Id., Clause 3

23 <https://techpana.com/2025/154686/Election-Commission-Monitors-Paid-Political-Campaigns-On-Social-Media>

It bans election-related promotional content on foreign media outlets.²⁴ However, political parties and candidates may still use their official or personal social media pages and websites for political communication.²⁵ Online media registered with the Information and Broadcasting Department and listed with the Press Council only are permitted to publish electoral advertisements,²⁶ and all such content must be clearly labeled as paid advertisements.²⁷ Election campaigning is also prohibited on other webpages, TV scrolling, digital displays such as in shopping malls, and bank ATM counters.²⁸

For the first time, the Code explicitly regulates the use of AI, prohibiting the use in spreading disinformation, defamation, false information, hate speech, or misleading comments through social media.²⁹ Activities such as posting, sharing, commenting, tagging, live streaming, or reacting on social media with the intent to influence the election, by candidates, parties, or even voters, are strictly regulated. The Code also incorporates the concept of “Green Elections”.³⁰ The Commission also encouraged digital campaigning over paper and plastic materials, urging candidates to prioritize digital content through official platforms. Violations of the Code, particularly through social media or technology, may result in warnings, fines of up to NPR 100,000, or even disqualification of candidacy under the Election Commission Act, 2016.³¹

24 Election Code of Conduct 2026, Clause 15(3)

25 Id., Clause 13(1)(P)

26 Id., Clause 15(2)

27 Id., Clause 15(2)(c)

28 Id., Clause 13(1)(p)

29 Id., Clause 4(l)

30 Id., Chapter 9

31 Id., Clause 48

Social Media Management Directive, 2023

The Social Media Management Directive 2023, issued by the Government of Nepal in 2023 under the Electronic Transaction Act, aims to regulate the use of social media networks and to promote self-regulation by social network platform operators and users of social networks operating in Nepal.³² It defines social media and social media platforms broadly, including services that enable interactive communication and user-generated content such as Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, WhatsApp, and others.³³

The Directive requires all social media platforms to enlist with the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, while existing platforms must complete enrollment within a specified timeframe. Foreign platforms must establish an office or appoint a local point of contact in Nepal for coordination and grievance handling.³⁴ Platforms are categorized as small or large based on user numbers, with larger platforms subject to stricter obligations.

The Directive strictly prohibits a wide range of activities on social media, including creating fake accounts, spreading hate speech, misinformation, defamatory or misleading content, cyberbullying, phishing, impersonation, and hacking. It also bans the unauthorized sharing of private content, obscene or violent material, child exploitation, human trafficking, terrorism-related content, gambling, drug promotion, and caste-based discrimination. Additionally, users are prohibited from disrupting privacy, sharing manipulated content intended to

32 Social Media Management Directive 2023, Available at: <https://www.mocit.gov.np/content/8361/8361-directives-for-managing-the-us/>

33 Id., Section 2(e)

34 Id., Section 11

harm individuals, and promoting or engaging in any activity that violates existing laws.

To ensure enforcement, the Directive establishes a Social Media Management Unit responsible for handling complaints, monitoring compliance, and directing platforms to remove illegal content. Social media operators are required to maintain transparency, ensure data protection, moderate content, and follow international standards, while users are prohibited from engaging in activities that threaten national security, social harmony, or public order.

Online Media Operation Directives, 2017

The Online Media Operation Directives 2017, issued by the Government of Nepal, regulates the registration, renewal, operation, monitoring, and conduct of online media and online journalism in Nepal.³⁵ It requires all online media outlets to register with the Department of Information, and renew their registration annually.³⁶ Media outlets must also disclose ownership, editorial responsibility, and maintain transparency by displaying key information such as registration details and contact information on their websites.³⁷

The Directive establishes content and ethical standards for online media, requiring adherence to the journalist code of conduct³⁸ and ensuring accountability for all published content, including re-publication and sub-domain content.³⁹ Online media are

35 Online Media Operation Directives, 2017, Available at: <https://www.fnjnepal.org/np/resource/33>

36 Id., Section 6

37 Id., Section 9

38 Id., Section 15

39 Id., Section 12

required to archive published content for at least six months and correct or retract inaccurate information while maintaining records.

It strictly prohibits publication or dissemination of content that threatens national sovereignty, territorial integrity, social harmony, or inter-community relations. It also bans content involving defamation, contempt of court, incitement to crime, discrimination based on caste, gender or ethnicity, and misleading information that may affect public order or international relations.⁴⁰

The Directive provides monitoring mechanisms through the Department of Information and the Press Council Nepal, both empowered to inspect compliance, list media outlets, and enforce journalist ethical standards.⁴¹ Non-compliant media may face suspension or loss of government benefits.⁴² It also establishes a grievance mechanism allowing individuals to file complaints regarding online content, which are then investigated by the Press Council.⁴³

Journalist Code of Conduct, 2016

The Journalist Code of Conduct, 2016 (amended in 2019), issued by the Press Council Nepal, establishes professional and ethical standards for all journalists and media outlets in Nepal, including online media.⁴⁴ It aims to ensure responsible journalism in line

40 Id., Section 11

41 Id., Section 17

42 Id., Section 18

43 Id., Section 20

44 Journalist Code of Conduct, 2016 (amended in 2019), Available at: <https://presscouncilnepal.gov.np/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/CoC-Eng-2073-amd-2076.pdf>

with press freedom, freedom of expression, and the right to information, while maintaining accountability and public trust.

The Code requires journalists to report in a factual, balanced, and objective manner, clearly distinguishing between news, opinion, and advertisement.⁴⁵ It emphasizes respect for human rights, editorial independence, social responsibility, and protection of vulnerable groups.⁴⁶ Journalists must also ensure transparency in sourcing, protect confidential sources, and respect individual privacy while prioritizing public interest.

It prohibits the publication of content that threatens national sovereignty, social harmony, or public order, as well as content that promotes discrimination, violence, hate speech, terrorism, crime, or misinformation. It also restricts harmful reporting practices such as manipulating images, misusing technology, publishing sensitive victim identities without consent, or spreading misleading or sensationalized health or disaster-related information.⁴⁷

The Code includes provisions for corrections, right of reply, and complaint mechanisms, allowing affected individuals to seek redress through media organizations or the Press Council Nepal. It empowers the Council to investigate violations and impose sanctions such as warnings, suspension of press accreditation, blacklisting, or removal of media benefits.

Policy on the Use of Social Media in Electoral Management, 2020

The Policy on the Use of Social Media in Electoral Management, 2020 was introduced by the Election Commission of Nepal

45 Id., Clause 4

46 Id., Clause 4(2)

47 Id., Clause 5

(ECN) to provide a structured framework for the use of social media in electoral processes.⁴⁸ It recognizes the rapid expansion of internet access and social media platforms in Nepal and their growing role in voter education, public communication, information dissemination, and election management.

The policy aims to improve timely, accurate election information, expand digital voter education, and strengthen two-way communication between the ECN and citizens, with particular emphasis on including women, youth, persons with disabilities, marginalized communities, and remote populations.⁴⁹ It also promotes collaboration among government agencies, media, civil society, academic institutions, fact-checkers, internet service providers, and digital platforms to support a safe, reliable information environment.

Overall, the policy represents Nepal's first comprehensive attempt to integrate social media into election governance. It reflects both the opportunities and risks of digital platforms in electoral processes and provides a framework for improving transparency, participation, and information integrity.

Other Relevant Laws

Electronic Transaction Act, 2008

Section 47 of the Electronic Transactions Act, 2008 criminalizes the publication or dissemination of illegal or harmful content through electronic means such as computers and the internet. It prohibits content that is restricted by law, violates public morality or decency, spreads hate or hostility, or harms social

48 Policy on the Use of Social Media in Electoral Management, 2020, Available at: <https://election.gov.np/source/%>

49 Id., Section 6

harmony among different castes, religions, or communities. It also criminalizes harassment, humiliation, or indecent behavior, particularly against women, in electronic form.⁵⁰

Anyone found guilty of such offenses may be punished with a fine of up to NPR 100,000, imprisonment of up to five years, or both. In cases of repeated offenses, the penalty is increased by one and a half times the previous punishment.

National Penal Code (Muluki Criminal Code), 2017

The Muluki Criminal Code, 2017 includes several provisions relevant to digital communication, online expression, and election-related speech, particularly concerning misinformation, hate speech, privacy, and defamation.⁵¹

Section 70 prohibits spreading rumors or engaging in acts that disturb public order, incite violence, undermine national sovereignty, or harm communal harmony, with penalties of up to one year's imprisonment, a fine of up to NPR 30,000, or both. Section 224 criminalizes sexual harassment, including through electronic means, punishable by up to three years' imprisonment and a fine of up to NPR 30,000. Sections 295 and 296 protect privacy by prohibiting unauthorized photography, image manipulation, and the sharing or sale of someone's photographs without consent, especially when intended to harm or exploit them. Section 298 prohibits unauthorized access, interception, or sharing of private electronic communications, safeguarding

50 Electronic Transaction Act, 2008, Available at: <https://lawcommission.gov.np/content/13397/electronic--electronic--traded-international-act--2063/>

51 National Penal Code, 2017, Available at: <https://lawcommission.gov.np/content/13454/criminal-code-2074/>

digital privacy. Sections 305 and 306 criminalize slander and defamation, including in online and electronic forms, where false or harmful statements damage a person's reputation, while Section 307 increases penalties for defamation committed through electronic or mass communication platforms and allows for victim compensation.

These provisions also apply to online political communication, particularly regarding misinformation, harassment, and reputational harm during elections.

Privacy Act, 2017

Privacy Act, 2017 operationalizes the fundamental right to privacy guaranteed under Article 28 of the Constitution of Nepal.⁵² It also establishes legal safeguards for personal data, private communications, and electronic information. It categorizes personal data and sensitive data. Chapter 9 of the Act specifically addresses protections tailored to digital interactions, data communication, and local surveillance. Section 19(1) explicitly guarantees that personal information, documents, correspondence, data, or character attributes stored or handled via electronic means remain private. Section 19(2) explicitly bans any person from obtaining notice, information, or correspondence related to another person, which remained in electronic means in any unauthorized manner. Voter databases are heavily consolidated repositories containing sensitive details that mirror the personal and sensitive information categorized by law. Section 2(c)(4) explicitly mentions voter identity card and details of such card issued by public body as personal information and the Section

52 Privacy Act, 2017, Available at: https://giwmscdnone.gov.np/media/app/public/275/posts/1721034328_44.pdf

27 explicitly labels an individual's political affiliation as sensitive personal data that public entities are prohibited from processing or profiling outside strictly narrowed exceptions provided in Section 27 (3) (a) and (b). Mass profiling or processing the voter lists to run targeted political campaigns are contrary to Section 12(4) (g) and Section 26 which require explicit consent to transfer or publicize the data for any purpose. Any act contrary to Section 12 (4), Section 26 and Section 27 are punishable with imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years or fine not exceeding thirty thousand rupees or both shall be imposed for the offence referred to in sub-section (1).

6. ROLES OF KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES

a. Election Commission of Nepal (ECN)

The Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) is a constitutional and independent body established under Article 245 of the Constitution of Nepal, mandated to conduct, supervise, direct, and control elections at all levels of government.⁵³ It is the central institution responsible for ensuring free, fair, transparent, and credible elections in accordance with constitutional and legal provisions.

The Commission consists of a Chief Election Commissioner and four Election Commissioners appointed by the President on the recommendation of the Constitutional Council. Collectively, they are responsible for overseeing the electoral process. However, during the 2026 House of Representatives election, the Commission operated with only three commissioners, including

53 <https://election.gov.np/>

an acting Chief Election Commissioner, due to incomplete appointments.⁵⁴

To ensure decentralized electoral administration, the ECN maintains a multi-tier structure comprising seven Provincial Election Offices and 77 District Election Offices. These offices support voter registration, voter education, logistical coordination, and local-level election management, ensuring access to electoral services across the country.

b. Government Agencies and Security Bodies

The Ministry of Home Affairs, Nepal Police, Armed Police Force and Nepal Army were primarily responsible for coordinating security and administrative measures to ensure free, fair, and fear-free 2026 elections. For the fearless, free and fair election, the security bodies adopted the Integrated Security Plan 2026, under which all four security agencies, the Nepali Army, Nepal Police, Armed Police Force, and National Investigation Department, were mobilized alongside a large number of temporary election police personnel.⁵⁵ The Ministry also coordinated overall election security. The Election Commission formed a Joint Election Operations Center (JEOC), along with representatives of the Home Ministry, and of security bodies as members including Nepal Army, Nepal Police, Armed Police Force and official members of the National Investigation Department.⁵⁶ The ECN

54 <https://republicaorigin.nagariknetwork.com/news/election-commission-without-chief-as-cec-yadav-retires>

55 <https://theannapurnaexpress.com/story/61862/>

56 <https://ekantipur.com/news/2026/01/25/en/house-of-representatives-member-election-joint-election-operation-center-established-17-52.html>

used the tools and experts from the Army's Cyber Security Directorate and the Nepal Police Cyber Bureau for digital platform monitoring.⁵⁷

c. National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs)

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and constitutional commissions in Nepal, such as the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), National Women Commission, Madheshi Commission, National Inclusion Commission, Indigenous Nationalities Commission play important roles in promoting and protecting human rights, including during elections. These bodies are established under the Constitution of Nepal (2015) as independent constitutional commissions. Their primary mandates focus on monitoring, investigating, and advocating for rights related to their specific domains.

Whereas the NHRC holds the broadest mandate, overseeing overall human rights compliance, the National Women Commission focuses on gender equality, women's participation, prevention of gender-based violence, including online harassment, and implementation of reservation quotas; the Madheshi Commission and other inclusion commissions work to protect the rights of Madheshi and other marginalized communities, as prescribed in their mandate, addressing discrimination and ensuring fair representation in candidate selection and voter access.

Based on its constitutional mandates, NHRIs monitor the entire electoral process from a human rights perspective. Their key functions include observing pre-election, election, and post-election phases for violations such as discrimination, violence,

57 <https://www.bbc.com/nepali/articles/c75xxd5wx27o>

intimidation, hate speech, disenfranchisement of marginalized groups, and restrictions on freedoms of expression and assembly. They issue public appeals and recommendations to political parties, candidates, the ECN, and the government; handle complaints; conduct awareness programs; and collaborate with the ECN through formal mechanisms like MOUs to ensure inclusive, free, and fair elections.

d. Political Parties

Political parties play a central and indispensable role in Nepal's electoral process as per the Constitution and election laws. They nominate candidates for the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) seats, prepare closed lists for the Proportional Representation (PR) seats, mobilize voters, conduct campaigns, articulate policies, and form governments after elections. They are required to register with the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN), follow its Code of Conduct, and ensure internal democratic functioning, including periodic elections of office-bearers and minimum women's representation.⁵⁸ The 2026 election, triggered by Gen Z-led protests and political upheaval, saw a record number of 120 parties registered, whereas 63 parties filed nomination of their candidates, reflecting high fragmentation and the rise of new forces.⁵⁹ There were 3,406 candidates, including 388 women, 3017 men, and one from the "other" category, in the FPTP ballot. Similarly, 1,772 women and 1,363 men contested in the election under the proportional representation system.⁶⁰

58 <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src>

59 <https://kathmandupost.com/politics/2025/12/01/a-total-of-120-parties-seek-to-contest-march-5-elections>

60 UNDP Report "Use of Online Platforms in the Election of the House of Representatives, NEPAL" Available at <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2026-05/final-consolidated-report-2026.04.08bb.pdf>

e. Digital platforms

Digital platforms were one of the key stakeholders In Nepal's March elections, as treated by the Election Code of Conduct issued by ECN. Social media platforms were expected to act proactively to preserve election integrity, curb misinformation and disinformation, address Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV), and tackle hate speech. The Election Code of Conduct 2082 explicitly outlined obligations for social media use, including restrictions on misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, and content violating electoral integrity,⁶¹ along with requirements for transparency in political advertising⁶² and removal of violative content.⁶³

One of the reasons for such a treatment to the digital platform was the penetration and impact of internet and social media in Nepal. As of late 2025, Nepal demonstrated substantial mobile connectivity, with 32.4 million active cellular mobile connections, equivalent to 109 percent of the country's approximately 29.6 million population.⁶⁴ Overall subscription density, including multiple connections per individual, exceeded 143 percent, according to data from the Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA).⁶⁵ This growth was driven predominantly by mobile broadband. Unique internet user penetration stood at a more moderate level, with approximately 16.6 million unique internet

61 Election code of conduct, 2082

62 <https://bdnews24.com/national-election-2026/175c460b6d48>

63 <https://ekantipur.com/news/2026/02/03/how-is-the-election-commission-in-collaboration-with-the-military-and-police-stopping-disinformation-created-by-ai-38-53.html>

64 <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2026-nepal>

65 <https://www.nepalitelecom.com/2017/07/mobile-internet-broadband-penetration-nepal.html>

users, representing about 56 percent of the total population.⁶⁶ Social media adoption was similarly widespread, reaching 14.8 million users (roughly 50 percent of the population) as of October 2025.⁶⁷

The ECN stated that it coordinated with Meta and TikTok for the technical assistance in controlling election-related misinformation on social media,⁶⁸ to enforce the Code and ensure a free and fair HOR election.

'See Section 7 for a detailed description on the use of digital platforms during HOR Election 2026)

f. Media and Civil Society

The media and civil society are vital stakeholders in any democratic election, acting as watchdogs, information providers, fact-checkers, and advocates for transparency, inclusion, and accountability. The Election Code of Conduct issued by the ECN outlined specific roles for both, including upholding ethical standards, maintaining neutrality, avoiding misinformation, and supporting a free, fair, and peaceful election.

Media are responsible for factual, balanced reporting on candidates, parties, manifestos, and campaign activities, while avoiding sensationalism, hate speech, financial assistance, discriminatory news, free campaign advertising, or any content violating the Code. They must provide equitable coverage to all contesting

66 <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2026-nepal>

67 Id.

68 <https://techpana.com/2026/154935/meta-and-tiktok-to-help-election-commission-control-election-misinformation>

parties and candidates, promote voter education, disseminate official ECN information, and follow restrictions on opinion polls, premature campaign coverage, and inflammatory reporting, particularly online. These regulations for neutrality applied not only to domestic outlets but also to the international media.

Civil society organizations (CSOs), including NGOs, human rights groups, and observer networks, carry a special responsibility as election observers. They monitor whether the election is conducted in a free, fair, and peaceful manner, whether political parties and candidates comply with the Election Code of Conduct, and whether marginalized groups such as women, Madheshi, Muslim, Dalit, Indigenous communities, and persons with disabilities receive meaningful participation. They also track violations like intimidation, vote buying, or misuse of state resources, while conducting voter education, advocating for rights-based manifestos, and submitting recommendations to strengthen the democratic process. For this election,⁶⁹ ECN selected a total 31 election observation organizations, including 27 NGO and 4 INGO as election observers organizations. Under 31 election observation organizations, around 700 election observers were deployed all over Nepal to observe the election. Media and civil society also served as key partners in voter education.

(See Section 7 for detailed observation on the use of digital platforms by the civil society and Media during HOR Election 2026)

Coordination and collaboration among stakeholders

Coordination and collaboration among key stakeholders, including the ECN, the government, security agencies,

69 <https://en.setopati.com/political/165928>

development partners, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), civil society organizations, media, and digital platforms played a vital role in conducting the House of Representatives election amidst political uncertainty.

The ECN showed strong leadership by bringing together the government, political parties, security forces, development partners, civil society, media, and digital platforms.⁷⁰ This multi-stakeholder coordination was effective in areas such as logistical arrangements, security deployment, voter list management, polling operations, and overcoming legal hurdles. Regular coordination meetings and joint mechanisms such as Election Information Dissemination and Coordination Center (EIDC) and the Information Integrity Promotion Unit (IIPU) helped ensure the election was held successfully even in a difficult political environment. The ECN also claimed to coordinate with the development partners, digital platforms, civil society and civitech companies and organizations. Major examples of coordination and collaboration among the stakeholders are mentioned in detail in the relevant sections below.

7. USE OF DIGITAL SPACE BY ELECTORAL ACTORS AND EMERGING TRENDS IN NEPAL ELECTION 2026

Digital tools formed the backbone of Nepal's 2026 HoR election, transforming political communication, voter outreach, real-time monitoring, and enforcement. Digital platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, X, YouTube, WhatsApp, and AI-powered websites saw intensive use, increasingly shaping

70 <https://ekantipur.com/news/2026/03/02/en/550000-manpower-mobilized-for-voting-management-and-security-00-41.html>

political communication, voter engagement, campaign strategies, and information dissemination. The Election Code of Conduct 2082 pushed for “Green Elections”, favoring digital over physical materials, however this also brought forth issues of deepfakes, anonymous accounts, harmful content, and TFGBV. One of the participants of FGD noted that “*Digital platforms expanded democratic participation but also introduced new forms of influence, manipulation, and governance challenges, with algorithms shaping the visibility and amplification of certain narratives over substantive policy debate.*” This section discusses the use of digital tools and spaces by the major electoral actors, along with the major trends observed throughout the electoral process.

Election Commission of Nepal

The Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) emerged as one of the highly active actors in digital spaces. From electoral information dissemination to voter education, ECN leveraged the use of digital platforms during the March election. For the regulation of digital space during election, ECN enforced a comprehensive Election Code of Conduct 2026 (*explained in the above legal and policy section*). For the first time in Nepal’s electoral history, the ECN officially incorporated AI regulation into its Election Code of Conduct 2026 for the 2026 House of Representatives election.⁷¹ The code strictly prohibited the use of AI tools to generate or manipulate content aimed at spreading misinformation, deepfakes, or deceptive narratives that could adversely affect the integrity of the electoral process.⁷²

Further, the ECN also established the Election Information Dissemination and Coordination Center (EIDC) at its central

71 <https://www.technologykhabar.com/2025/12/29/225112/>

72 <https://election.gov.np/admin/public/storage/HOR>

office on December 26, 2025 to strengthen communication, coordination with stakeholders, and management of information flow. The EIDC was structured into three coordinated units: the Media Center, the Information Integrity Promotion Unit (IIPU), and the Digital Voter Education Unit (DVEU).⁷³

Within this structure, the IIPU was mandated to monitor and counter mis/disinformation, hate speech, and other harmful content; promote accurate and trustworthy election-related information; refer serious violations to relevant authorities; and utilize monitoring tools and data for strategic communication aimed at discouraging problematic information trends.⁷⁴

As reported by the EIDC, the IIPU identified and analyzed 998 instances of toxic information during its operational period.⁷⁵ Upon detection of mis/disinformation, the ECN referred content creators and disseminators to the Nepal Police Cyber Bureau, the Nepal Telecommunications Authority, and the Press Council for further action.⁷⁶ The Commission also maintained a dedicated email mechanism for reporting violations of the Election Code of Conduct.⁷⁷

However, significant gaps remain in terms of transparency and accountability.⁷⁸ While referrals were made to relevant authorities,

73 <https://election.gov.np/admin/public//storage/HOR%202082/Press%20Release/2082-09-11%20Press%20Release.pdf>

74 Id.

75 <https://ebulletin.election.gov.np/2026/03/3031/>

76 <https://english.ratopati.com/story/49545/commissions-letter-to-take-action-against-290-producers-and-communicators-of-harmful-information>

77 <https://ebulletin.election.gov.np/2026/02/2649/>

78 <https://ebulletin.election.gov.np/2026/03/3031/>

there is no publicly available data on how many of these flagged pieces of content were subsequently removed, what specific narratives or subject matters they involved, or what enforcement actions were ultimately taken. Information regarding the identities of responsible actors or the outcomes of investigations is also not systematically disclosed. *“Despite media reports, no details of the identified content were publicly disclosed through the Commission’s website or official social media platforms”* as noted by one of the respondents in FGD. This lack of publicly accessible follow-up data limits the ability to assess the effectiveness of the monitoring and enforcement process.

As noted by FGD respondents, although ECN’s monitoring efforts represent an important step, *“addressing false and harmful content is not only a punitive exercise but also a preventive measure aimed at limiting the spread of misinformation and protecting the public. Timely public communication regarding identified content is therefore essential, yet the absence of such updates reflects institutional opacity.”* Overall, these gaps point to weak institutional capacity, limited enforcement follow-through, and an underdeveloped accountability mechanism, leaving digital campaigning only partially regulated despite extensive monitoring efforts.

Regarding the oversight of media content, the Commission had intensified oversight of media content before the election date to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process. ECN directed the Press Council Nepal to monitor media outlets and cautioned journalists against publishing or amplifying content that could influence voter behavior, and instructed authorities to suspend 11 online platforms conducting ‘live’ opinion polling,⁷⁹ citing

79 <https://www.technologykhabar.com/2026/02/26/231891/>

the risk of misleading voters. As polling day approached, the ECN intensified oversight of both traditional and online media, targeting content that could influence voter behavior.⁸⁰ These measures were grounded in the Election Code of Conduct, which restricts the publication of opinion polls, surveys, or content favoring or disadvantaging candidates.

Few concerns regarding the right to privacy of voters were also raised during the election process. The ECN had deployed the UNDP's AI-based "E-Monitor Plus" system to monitor misinformation, hate speech, and harmful content across social media platforms in collaboration with security agencies.⁸¹ The system was trained on 200+ media links and election-related keywords and was designed to analyze multilingual public content, including Devanagari, Roman Nepali, and English, using keyword-based tracking. While this reflects an effort to safeguard information integrity and strengthen election monitoring, it also raises important concerns regarding privacy, digital surveillance, and accountability. The Commission clarified that private messages are not accessed.⁸² However, the use of third-party AI-powered monitoring tools may be prone to algorithmic bias, inaccuracies in content classification, and risks relating to data protection and data governance. Such systems may disproportionately flag certain types of content, languages, or communities, particularly in complex multilingual contexts. The deployment of AI-driven monitoring tools therefore highlights the need for clear legal safeguards, transparency regarding their operational scope and methodology, independent oversight mechanisms, robust data

80 <https://www.ukeraa.com/news/detail/171229/>

81 <https://ekantipur.com/news/2026/01/21/en/how-is-the-election-commission-monitoring-social-media-20-21.html>

82 Id.

protection measures, and adherence to the principles of necessity, proportionality, and due process.

Despite the claim of ECN, significant gaps in the privacy issues were persistent. Through the First Amendment to the House of Representatives Member Election Directive, 2082, the ECN permitted political parties and independent candidates to obtain digital copies of voter lists upon payment of NPR 10,000 for nationwide access, NPR 5,000 for provincial access, and NPR 3,000 for district or constituency-level access.⁸³ While the shared data excluded dates of birth, citizenship numbers, and mobile numbers, it still contained sensitive personal information, including voter ID numbers, age, gender identity, and parents' names.⁸⁴ This raised serious concerns regarding compliance with the Constitution of Nepal and the Privacy Act, 2017. Such disclosure facilitates profiling, heightens risks for gender minorities, and undermines privacy, democratic integrity, and public trust in the electoral process. In the absence of comprehensive data protection legislation and independent oversight, such systems risk expanding the boundaries of state surveillance without sufficient accountability.

For the first time in the election process, ECN integrated the National Identity Card system with the voter roll, allowing citizens with National ID numbers to register online without visiting election offices for biometric verification or photographs, thereby simplifying and expediting the voter registration process.⁸⁵ Likewise, to address voters' and the general public's

83 <https://techpana.com/2026/154926/election-commission-to-provide-digital-voter-lists-to-parties-and-candidates-under-new-guidelines>

84 <https://theannapurnaexpress.com/story/61257/>

85 <https://techpana.com/2025/154001/national-identity-card-integrated-into-election-system-voter-roll-registration-now-online>

election-related inquiries, a call center was operational from January 19, 2026, and responded to 8,220 inquiries from voters concerning the voter list, voter education, the election code of conduct, and other matters related to the electoral process.⁸⁶

For collaboration between security agencies and overall coordination of the election process, the Joint Election Operations Center (JEOC) was operational from January 25, 2026. ECN also collaborated with the Nepal Army for social media monitoring.⁸⁷

The Media Center managed the dissemination of information regarding the Commission's activities, coordinated with media outlets, conducted press briefings, monitored and analyzed content published in daily newspapers, identified materials violating the code of conduct, recommended appropriate actions, and produced voter education materials. One of the respondents of the KII highlighted that *"ECN had anticipated the increase in use of social media during the upcoming election, even before the date of election was announced, however, as this election came early than anticipated date, ECN was not able to leverage the platform as it could have for the voter education."* Even so, the Digital Voter Education Unit under ECN produced a total of 704 distinct digital materials, including videos and posters related to the electoral process, voter education, and civic awareness, which were disseminated through the Commission's digital platforms.⁸⁸ In this process, the ECN had coordinated with different organizations including SpeakUp Nepal, Research and Communication International, The Asia Foundation, UNDP, UN Women and others.

86 <https://ebulletin.election.gov.np/2026/03/3031/>

87 <https://www.onlinekhabar.com/2026/01/1849953/social-media-monitoring-during-elections-is-done-with-the-help-of-the-nepali-army-commission>

88 <https://ebulletin.election.gov.np/2026/03/3031/>

The ECN actively sought cooperation from major social media platforms. ECN partnered with TikTok, signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to support election integrity initiatives for the HoR election 2026.⁸⁹ This partnership enabled initiatives such as launching an in-app Election Centre, promoting voter education, curbing misinformation, and supporting ethical digital campaigning. ECN also tried to collaborate with Meta, parent company of Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, on technical assistance to control misinformation.⁹⁰ However, no formal or effective collaboration materialized with Meta during the 2026 elections. *“Though Facebook remained the most widely used platform for political advertising and campaigning, and despite the ECN stating it had reached out to Meta, the two sides did not work closely together this time, unlike in the previous election of 2022,”* stated one of the respondents of KII.

The 2026 election also demonstrated the growing role of social media campaigning and digital political advertising, raising questions about the ECN's ability to regulate and monitor digital campaign financing. Although the ECN officially permitted election campaigning only from February 16, 2026, many candidates, political parties, and their supporters openly violated this through premature social media campaigning.⁹¹ The Meta Ad Library showed that political campaigns were boosted before this date,⁹² undermining the level playing field that the Code of Conduct aimed to ensure. The ECN's failure to effectively regulate

89 <https://www.nepalitelecom.com/2026/02/tiktok-and-election-commission-nepal-partner-to-ensure-integrity-and-fairness-for-falgun-21-elections.html>

90 <https://english.onlinekhabar.com/online-election-code-of-conduct.html>

91 <https://english.onlinekhabar.com/online-election-code-of-conduct.html>

92 Id.

and monitor digital campaign financing also contributed to an uneven playing field among candidates and parties, as discussed further under Political Parties and Candidates below.

Political Parties and Candidates

The 2026 election marked a clear shift from traditional campaign methods toward digital-first political communication. Conventional materials such as posters, pamphlets, banners, flags, and badges saw reduced use, with printing businesses reporting a noticeable decline in demand compared to earlier election cycles.⁹³ *“Candidates are increasingly moving away from traditional door-to-door outreach and printed materials, opting instead for digital platforms and paid social media promotions to engage with wider audiences more efficiently”* as highlighted by one of the respondents of KII. Although most political parties used their official websites to publish their visions, ideologies, and manifestos, during the election both political parties and candidates relied heavily on social media for direct voter engagement, manifesto dissemination, live streaming, and narrative shaping.

One of the participants of the FGD said *“Despite the widespread adoption of digital platforms for election campaigning, the official social media pages and websites of political parties remained relatively underutilized. Instead, candidates primarily relied on their personal social media accounts and targeted online advertisements to engage with voters and expand their outreach.”*

Major political parties, including the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), Nepali Congress, CPN-UML, the Communist Party of Nepal, Shram Sankriti Party and Rastriya Prajatantra Party,

93 <https://english.khabarhub.com/2026/21/536012/>

used digital platforms to publish and disseminate their election manifestos and policy agendas. *“The official page of political parties on social media also served as an important channel for voter engagement and communication”,* as highlighted by a KII respondent. *“However, digital campaign was largely driven by individual candidates rather than the official party accounts. Candidates’ personal posts, videos, and promotional content generated significantly greater visibility and interaction compared to content published through the parties’ official social media pages, reflecting a growing trend toward personalized and candidate-centric digital political communication”,* shared one of the participants FGD.

Political parties and candidates hired dedicated social media management companies and professionals to manage their online presence and conduct digital political campaigning throughout the election period.⁹⁴ *“Candidates used the platforms to reach youth and first-time voters to build the public perception”* highlighted one of the KII respondents. All major parties had their own social media and digital campaigning teams,⁹⁵ at the same time many outsourced content creation, targeting, and boosting to IT firms, with daily spends per post ranging from NPR 1,200 - 20,000.⁹⁶ Political parties also relied on professional IT agencies, content creators, and ‘viral packages’ prepared by companies offering digital promotion and targeted negative campaigning packages.⁹⁷

94 <https://ekantipur.com/news/2026/01/28/en/election-winning-package-on-social-media-53-00.html>

95 <https://openthemagazine.com/world/ink-fades-influencers-rise-in-nepals-hybrid-election-campaign>

96 <https://ekantipur.com/technology/2026/01/28/candidates-pay-up-to-20000-per-post-for-their-campaign-33-21.html>

97 <https://english.nepalnews.com/s/politics/from-loudspeakers-to-viral-campaigns-how-nepali-elections-went-digital/>

Political parties and candidates used these platforms for direct, low-cost outreach. They ran paid promotions and shared speeches, campaign videos, memes, reels, and AI-generated content to reach wider audiences efficiently. *“Newer parties and digitally savvy candidates, particularly from the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), excelled by leveraging strong digital-native branding and direct outreach on Facebook, TikTok and Instagram, often bypassing traditional media”* as noted by one of the respondents in the FGD.

Data-driven strategies in political communication visibly increased, including micro-targeting, automated calls, and personalized outreach. The emergence of dedicated websites offering digital war room-style services, enabling candidates to manage their entire digital campaigns, monitor the activities of political rivals, and analyze voter responses in real time,⁹⁸ and paid engagement practices⁹⁹ illustrate how online mobilization became a central component of electoral campaigns. Platforms like *MyCampaign.com*, operated by Berri Technology, let candidates manage voter outreach, team coordination, social media campaigns, and SMS messaging in one place.¹⁰⁰ Candidates often relied on such services because they could not personally maintain their social media accounts.¹⁰¹ However, such messaging strategies were mostly opaque, with no transparency on how they were run or how parties accessed voters' contact details.¹⁰² Political parties and

98 <https://ekantipur.com/news/2026/01/28/election-winning-package-on-social-media-53-00.html>

99 <https://www.facebook.com/ads/library/report/?source=onboarding>

100 <https://ekantipur.com/news/2026/01/28/election-winning-package-on-social-media-53-00.html>

101 Id.

102 <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2026/01/14/bulk-sms-calling-for-royalist-protests-sparks-privacy-concerns>

candidates also intensified campaigning on Meta platforms for the election.¹⁰³

Data extracted from the Meta Platforms Ad Library for the 90-day period preceding the March 2026 elections shows that approximately USD 46,857 was spent on digital political advertising.¹⁰⁴ Political parties also recognized both the opportunities and risks associated with social media use during elections. For instance, the Rashtriya Swatantra Party (RSP) had directed its leaders, candidates, and supporters to refrain from making unnecessary comments on social media during the vote-counting process.¹⁰⁵ The party's Central Disciplinary Commission warned that irresponsible or premature posts regarding election results could result in disciplinary action under party regulations. Members were also urged to maintain discipline and avoid interpreting early vote counts as a definitive indication of victory.¹⁰⁶ This demonstrates how political parties increasingly sought to regulate online conduct and messaging to maintain organizational coherence and manage public perception during the electoral process.

During the initial phase of the election, following the official date announcement, AI-generated deepfakes were aggressively deployed against political figures, including manipulated footage of UML leader Pradeep Gyawali¹⁰⁷ and fabricated imagery of

103 <https://ekantipur.com/business/2026/01/22/political-parties-and-candidates-are-increasing-advertising-on-facebook-25-55.html>

104 <https://www.facebook.com/ads/library/report/?source=nav-header>

105 <https://english.ratopati.com/story/52498/rashtriya-swayamsevak-sangh-rss-warns-of-action-against-those-who-post-inappropriate-content-on-social-media-in-the-frenzy-of-victory>

106 <https://www.techpana.com/2026/155615>

107 <https://ekantipur.com/news/2025/12/16/what-is-the-truth-behind-the-video-of-uml-leader-pradeep-gyawali-crying-57-08.html>

overcrowded campaign rallies, distorting public perception. One viral video deceptively portrayed RSP President Rabi Lamichhane, then-Minister Kulman Ghising, and then-Kathmandu Mayor Balen Shah walking together under the caption ‘Coming Soon Together.’ This early deployment of deepfakes reflected a trend of synthetic media being weaponized to simulate political solidarity and manipulate voter expectations.

Political parties and candidates were at the center of disinformation and hate speech that spread during elections. Women candidates including Ranju Darshan, Nisha Adhikari, Reema Bishwokarma, Sobita Gautam, Eleeza Gautam faced gendered abuse and harassment.¹⁰⁸ Women candidates faced intense scrutiny and abuse online, often focused on their bodies, age, health, or reproductive status rather than their vision or agenda.¹⁰⁹ Purple foundation monitored the official Facebook pages of 20 women candidates and found that 13 of them experienced online gender-based violence (OGBV) during the election period.¹¹⁰ Hate speech was directed particularly at women and marginalized candidates, especially those with a strong presence and popularity on digital platforms. *Kalam Weekly* monitored the social media activity of eight prominent women candidates from different political parties between January and mid-February, they analysed 753 Facebook and X (Twitter) posts and 92,694 comments, focusing on five categories of hate speech: gendered/ sexist abuse, misinformation and disinformation, character

108 <https://www.nimjn.org/np/detail/367/nepal-election-online-harassment-against-female-candidates-on-the-rise>

109 <https://kathmandupost.com/politics/2026/02/01/women-election-candidates-in-nepal-face-abuse-and-vitriol>

110 Purple Foundation, “Feminist Monitoring of Elections and Learning Report” (Unpublished)

assassination, sexualised harassment, and violent threats.¹¹¹ While only 346 comments were classified as hate speech, the findings highlighted the gendered nature of online abuse. Among these, 234 were sexist or gender-based comments, followed by 50 cases of misinformation/disinformation, 49 cases of character assassination, 10 instances of sexualised harassment, and four violent threats. More than 60 percent of the hate speech targeted candidates based on their gender rather than their political positions, showing that online hostility against women in politics remains deeply rooted in gender discrimination, reflecting patriarchal and misogynistic behaviour. The research also showed that women with intersectional and marginalised identities, in the context of Nepal, this includes Dalits, indigenous Janajatis, Madhesis and others, are more likely to face gender-based violence both online and offline.¹¹²

Caste based discrimination was also visible during the election. Candidates from *Dalit* communities such as Reema Biswokarma, Khagendra Sunar were targeted mainly because of their caste. Identitybased targeting was majorly seen in social media platforms. One of the FGD participants said that “*targeted messages were circulated during the election against a Dalit candidate, stating that if he won, people would have to greet him because he belonged to the Dalit community. Cases of vote confirmation were observed primarily in Karnali Province, where some candidates reportedly took voters to temples and asked them to swear religious oaths promising electoral support. These practices showed how religious influence was used to reinforce voter commitments and shape voting behavior.*”

111 <https://www.himalmag.com/nepal-women-politics-online-abuse/>

112 Id.

According to UNDP's eMonitor+ report, an analysis of 173,030 posts during the election period (January 1 to March 12, 2026) found Facebook to be the source of most online hate speech, followed by X and news websites.¹¹³ Facebook was the primary source of analysed online hate speech, accounting for 76% of cases, followed by Twitter (17%) and news websites. TikTok also emerged as a significant platform for problematic and harmful content on social media.¹¹⁴

Among the flagged posts, 164 contained hate speech, including hostile discourse (47%), political rhetoric and extreme narratives (31%), and explicit attacks or incitement targeting individuals or groups based on identity markers such as ethnicity, religion, or gender (22%). Most hate speech targeted men, likely due to the larger number of male candidates and prominent contests involving male candidates. While the majority of hate speech was directed at male candidates reflecting their higher representation in the contest, women faced a disproportionate intensity of gender-based online violence, including dehumanization and targeted "slut-shaming."¹¹⁵

A critical revelation of the study was that 54% of identified disinformation utilized AI-generated or altered media, with manipulated videos (86%) serving as the preferred tool for discrediting candidates and spreading false narratives. Furthermore, the system flagged 388 violations of the Election Code of Conduct, the most frequent being the dissemination of

113 <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2026-05/final-consolidated-report-2026.04.08bb.pdf>

114 Id.

115 Id.

false or hate-based information (128 instances) and the distortion of content using AI (95 instances).¹¹⁶

Misinformation and disinformation were also used to target specific politicians. Notable incidents include fake TikTok accounts created in RSP President Rabi Lamichhane's name offering iPhone giveaways,¹¹⁷ and viral false stories about journalist turned independent candidate Divakar Sah¹¹⁸ and former ANNFSU president Sujan Kadariya.¹¹⁹ Likewise, a misleading edited video distorted a speech by Nepali Congress leader Gagan Thapa to claim he had promised NPR 30,000 monthly allowances for citizens above 60, free mobile phones for those over 18, and free fuel for motorbike riders if he became Prime Minister.¹²⁰ Other incidents include an AI-generated image falsely claiming that Nepali migrant workers returning from Malaysia were carrying luggage featuring a candidate's photo;¹²¹ misleading posts suggesting Sher Bahadur Deuba had switched party,¹²² when in fact the news referred to a local leader with the same name; a viral video falsely framed as an overseas political endorsement;¹²³ selectively edited clips misrepresenting

116 Id.

117 <https://techpana.com/2026/155100>

118 <https://www.techpana.com/2026/155109>

119 <https://techpana.com/2026/155122>

120 <https://nepalfactcheck.org/2026/01/gagan-thapa-free-mobile-money-fuel-claim-factcheck/>

121 <https://nepalfactcheck.org/2026/02/harka-sampang-supporters-photo-factcheck/>

122 <https://www.techpana.com/2026/155340/misleading-posts-claim-deuba-joined-uml>

123 <https://nepalfactcheck.org/2026/02/abaki-bar-gagan-sarkar-boat-chant-video-is-from-nepal-not-abroad/>

statements by political leaders;¹²⁴ and exaggerated or out-of-context claims about natural resource discoveries¹²⁵ and corruption allegations.¹²⁶ Similarly, fabricated content targeted political figures, including false claims that Rastriya Swatantra Party candidate KP Khanal was involved in a clash in Kailali-2,¹²⁷ and an edited seven-year-old speech clip falsely portraying Nepali Congress President Gagan Thapa as insulting Indigenous communities.¹²⁸ Even after clarification from the concerned parties debunking from the fact-checking platforms, the spread of false content continued.

National Human Rights Commission

During the March Election, the NHRC played a prominent role by monitoring activities across all three phases of elections through its central, provincial, and district-level offices covering all 77 districts.¹²⁹ *“It formed dedicated monitoring teams, developed checklists aligned with national laws and international standards, engaged in stakeholder interactions with parties, candidates, civil society, and media, and operated election monitoring desks”* as noted during the KII. The Commission also conducted comprehensive media monitoring, including digital platforms, assessed

124 <https://nepalfactcheck.org/2026/02/did-rabi-lamichhane-say-uml-is-a-party-with-good-leaders/>

125 <https://techpana.com/2026/155331/dailekh-methane-gas-112-billion-cubic-meters-oli-claim-factcheck>

126 <https://nepalfactcheck.org/2026/02/did-ram-kumari-jhankri-say-kp-oli-does-nothing-except-corruption/>

127 <https://techpana.com/2026/155450/fact-check-edited-photo-falsely-claims-balen-ate-beef-and-alcohol-viral-kheer-image>

128 <https://nepalfactcheck.org/2026/02/did-gagan-thapa-insult-janajatis>

129 https://www.nhrcnepal.org/uploads/news_letter/HR_News_Letter_till_march_2026.pdf

compliance with the ECN's code of conduct, and later released a consolidated report.¹³⁰ Overall, it found the *"election largely satisfactory from a human rights viewpoint, though it noted areas for improvement such as better accessibility for vulnerable groups and higher inclusion in first-past-the-post seats"* noted one of the KII respondents. The NHRC and other commissions monitored digital media as part of their broader oversight, highlighting concerns around abusive content, privacy violations, and threats to electoral integrity and personal dignity, particularly against women and marginalized voices. While primary responsibility for regulating digital content lies with the ECN, *"the human rights commission emphasized balancing freedom of expression with protection from harms and advocated for improved digital literacy and responsible use of platforms,"* stated the KII respondent.

Press Council Nepal

Press Council Nepal (PCN) collaborated with the ECN to monitor media conduct during the election period. It organized discussions with editors, media representatives, and government stakeholders to promote compliance with the Election Code of Conduct and strengthen the media's role in responsible election coverage.¹³¹

In mid-February 2026, Setopati Online was flagged by the ECN for publishing constituency-level election projections, including analysis of Chitwan-3.¹³² The Commission cited provisions of the

130 [https://www.nhrcnepal.org/uploads/publication/Third_Quarterly_Report-RTI-Magh_to_Chaitra-2082_\(003\).pdf](https://www.nhrcnepal.org/uploads/publication/Third_Quarterly_Report-RTI-Magh_to_Chaitra-2082_(003).pdf)

131 <https://www.presscouncilnepal.gov.np/np/2026/01/29/11460/>

132 <https://ekantipur.com/news/2026/02/16/en/election-commission-writes-to-council-asking-for-action-against-setopati-37-58.html>

Election Code prohibiting opinion polls and content that could favor specific candidates during the restricted period and directed the outlet, through PCN, to remove the material.¹³³ In response, Setopati challenged the directive before the Supreme Court, which issued a show-cause order.¹³⁴ The case is *subjudice* at the time of writing this report.

In another notable case, the ECN sought the removal of an international documentary produced by the BBC World Service titled *Shot like Enemies: Inside Nepal's Gen Z Uprising*, released shortly before the election.¹³⁵ The documentary examined the September 2025 protests and related fatalities. Citing concerns over its timing and the absence of a completed domestic inquiry, the ECN invoked the Election Code to request that Press Council Nepal facilitate its removal, arguing the content could influence voter perception. PCN, however, clarified that it lacked jurisdiction over an international BBC World Service documentary,¹³⁶ highlighting the challenges of regulating cross-border digital content during elections. It instead urged domestic media organizations and social media users to exercise caution in sharing unverified foreign content and suggested diplomatic channels as a possible route for addressing such concerns. As noted in KII “PCN mainly received complaints related to misleading information, defamatory content, and misinformation circulated through digital platforms such as Facebook and TikTok.”

“PCN received complaints both directly and through referrals from the ECN. Complaints involving registered media outlets were

133 <https://www.setopati.com/politics/382915>

134 <https://en.setopati.com/political/165971>

135 <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/ec-asks-press-council-to-remove-bbc-documentary-on-gen-z-protest-64-59.html>

136 <https://www.presscouncilnepal.gov.np/np/2026/02/27/11591/>

addressed by the Council, while those concerning unregistered entities were referred to the Nepal Police Cyber Bureau and, in some cases, the Nepal Telecommunications Authority for further action. During the election period, PCN took action against 953 entities, including 810 and 143 unregistered entities posing as media organizations. The Council issued 550 notices concerning 508 pieces of content and referred 43 cases involving non-media actors to Nepal Police.¹³⁷ However, the Press Council did not publish a detailed list of the registered media outlets or unregistered entities against whom action was taken, nor did it provide publicly accessible information on the specific content that triggered these measures.

These developments point to a broader trend of increased scrutiny and regulation of media content during elections, particularly in online spaces where information circulates rapidly and at scale. While such regulation is intended to safeguard electoral integrity, overbroad or inconsistently applied measures may risk constraining legitimate journalistic practice and limiting the information available to voters, thereby raising concerns related to freedom of expression and press freedom.

In the case of unregistered entities, the absence of an opportunity for clarification, response, or justification before referral to law enforcement further raises due process concerns. Such cases were directly forwarded to the Nepal Police Cyber Bureau, yet there is no publicly available information on the outcomes of these referrals or what actions, if any, were subsequently taken by the police. Overall, the process remains largely opaque, with unclear procedural safeguards, limited transparency regarding the nature of the flagged content, and no systematic

137 Shred by PCN spokesperson in the event organized by Center for Media Research (CMR) on May 25, 2026

disclosure of enforcement outcomes, making it difficult to assess proportionality, accountability, or consistency in application.

Government Agencies

Different agencies of the government were heavily involved in monitoring use of digital space, maintaining cyber security, and mitigating the spread of disinformation and coordinated cyberattacks. Nepal Police, Nepali Army, Armed Police Force and National Investigation Department jointly adopted an integrated security plan 2026 for fearless, free and fair elections. Further security agencies along with the Home Ministry and ECN jointly formed JEOC.

One of the respondents of the KII also noted “*the coordination done with Cyber Bureau and Nepali Army by ECN eased the monitoring of digital space during election.*” Nepal Police launched an Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Analytics Cell (AI-AAC) to combat cybercrime, misinformation, and digital threats,¹³⁸ though details of its use, structure, function process and outcome have not been updated to date. Alongside the AI Cell, Nepal Police also deployed advanced tracking systems, including Election Information Management System (EIMS) and the Geographic Information System (GIS) to support election management and maintain overall law and order.¹³⁹ Nepal Police arrested 35 individuals nationwide for allegedly using social media and AI tools to spread misinformation and disrupt the HOR election.¹⁴⁰

138 <https://www.techpana.com/2026/155468>

139 <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2026/03/03/35-arrested-nationwide-for-misuse-of-social-media-and-ai-ahead-of-elections>

140 Id.

However, there were also criticisms that authorities did not disclose the specific content flagged, the individuals implicated, or the legal reasoning behind their decisions, and that no accessible redress mechanism exists for those affected. *“Nepal police also requested TikTok to cooperate in various ways, including responding to and acting upon content reports. At that time, we had asked TikTok whether it could provide a dedicated reporting portal for Nepal, but the platform did not agree to that request. However, TikTok did remove the content that we reported and referred to them”, shared one of the KII respondents.*

Along with that, the *Nagarik App*'s update allowing voter ID screenshots provided practical digital convenience at polling stations.¹⁴¹ and it also provided a facility to identify polling centers through the App.¹⁴²

Besides, different trends relating to digital security were also observed during the election time. A recurring pattern was the creation of impersonated accounts of political leaders on social media. The Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers had to coordinate directly with the Cyber Bureau to take down fake accounts impersonating PM Sushila Karki.¹⁴³

A wave of cyberattacks also targeted key government websites following the announcement of the election date. A group calling itself Nepali for Nepal (NFN) claimed responsibility, releasing

141 <https://www.nepalitelecom.com/2026/02/how-to-take-screenshot-of-voter-id-on-nagarik-app.html>

142 National Election Observation Committee (NEOC), House of Representatives Election 2026 Comprehensive Observation Report, Page 16

143 <https://techpana.com/2025/153399/cyber-bureau-moves-to-remove-fake-pm-sushila-karki-accounts>

videos on Telegram, for control over systems such as the Election Commission, the National ID Department, and the Nepal Electricity Authority.¹⁴⁴ The incidents, which coincided with peak voter registration activity, triggered public concern and prompted an investigation by the Cyber Bureau. Two young suspects were arrested,¹⁴⁵ while NFN later announced plans to surrender after a press conference in Kathmandu.¹⁴⁶

Fact-Checking and Media

Disinformation during the election disproportionately targeted those already at a disadvantage. Some notable incidents of disinformation targeted towards political parties and candidates are mentioned in the ‘Political Parties and Candidates’ section above. Fact-checking platforms repeatedly debunked content during this period.

During the March election, the major active fact-checking institutions operated across two distinct categories i.e. independent fact-checking organizations and media house initiative as factcheckers. Nepal FactCheck and NepalCheck operated as independent fact checking bodies, whereas TechPana Fact Check, Kantipur Fact Check were the fact checking initiative by established media houses. Techpana collaborated with the ECN, while Nepal FactCheck partnered with the news portal Onlinekhabar, strengthening their collective impact on the fact-checking space by monitoring viral content circulating across social media platforms. The Association of

144 <https://techpana.com/2026/154946/gen-z-revolt-cyber-attacks-nepal-government-websites-election-period>

145 <https://techpana.com/2026/154802>

146 <https://techpana.com/2026/154966>

Community Radio Broadcasters Nepal (ACORAB Nepal) also launched a nationwide fact-checking initiative.¹⁴⁷ The analysis of fact-checking trends identified four key patterns: (i) a higher prevalence of disinformation compared to misinformation, (ii) personal disinformation targeting specific individuals, (iii) the emergence of AI-generated content, and (iv) content involving harm, violence, hate speech, and narratives questioning the integrity of elections.¹⁴⁸ The majority of the flagged content originated on social media platforms, with only five cases identified as originating from outside social media ecosystems. Only 3.92% of mis/disinformation was attributed by politicians directly.¹⁴⁹

Evidence from independent monitoring initiatives underscored the scale of information disorder during the election. A study by the Centre for Media Research (CMR), Misinformation during Nepal's 2026 General Election, conducted during a one-month period from February 5 to March 5, 2026, identified a total of 102 misinformation (fact checked by Techpana and Nepal FactCheck) and a total of 1020 potential misinformation.¹⁵⁰ The findings suggest that misleading and unverified content circulated extensively throughout the electoral period, demonstrating the increasing influence of digital platforms in shaping political discourse and the corresponding need for stronger mechanisms to address misinformation during elections.

147 <https://english.nepalnews.com/s/society/acorab-nepal-launches-nationwide-fact-checking-campaign-for-community-radio-journalists/>

148 Id.

149 Id.

150 Center for Media Research, Misinformation During Nepal's 2026 General Elections (unpublished)

Influencers and Supporters

Media monitoring revealed that the supporters of the political parties and candidates were engaged in creating cheapfakes, deepfakes, memes, and synthetic videos, e.g., fabricated fights, endorsements, or insults to mock opponents or amplify emotional appeals in the election. Dedicated websites such as *sahakari.money*,¹⁵¹ *muttonkaji.world*,¹⁵² *mutton.world*,¹⁵³ and *BalenForPM*¹⁵⁴ were launched to create targeted positive or negative branding.

During the March election, supporters amplified official messages of the political parties and candidates through personal accounts and fan pages; shared, commented, tagged, and reacted on those messages; and were engaged in creating viral clips and AI-generated memes. One of the respondents in FGD mentioned that *“Gen Z supporters in particular drove emotionally charged and identity-based content that might have performed strongly due to platform algorithms.”* The hashtags like #voteforchange #votewisely #myvotematters #timeforchange were trending during election time.

Social media influencers, including public personalities from the art and entertainment sectors, publicly endorsed the political parties and candidates and used their digital platforms to support their election campaigns. Supporters also used specific songs and voiceovers to make reels indicating their support for specific candidates and political parties. As one of the FGD participants

151 <https://sur.ly/i/sahakari.money/>

152 <https://www.muttonkaji.world/>

153 <https://mutton.world/>

154 <https://balenforpm.com/>

highlighted, *political content shared through social media pages and WhatsApp messages was often circulated with emotional appeals. Some messages suggested that if a particular party won the election, it would create more employment opportunities within Nepal, ensuring that future generations would not have to leave the country in search of work.*

Three politics-themed movies, namely *Dimag Kharab*, *Jhari Pachhiko Inderni*, and *Senti Virus*, were released on YouTube just a few days before the election, contributing to the broader political discourse surrounding the electoral process.¹⁵⁵ While not formally part of any political campaign, their themes and narratives resonated with political issues and public sentiment, potentially influencing political discussions among voters. Similarly, numerous songs were released during the election period, many reflecting themes of public frustration, rebellion, hope, and expectations for change.¹⁵⁶ *“The social media influencers, digital creators, and online volunteer networks played a significant role in amplifying political messages, particularly among youth”* as noted by one respondent in the FGD. *“overall, the election reflected a hybrid digital campaigning model, combining paid advertising and centrally managed communication with organic, citizen-driven amplification across multiple platforms”*, the respondent further added.

Digital platforms like TikTok and Facebook became the battlefield during the election, as AI-generated content, especially deepfakes and cheapfakes, spread across social media platforms.¹⁵⁷

155 <https://english.onlinekhabar.com/films-join-the-election-campaign.html>

156 <https://english.khabarhub.com/2026/06/534009/>

157 <https://nepalitimes.com/nepal-s-ai-generated-election>

While some use of AI was expected given the political crisis that prompted the election, its scale was exponential and quickly normalized. This created a complex information environment in which real incidents were sometimes dismissed as artificial while fabricated content gained credibility. AI thus became both a tool of political influence and a source of confusion and mistrust. As generative AI tools became more accessible, the creation and circulation of cheapfakes and deepfakes grew exponentially, raising concerns about electoral transparency, public trust, and informed democratic participation. An FGD participant noted that *the easy accessibility of AI tools also had a positive impact by enhancing AI literacy. Greater exposure to these technologies helped people better recognize AI-generated content and develop the skills needed to critically evaluate and respond to its spread.*

Similarly, supporters of political parties and candidates were also found responsible for much of the coordinated harassment, especially gendered abuse and mob behavior targeting women candidates and social media users supporting opponent candidates or parties.¹⁵⁸ Online Gender-based Violence (OGBV) was especially prominent in the post-election phase. In one incident, Renuka Baral, an ordinary small business owner, faced intense online trolling, harassment, and public humiliation over a viral video of her pre-election remark that she would ‘cut her ear if Balen Shah wins.’ Following Shah’s victory, social media users targeted her, reportedly causing mental distress and offline harassment, including people confronting her in public.¹⁵⁹ Even after the election, male politicians were trolled with images of

158 <https://www.nimjn.org/en/detail/367/nepal-election-online-harassment-against-female-candidates-on-the-rise>

159 <https://www.techpana.com/2026/155631>

them in female attire, while female candidates were shown in uncomfortable depictions with other candidates.¹⁶⁰

Civil Society Organizations and Voters

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) played a significant role in Nepal's 2026 Election by complementing the efforts of the ECN and promoting informed, inclusive, and accountable democratic participation. Beyond traditional voter education initiatives, CSOs actively engaged in strengthening information integrity, enhancing electoral transparency, and encouraging meaningful voter engagement throughout the electoral cycle.

Several organizations organized manifesto discussions, public dialogues, and voter education campaigns aimed at helping citizens make informed electoral choices. CSOs also undertook initiatives to counter misinformation and disinformation, which became increasingly prevalent during the election period.

As part of these efforts, Digital Rights Nepal (DRN), along with its regular publication of *Digital Rights Weekly*, published a special weekly newsletter titled *Nepal Election Monitoring* in collaboration with Accountability Lab Nepal.¹⁶¹ The newsletter sought to counter misinformation, promote electoral integrity, and provide non-partisan, evidence-based information during the election. In addition, DRN produced a range of social media content focused on voter awareness and information literacy.¹⁶²

160 UNDP Report "Use of Online Platforms in the Election of the House of Representatives, NEPAL" Available at: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2026-05/final-consolidated-report-2026.04.08bb.pdf>

161 <https://mailchi.mp/0c6fa80d40d7/digital-righrs-weekly-10356125>

162 <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/18dHDwt9ho/>

DRN further collaborated with organizations including the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the Nepal Election Observation Committee (NEOC), and Sancharika Samuha to train election observers on incorporating digital spaces into election observation methodologies. Similarly, DRN conducted capacity-building sessions for youths on information integrity and strategies to identify and counter disinformation.

Likewise, Speak Up Nepal implemented voter education initiatives through its *Vote Line Nepal*, an AI powered call center and social media campaign utilizing social media and multilingual content, including materials in Maithili and Bhojpurī, to expand access to election-related information and enhance voter awareness.¹⁶³

Civil society organizations also organized manifesto discussions and dialogue series aimed at voter education. For instance, ICT Foundation organized *Candidate Mela 2026: Digital Leadership Dialogues* at the provincial level, giving candidates and parties a platform to explain their plans and visions, and voters a chance to ask questions.¹⁶⁴ Accountability Lab Nepal and Digital Rights Nepal jointly prepared materials comparing the manifestos of different political parties on governance, digitalization, and other issues.¹⁶⁵ Different news media also covered the main provisions of each party's manifesto.¹⁶⁶

Similarly, the Dignity Initiative (DI) also organized different interventions during the election from an inclusion perspective.

163 Report by Speak Up Nepal "Digital Electoral Literacy" (Unpublished)

164 <https://ictfoundation.org.np/digital-leadership-dialogue/>

165 <https://digitalrightsnepal.us14.list-manage.com/track/click>

166 <https://ekantipur.com/politics/2026/02/18/en/what-did-each-party-say-in-its-manifesto-42-18.html>, <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal-votes/major-parties-manifestos-and-their-primary-promises>

DI launched a special Podcast to discuss the inclusion aspect during the election.¹⁶⁷ As mentioned by one of the respondents during the FGD, “*DI also worked with Online khabar to bring the issue of inclusion in mainstream media.*”

Bhugol Park operated *hamroneta.online* with the aim of providing all election-related information on a single platform.¹⁶⁸ One of the major features of this platform is “Know Your Candidate”, which provides detailed information about all candidates contesting in the election.¹⁶⁹ Through its *Transparency for Accountability* project, NAAMII monitored social media trends and information flows during the election period. The initiative observed instances where existing social media pages were repurposed and rebranded to align with political figures and movements, contributing to the creation of artificial online engagement and shaping public perceptions of political support.¹⁷⁰

Similarly, the Election Observation Committee Nepal (EOCN) established a Digital Media Observation Dashboard to monitor digital campaigning practices, identify potential violations, and evaluate adherence to the election code of conduct in online spaces.¹⁷¹

UNDP and UN Women also launched a joint digital voter education campaign targeting urban audiences and young voters who increasingly rely on digital channels for news and civic

167 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArxRELXf2gk>, <https://www.youtube.com/@dignityinitiatives4726/videos>

168 <https://hamroneta.online/>

169 <https://hamroneta.online/2082/candidate/list>

170 <https://transparency.naamii.org/>

171 <https://watch.eocnepal.org.np/>

information.¹⁷² *“Hundreds of content creators, influencers, and other social media users also created reels, short videos for voter education”* as stated by one FGD respondent. The respondent also stated that *“the content creators, influencers and other social media users used their personal social networks to share, translate, and amplify official voter education materials produced by the ECN.”* Through these efforts, campaigns such as ‘My Vote Matters’, ‘Vote for a Better Future’, and ‘Ready to Vote’ ran across various social media platforms and other digital spaces.

Despite these extensive digital and traditional campaigns, longer-term indicators and preliminary election data point to systemic challenges. Nepal’s average literacy rate stood at 76% as per the 2021 census, and the preliminary report for the 2026 HoR election shows around 3.5% invalid votes under the proportional representation (PR) system, and above 5.0% under the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system.¹⁷³ As per the post-election report of ANFREL, observers and stakeholders also noted gaps in voter education and uneven access to election information, particularly in remote areas.¹⁷⁴

“Generally, voters primarily consumed information through social media and messaging apps, with many relying on TikTok, Facebook, and short videos for updates,” as highlighted by one of the respondents of KII. Low digital literacy left many voters vulnerable to deepfakes, manipulated opinion polls, and

172 <https://www.undp.org/nepal/stories/time-i-voted-new>

173 <https://risingnepaldaily.com/news/76987>

174 ANFREL Report “Rebuilding Trust, Restoring Credibility: Accountability and Electoral Integrity in Nepal 2026” Available at <https://anfrel.org/rebuilding-trust-restoring-credibility-accountability-and-electoral-integrity-in-nepal-2026/>

misinformation. Digital platforms played a significant role in shaping public perceptions and influencing voter turnout, which reached 59.6 percent overall.¹⁷⁵

There was also an issue of violation of voters' privacy during the election period through the misuse of social media and online platforms. Voters are being directly asked about their intended voting choices before polling, and videos capturing their responses are being recorded, edited, and circulated online without proper consideration of privacy.¹⁷⁶ Such practices undermine the principle of secret voting and may expose individuals to social pressure, harassment, or unwanted public attention.

Concerns were also raised about the access and use of voter data during the election period, particularly regarding the use and potential misuse of communication systems and digital monitoring tools. One notable incident involved the sending of nearly 5 million unsolicited political SMS messages in a single day, using an SMS gateway favoring monarchy, raising serious concerns about privacy, data protection, and consent.¹⁷⁷ The individual responsible was arrested by the Kathmandu Valley Crime Investigation Office.¹⁷⁸ Millions of citizens received unsolicited political content without their knowledge

175 UNDP Report "Use of Online Platforms in the Election of the House of Representatives, NEPAL" Available at <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2026-05/final-consolidated-report-2026.04.08bb.pdf>

176 <https://risingnepaldaily.com/news/75620>

177 <https://english.khabarhub.com/2026/14/516000/>

178 <https://www.myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/police-arrest-sedhai-for-sending-mass-sms-urging-monarchist-protest-54-87.html>

or consent, raising serious concerns about violations of the right to privacy and basic data protection principles. The scale and speed of dissemination exposed critical vulnerabilities in Nepal's telecommunications and data governance systems, raising questions about how personal mobile numbers were accessed, whether adequate safeguards existed within bulk messaging infrastructure, and why regulatory mechanisms failed to act in time. While Nepal Telecom denied sharing customer data,¹⁷⁹ the absence of a prompt, transparent response from the telecommunications regulator further intensified public concern and eroded trust. The incident's timing, during a sensitive pre-election period, amplified its impact and underscores significant gaps in Nepal's data protection framework, including unclear standards on consent, limitations on data use, and accountability mechanisms for the misuse of personal data in electoral contexts. Besides, the availability of voters' data with payment of prescribed fees raised concerns about the exposure of sensitive personal data including age, gender identity, and parent names. Digital Rights Nepal submitted a memorandum to the ECN highlighting these concerns.¹⁸⁰

Digital Platforms

Meta platforms dominate the digital landscape in Nepal. Facebook remained the most widely used platform with 14.8 million users, followed by Instagram with 4.35 million users in

179 <https://techpana.com/2026/154959>

180 <https://digitalrightsnepal.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Memorandum-to-the-ECN-1.pdf>, <https://techpana.com/2026/154920/digital-rights-nepal-requests-election-commission-to-halt-voter-registration-data-sale>

late 2025.¹⁸¹ In contrast, X (formerly Twitter) had a significantly smaller footprint, with approximately 342,000 users. Facebook was the dominant platform with the highest user base and advertising reach, which was extensively used for political ads, live streams, page management, and voter mobilization.

TikTok emerged as a highly influential platform among young voters, with approximately 2.2 million daily active users. Political actors, creators, and youth-led movements used short-form videos to engage audiences directly. The Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) also leveraged TikTok for voter education through content creation campaigns and competitions.¹⁸² X (formerly Twitter), despite its smaller user base of around 342,000 users,¹⁸³ *“remained important for real-time political updates, public statements, and discussions among politicians, journalists, and opinion leaders”* as noted by one of the respondents of FGD. YouTube gained prominence as a platform for longer-form political content, including interviews, campaign speeches, debates, podcasts, and citizen-candidate discussions.¹⁸⁴

eMonitor+ found that TikTok recorded the highest audience engagement among monitored platforms, with over 2.6 million likes, 400,000 shares, and 131,000 comments, followed by

181 UNDP Report “Use of Online Platforms in the Election of the House of Representatives, NEPAL” Available at: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2026-05/final-consolidated-report-2026.04.08bb.pdf>

182 <https://www.nepalitelecom.com/2026/02/tiktok-and-election-commission-nepal-partner-to-ensure-integrity-and-fairness-for-falgun-21-elections.html>

183 <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2026-nepal>

184 <https://openthemagazine.com/world/ink-fades-influencers-rise-in-nepals-hybrid-election-campaign>

Facebook with over 2 million likes and 170,000 shares. Given that many monitored posts were high-risk, their potential impact was significant. The total engagement across seven platforms exceeded 4.8 million interactions, though actual reach may have been higher.¹⁸⁵

One of the FGD respondents noted that *“internet and digital platforms played a significant role in this election.”* According to the respondent, *“the election results themselves reflected the impact of digital connectivity. Areas with higher internet penetration and higher Human Development Index (HDI) scores were more likely to elect candidates from the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), whereas regions with lower internet penetration and lower HDI levels largely continued to support political parties leading the governments in the past.”*

This observation aligns with data from the Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS) 2022/23 conducted by the National Statistics Office (NSO), which found that only 9.5% of households living below the poverty line have access to the internet. Overall, internet access is available in 39.7% of Nepali households, although significant disparities exist across regions. Internet penetration is highest in the Kathmandu Valley (79.3%), followed by other urban areas (43.2%), while only 17.4% of rural households have internet access.¹⁸⁶ These disparities in digital access appear to be

185 UNDP Report “Use of Online Platforms in the Election of the House of Representatives, NEPAL” Available at: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2026-05/final-consolidated-report-2026.04.08bb.pdf>

186 Nepal Living Standard Survey IV 2022/23, Available at: <https://data.nsonepal.gov.np/dataset/b6c3c19b-4b15-44bf-8653-1571e76dad14/resource/e2d52301-1c25-498b-8732-4326c62a2372/download/nlss-iv.pdf>

reflected in electoral outcomes as well. The success of Rastriya Swatantra Party candidates in several urban constituencies suggests that a strong online presence and digital campaigning strategy can effectively challenge established political parties in areas with higher levels of internet connectivity.¹⁸⁷

As noted by FGD respondents, *“websites and party portals continued to serve as official sources for manifestos, candidate information, campaign updates, and policy positions, whereas messaging applications such as WhatsApp and Viber were widely used for volunteer coordination, supporter mobilization, and targeted communication, although their private nature limited transparency and oversight.”*

Meta’s Ad Library showed significant spending on election-related content.¹⁸⁸ Data extracted from the Meta Platforms Ad Library for the 90-day period preceding the March 2026 elections shows that approximately USD 46,857 was spent on digital political advertising.¹⁸⁹ The geographic distribution of this expenditure highlights inherent inequality in digital campaigning. The Bagmati Zone, encompassing Kathmandu and surrounding urban centers, accounted for USD 36,515, while comparatively lower amounts were recorded in zones such as Bheri (USD 3,853) and Dhawalagiri (USD 1,023). This concentration shows how digital campaigning disproportionately targets urban, digitally connected populations, potentially marginalizing rural voters

187 <https://www.onlinekhabar.com/2026/03/1889393/rashtriya-swayamsevak-sangh-rss-and-the-creation-of-new-politics-in-nepal>

188 Monitoring Digital Media during Nepal’s 2026 Elections, Available at: <https://www.undp.org/nepal/stories/monitoring-digital-media-during-nepals-2026-elections>

189 <https://www.facebook.com/ads/library/report/?source=nav-header>

outside the focus of high-spending political actors. However, the accuracy and completeness of this figure remain questionable, as political content and advertisements were also disseminated through other digital platforms, and some election-related advertising reportedly originated from foreign sources promoting or supporting political parties.

The ECN's failure to effectively regulate and monitor digital campaign financing contributed to an uneven playing field among candidates and parties. Use of these platforms also went beyond the Code of Conduct. Although the ECN officially permitted election campaigning only from February 16, 2026, many candidates, political parties, and their supporters openly violated this through premature social media campaigning.¹⁹⁰ Meta Ad Library showed that political campaigns were boosted before this date.¹⁹¹ These early activities undermined the level playing field that the Code of Conduct aimed to ensure.¹⁹²

Digital platforms expanded democratic participation but also introduced new forms of influence, manipulation, and governance challenges. A platform format popular among young voters and candidates was the 'podcast channel', which served as a space for political discussion, citizen engagement, and a way for voters to convey their issues to candidates.

As per eMonitor+, Facebook and TikTok accounted for over 90% of high-risk election-related posts identified by monitors, including content involving hate speech, disinformation, electoral manipulation, and attempts to undermine trust in institutions.

190 <https://english.onlinekhabar.com/online-election-code-of-conduct.html>

191 Id.

192 <https://english.onlinekhabar.com/online-election-code-of-conduct.html>

Out of 417 flagged posts, 51% were on Facebook and 41% on TikTok, while smaller shares appeared on X, Instagram, and news websites. Most problematic content targeted male candidates, largely reflecting their higher representation in the election.¹⁹³

Through its *Transparency for Accountability* project, NAAMII identified a pattern of social media pages being strategically rebranded to resemble political figures and movements, thereby creating artificial online momentum and influencing public perception.¹⁹⁴ The project documented 319 identity shifts, with more than three historical name changes. It also detected 232 pages linked to political parties or public figures through keyword matching, including names such as Rabi and Balen. Additionally, the study identified 35 Gen Z-branded groups and uncovered 14 interconnected networks, including several Balen-related groups that were linked to pages associated with *Rabi* and *Sidha*,¹⁹⁵ suggesting coordinated online activity and audience-building strategies.

Further Algorithms shaped the visibility and amplification of certain narratives across these platforms: an analysis of 24 prominent Facebook pages ahead of the election found that emotionally charged political content was amplified over substantive policy debate.¹⁹⁶ A platform format popular among young voters and candidates was the ‘podcast channel’, which

193 UNDP Report “Use of Online Platforms in the Election of the House of Representatives, NEPAL” Available at: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2026-05/final-consolidated-report-2026.04.08bb.pdf>

194 <https://transparency.naamii.org/>

195 Id.

196 <https://ekantipur.com/news/2026/02/23/facebook-algorithmic-fallout-a-flood-of-rumors-ideas-and-agendas-drowned-out-17-06.html>

served as a space for political discussion, citizen engagement, and a way for voters to convey their issues to candidates.

The election also witnessed increased use of generative AI tools to create campaign materials, including images, videos, and posters, raising concerns about misinformation and manipulated content.¹⁹⁷ One respondent in the FGD noted, *“The spread of disinformation and fabricated news on digital platforms increased as the election approached.”* The disinformation continued during the silence period as well.¹⁹⁸

UNDP’s eMonitor+ platform processed and analyzed 173,030 posts during the monitoring period, out of which 388 were related to violations of the election code of conduct.¹⁹⁹ The findings from the eMonitor+ final report characterize the digital landscape of Nepal’s 2026 election as a highly polarized environment where sophisticated technological tools were used. Monitoring posts between January 1 and March 12, 2026, the AI-powered system analyzed 144,072 instances of potential hate speech, identifying Facebook (76%) as the primary source, followed by X (formerly Twitter) (17%). A more nuanced human analysis of 417 high-risk posts revealed that Facebook (51%) and TikTok (41%) served as the definitive channels for harmful content, with TikTok generating the highest audience engagement, exceeding 2.6 million likes.

197 <https://www.undp.org/nepal/stories/monitoring-digital-media-during-nepals-2026-elections>

198 <https://ekantipur.com/politics/2026/03/04/a-flood-of-misleading-information-during-the-silent-period-44-24.html>

199 UNDP Report “Use of Online Platforms in the Election of the House of Representatives, NEPAL” Available at: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2026-05/final-consolidated-report-2026.04.08bb.pdf>

The Election Observation Committee Nepal operated a Digital Media Observation Dashboard to monitor compliance with the election code of conduct during the election period.²⁰⁰ Through this platform, a total of 16,482 observations were recorded, of which 882 were identified as violations during the election phase. The violations were categorized into 106 different types. Facebook emerged as the platform with the highest number of reported violations, accounting for 510 cases, followed by TikTok with 209 violations and Instagram with 146 violations. Among the recorded violations, voter manipulation and vote solicitation constituted the largest category at 8.3 percent, followed by misinformation at 5.5 percent. Intimidation accounted for 3.8 percent of violations, while hate speech and abusive content represented 3.2 percent. Geographically, Bagmati Province recorded the highest number of violations, whereas Madhesh Province reported the lowest number.

8. KEY GAPS AND CHALLENGES

The 2026 House of Representatives election highlighted several critical vulnerabilities within Nepal's digital electoral ecosystem:

- **Weak Enforcement and Regulatory Lag**

There is a widening gap between rapidly evolving digital campaign practices and Nepal's existing electoral regulatory framework. While the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) increasingly focused on rule-making, enforcement capacity and meaningful sanctions remained limited, particularly in relation to misinformation, hate speech, and Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV). More broadly, existing electoral laws and related regulatory

200 <https://watch.eocnepal.org.np/>

instruments are not fully updated to address the realities of digital campaigning, including algorithmic amplification, micro-targeted advertising, AI-generated content, and cross-platform information flows, creating a structural regulatory lag.

- **Underdeveloped Legal and Regulatory Framework for AI**
The 2026 election exposed key gaps in Nepal's legal and institutional readiness to address AI-driven risks in electoral processes. Although the Election Code of Conduct, 2082 was the first to explicitly prohibit AI-generated misinformation, deepfakes, and manipulated content, enforcement tools for detection, attribution, and accountability remained limited. A significant share of harmful election content involved AI-generated or AI-altered media, underscoring the gap between regulatory intent and operational capacity. The use of AI-based monitoring tools such as eMonitor+ further highlighted both opportunities and risks in automated content analysis. While such tools can enhance the scale and speed of monitoring, their deployment also introduces risks related to methodological transparency, potential bias in classification, and limited explainability of automated outputs. In the absence of clear regulatory or ethical safeguards, reliance on AI systems for election monitoring may inadvertently lead to misclassification of content, inconsistent interpretation of political speech, or over-reliance on opaque algorithmic judgments. This underscores the need for clearer governance frameworks that define standards for the use of AI in election monitoring, including transparency requirements, human oversight mechanisms, auditability of methodologies, and safeguards against bias and error in automated analysis systems.

- **Privacy and Data Protection Vulnerabilities**

Nepal conducted this election without comprehensive data protection legislation. This was visible in the sale of voter list data, which excluded dates of birth and mobile numbers but still included voter ID numbers, age, gender identity, and parents' names, raising unresolved questions about compliance with constitutional privacy protections and the Privacy Act, 2017. It was further exposed by the unresolved incident in which nearly 5 million unsolicited political SMS messages were sent in a single day, with no clear public explanation of how phone numbers were obtained or why regulatory safeguards did not prevent it.

- **Inconsistent Platform Accountability**

Cooperation from major tech companies was uneven. While TikTok signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and launched an in-app Election Centre, collaboration with Meta (Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp) was limited and failed to materialize into formal technical assistance despite Meta being the platform with the largest user base and the highest share of flagged hate speech and high-risk content. This left the most heavily used and most heavily flagged platform with the least binding accountability to domestic electoral authorities.

- **Transparency and accountability deficit in enforcement**

The ECN's IIPU reported identifying 998 instances of harmful content, while Press Council Nepal reported taking action against 953 entities and issuing 550 notices. However, limited information was publicly disclosed regarding the content involved, the entities affected, the actions taken, or the outcomes of referrals to other authorities. This lack

of transparency makes it difficult to assess the consistency, proportionality, and effectiveness of enforcement measures and raises concerns about due process, accountability, and public oversight.

- **The Urban-Rural Digital Divide**

Digital political advertising was heavily concentrated in urban centers; for example, the Bagmati Zone accounted for USD 36,515 of the total USD 46,857 spent on Meta platforms, potentially marginalizing rural voters who fall outside the focus of high-spending political actors. This results in a digital divide between those in urban areas and those in rural areas. This also affects people with disabilities regarding access to the information in the digital space. When the elections and campaign went digital, people who are off the grid are more marginalized as their access to information is further decreased.

- **Challenges of Cross-Border Regulation**

The ECN's unsuccessful attempt to remove an international BBC documentary highlighted the complexities and limits of domestic regulatory authority over global digital content. Similarly, some election-related advertising was reported to have originated from foreign sources, a pattern that domestic monitoring and enforcement tools were not equipped to address.

- **Threats to Freedom of Expression and Press Freedom**

Heightened regulatory interventions by the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) and Press Council Nepal (PCN) also raised concerns regarding the balance between electoral integrity and fundamental freedoms. The ECN's

instruction to suspend 11 online platforms for conducting live opinion polls and its directives against media outlets like Setopati Online were criticized as potentially overbroad and inconsistently applied. Furthermore, the lack of transparency in disclosing the legal reasoning behind flagged content or providing an accessible redress mechanism for affected parties posed a risk to legitimate journalistic inquiry and transparency.

- **Fragmented and non-harmonized monitoring architecture**
Multiple bodies, including the ECN/UNDP (eMonitor+), the NHRC, Press Council Nepal, the Election Observation Committee Nepal (Digital Media Observation Dashboard), NAAMII, Centre for Media Research, Techpana, conducted independent monitoring of digital content during the election. These efforts produced overlapping but not fully reconciled figures on hate speech, violations, and flagged content, reflecting a monitoring landscape that expanded in volume without a shared evidentiary standard, joint case-management system, or single authoritative public record of findings and outcomes.
- **Persistent digital divide undermining voter education efforts**
Despite extensive voter education output, including 704 digital materials produced by the ECN's Digital Voter Education Unit and multilingual campaigns by civil society organizations, structural gaps in access and literacy remained. Nepal's literacy rate stood at 76% as of the 2021 census, and the 2026 election recorded around 3.5% invalid votes under the proportional representation system and above 5.0% under first-past-the-post, with observers noting continued gaps in voter education and uneven access to election information

in remote areas. This suggests that voters with lower digital literacy, often in rural areas, faced the same exposure to manipulated content and misinformation as urban voters without commensurate access to mitigation efforts.

- **Involvement of the Nepal Army in the Electoral Process**

The involvement of the Nepal Army in election monitoring, including through the Integrated Security Plan and Joint Election Operations Centre (JEOC), extended into digital monitoring support via cyber tools and coordination mechanisms. While aimed at ensuring electoral security, the involvement of military institutions in monitoring digital spaces created ambiguity between security enforcement and surveillance. This raises concerns about chilling effects on online expression and underscores the need for clearly defined legal boundaries, transparency, and safeguards to maintain public trust in electoral processes.

- **Compliance with the Election Silence Period**

The growing shift of election campaigning to digital platforms has complicated the enforcement of the election silence period. Although the Election Commission required the removal of election-related social media content before the silence period began, ensuring compliance proved impractical due to the nature of online communication. Content can be easily shared, reposted, and circulated by supporters and third parties, making complete removal difficult to achieve. This challenge highlights the need to revisit existing silence period regulations and develop more practical approaches for the digital campaigning environment.

9. FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Findings

The 2026 House of Representatives election demonstrated a paradigm shift in Nepal's electoral landscape, with the use and impact of digital spaces reflected across the following key findings:

- a. **Online Mobilization and Digital Outreach:** Digital platforms displaced traditional campaign tools as the primary site of voter engagement and campaigning. Political parties and candidates ran professionalized websites, and social media pages. The campaigning shifted from official party channels to personalized, candidate-led branding through podcasts, YouTube, and paid promotions. Political parties and Candidates used digital platforms to reach out to youth and first time voters, where short videos and reels were mostly used for digital campaigning. The digital campaign was hybrid in nature, with both paid and sponsored content being used, while organic campaigning also took place simultaneously.

Data driven strategies were visibly increased in political communication. IT firms managed voter outreach, micro-targeting, automated calls, and SMS campaigns through platforms such as MyCampaign.com, with no transparency on how voter contact details were obtained or campaigns financed, while WhatsApp and Viber supported volunteer coordination beyond public oversight. Besides, the trend of creating new pages or changing the name of pages to reflect that of candidates was visible, questioning the authenticity of organic political support, as altered page identities can easily mislead voters regarding a candidate's actual public backing.

- b. Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression:** Media regulation intensified during the election, with Press Council Nepal taking action against 953 entities, including both registered and unregistered, issuing 550 notices concerning 508 pieces of content, and referring 43 cases to police, yet never publishing a detailed list of the content or entities involved. Alongside, the electoral integrity measures repeatedly came into tension with the constitutional guarantees of expression and information. The PCN's suspension of 11 platforms for live opinion polling, its directive against Setopati Online over constituency-level projections, and its attempt to remove the BBC documentary "Shot like Enemies" (which Press Council Nepal said fell outside its jurisdiction) were criticized as overbroad and inconsistently applied, compounded by the absence of disclosed legal reasoning or an accessible redress mechanism for those affected. With that the difficulty of regulating cross-border digital content while avoiding overreach into legitimate journalistic inquiry was also realized.
- c. Information Integrity:** The election was marked by a high volume of mis/disinformation across digital platforms. UNDP's eMonitor+ analyzed 173,030 posts and flagged 388 Code of Conduct violations, the most frequent being false or hate-based information (128 instances) and AI-distorted content (95 instances), while 144,072 instances of potential hate speech were detected, concentrated on Facebook (76%) and X (17%). Independent fact-checkers conducted 102 fact-checks within one month, finding disinformation more prevalent than misinformation, increasingly AI-generated, and rarely attributed directly to politicians (3.92%). EOCN's separate Digital Media Observation Dashboard logged 882 violations from 16,482 observations, led by Facebook (510

cases). While various fact-checking platforms repeatedly debunked this content during the election cycle, the speed of dissemination posed a constant challenge.

Disinformation campaigns during the election disproportionately targeted those already at a disadvantage including the women candidates. Rather than challenging their political ideologies, policy positions, or qualifications, these attacks were overwhelmingly gendered, targeting their bodies and personal lives. The content of disinformation was facilitated by modern technologies including artificial intelligence.

d. Digital Security: Impersonation and cyberattacks emerged as recurring threats to the digital electoral ecosystem. A prominent vector of disruption involved fraudulent social media accounts impersonating high profile candidates as well as PM Sushila Karki, which required direct, coordinated intervention between the PM's Office and the cyber bureau for the removal. Concurrently, a group operating under the name 'Nepali for Nepal' claimed cyberattacks on government systems, including the Election Commission and the National ID Department, resulting in arrests. Nepal Police's newly launched AI and Advanced Analytics Cell and the deployment of EIMS/GIS systems reflected growing institutional attention to digital security. Though the adoption of technology and systems were prioritized, absence of relevant legal regulation, institutional capacity, procedural transparency and public reporting of outcome raises questions regarding efficacy of adopted measures.

e. Privacy and Data Protection: Significant voter privacy

violations occurred in the absence of a comprehensive data protection law. The availability of digital voter lists, containing voter ID numbers, age, gender identity, and parents' names, to parties and candidates with certain fees raised concerns under the Individual Privacy Act,. Separately, the misuse of a bulk SMS gateway to send unsolicited political messages exposed systemic gaps in consent, data handling, and accountability across Nepal's telecommunications infrastructure. Questions regarding the privacy issues in use of AI-based tools by the ECN for monitoring of social media use were also raised.

- f. Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) and Discrimination:** The digital space saw a rise in identity based attacks, with online harassment weaponized to undermine specific demographics of candidates and citizens. While male candidates received more frequent hate speech, reflecting their higher representation in the race, abuse directed at women was characterized by dehumanization and “slut-shaming” targeting their personal lives rather than their political positions. Independent monitoring by the Purple Foundation revealed that 13 out of 20 monitored women candidates' Facebook pages experienced OGBV during the election period. Rather than challenging the political positions, policy platforms, or qualifications of women candidates, the online abuse was heavily gendered. It relied on dehumanization, character assassination, and “slut-shaming” tactics specifically targeting their personal and private lives.

Discrimination across digital platforms extended beyond gender to target other vulnerable aspects of identity, spanning the pre-election, polling, and post election phases. Candidates from marginalized communities faced targeted caste based

slurs and systemic online degradation aimed at diminishing their political legitimacy.

The threat of digital violence persisted even after the ballots were cast. Private citizens, particularly women vocal in the political sphere, faced targeted online harassment and retaliatory doxxing during the post-election phase.

- g. Voter Education:** The election cycle saw a significant shift toward voter education strategies in the digital space, which were driven by both public, private and civil society organizations, as well as the influencers and other individuals. Some notable examples include the TikTok competition announced by ECN, campaigns run by UNDP and UN Women as well as by civil society actors.

Despite expansive digital outreach, serious structural limitations and geographical disparities restricted overall effectiveness of these campaigns. Invalid votes reached approximately 3.5% under the Proportional Representation (PR) system and over 5% under the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) system. Voter turnout stood at 59.6%. Though the number of invalid votes notably decreased, observers noted continuing disparities in access to election information, particularly in remote areas, with the ECN itself noting that the earlier-than-expected election date limited its ability to fully leverage digital channels for voter education.

- h. Artificial Intelligence:** Artificial Intelligence emerged as a central feature of the election and was regulated for the first time under the Election Code of Conduct 2082. Use of generative AI, cheapfakes, deepfakes were aggressively

deployed against political figures. Approximately 54% of identified disinformation utilized AI-generated or altered media, with manipulated videos (86%), including deepfakes targeting figures such as Balen Shah, Gagan Thapa, KP Oli, Rabi Lamichhha, serving as the dominant tool for supporting or discrediting candidates. AI-based content distortion was also the second most frequent Code of Conduct violation, with 95 recorded instances.

At the institutional level, AI was also used for monitoring and governance. Tools such as eMonitor+, AI-assisted monitoring of Code of Conduct breach, AI-powered Telephone Election Information System-TingTing were deployed for social media monitoring, voter education and awareness campaigns. Nepal Police also introduced the Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Analytics Cell (AI-AAC) for cybercrime and misinformation monitoring. However, details regarding the technical architecture of these systems including data storage practices, server locations, security standards, and data retention protocols were not publicly disclosed. The use of third-party AI tools also raises concerns around algorithmic bias, classification errors, institutional dependence on external platforms, and broader risks related to data protection, governance, and oversight transparency.

- i. **Digital Political Advertising:** Digital political advertising expanded significantly during the election period, but concerns over transparency and accountability remained. According to Meta's Ad Library, approximately USD 46,857 was spent on political advertisements in the 90 days preceding the election, with spending heavily concentrated in the Bagmati Zone, highlighting a clear urban-rural disparity.

However, the accuracy of these figures remains questionable due to persistent transparency gaps in online political advertising. Evidence from Meta's Ad Library also suggests that some candidates began promoting content before the official campaign period commenced on February 16. Political parties and candidates maintained dedicated digital campaign teams, while outsourced digital promotion reportedly cost between NPR 1,200 to NPR 20,000 per post. These practices raised concerns about unequal access to digital campaigning resources and undermined the level playing field envisioned by the Election Code of Conduct.

- j. Institutional and Platform Coordination Gaps:** There was a stark contrast in platform accountability. While TikTok signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and established an in-app Election Centre, collaboration with Meta (Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp) was largely ineffective. Despite online meetings, Meta did not formally provide technical assistance, leaving the ECN to rely on manual filtering and third-party tools like eMonitor+ .

9.2 Conclusions

The 2026 election marked the arrival of a hybrid digital campaigning model in Nepal, where the digital space has become as influential as the physical ballot box. This transition has yielded several critical conclusions:

Legal and Regulatory Lag: Nepal's legal framework remains fundamentally outdated for the digital age. Relying on the Electronic Transaction Act (ETA) 2063 to govern modern social media dynamics is insufficient. The absence of a dedicated Cyber

Law and a comprehensive data protection law has left the state ill-equipped to handle issues like micro-targeted advertising, voter profiling, and algorithmic amplification of emotionally charged content .

Transparency as a Missing Link: While the ECN integrated advanced monitoring tools like eMonitor+, its processes remained largely opaque. The failure to publicly disclose the specific nature of flagged content or provide a clear redress mechanism for suspended platforms has raised concerns about institutional accountability and potential overreach in the name of “electoral integrity”.

The Power Shift to Platforms: The election underscored that the integrity of Nepal’s democratic process now partially depends on the whims of global tech giants. The limited cooperation from Meta, in contrast to TikTok’s proactive engagement, suggests that without formal, binding international cooperation, domestic regulators will continue to face significant “complexities of regulating cross-border digital content”.

Digital Divide and Electoral Result: There is a plausible correlation between digital access, including internet penetration, and electoral result. Newer political forces with digital competency and focus, thrived in urban constituencies with high internet access, while parties who led the government in the past maintained dominance in rural areas with lower digital connectivity.

Normalization of Synthetic Media: The 2026 cycle “normalized” the use of AI for political influence. The inability of current technology to effectively detect or halt deepfakes in real-time

has created a “complex information environment” where voters struggle to distinguish between authentic incidents and fabricated content.

In summary, while digital tools have expanded democratic participation and voter outreach, they have simultaneously introduced systemic vulnerabilities regarding privacy, information integrity, and freedom of expression that require urgent legislative and institutional reform.

9.3 Recommendations

To strengthen the integrity of future elections in Nepal’s digital environment, the following recommendations respond directly to the gaps and challenges identified in this report: opaque enforcement outcomes, an AI and data protection framework that has not kept pace with practice, uneven platform cooperation, unregulated digital campaign financing, under-protected candidates and voters facing gendered and identity-based harm, a fragmented monitoring landscape, and persistent digital literacy gaps.

To the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN)

1. Conduct a comprehensive post-election review of the 2026 election’s digital dimension, covering social media use, political advertising, AI-generated content, and their effects on voter behavior and electoral integrity, and use the findings to directly inform the next Election Code of Conduct and electoral directives.
2. Develop a Digital Election Integrity Framework, separate from the general Code of Conduct, that sets out enforceable rules on online political campaigning, political advertising,

influencer-driven promotion, AI-generated content, and the disclosure obligations of political actors and digital intermediaries.

3. Move from ad hoc, election-period engagement with platforms to standing coordination agreements with tech platforms having large number of users in Nepal such as Meta, TikTok, Google/YouTube, and X, with defined points of contact, response-time commitments, and reporting channels.
4. Require disclosure of paid political advertising, sponsored content, and paid influencer promotion, with content clearly labelled and accessible through a public advertisement transparency mechanism, such as Meta ad library.
5. Resource the Information Integrity Promotion Unit (IIPU), with necessary digital tools and system, dedicated digital investigators, data analysts, and monitoring resources.
6. Establish a permanent Digital Election Monitoring Mechanism within the ECN to monitor digital campaign activities, online electoral violations, coordinated manipulation efforts, and emerging technology-related risks throughout the electoral cycle rather than only during election periods.
7. Issue specific AI-in-elections guidelines that operationalize the Code of Conduct's existing prohibition on AI-generated misinformation: mandatory labelling of AI-generated or manipulated political content, disclosure obligations for political actors using AI in campaign

material, and a defined fast-track process for verification and takedown requests when synthetic media depicting candidates or officials circulates.

8. Review voter data management and sharing practices to ensure compliance with constitutional guarantees of privacy, the Privacy Act, 2018, and international human rights standards. The collection, use, processing, and sharing of voter data should be governed by principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, transparency, and informed consent.
9. Strengthen cybersecurity protections for election infrastructure to enhance public trust in digital electoral processes.
10. Ensure that any future media or content restrictions are lawful, necessary, and proportionate, with a clear distinction between legitimate political expression and unlawful harmful content. Broad or arbitrary restrictions that may undermine freedom of expression should be avoided.
11. Make transparency the default rather than the exception: publish regular reports on flagged content, referrals made, enforcement actions taken, and outcomes received from platforms and other authorities, including the results of cases referred to the Cyber Bureau, NTA, and Press Council.

To the Government of Nepal

1. Enact a comprehensive data protection law covering the collection, processing, storage, sharing, and use of personal data, with specific provisions for voter data and

political profiling, and clear consent rules for bulk political communication.

2. Review and update the electoral laws to address digital campaigning, political advertising, algorithmic amplification, platform accountability, AI-generated content, and coordinated influence operations, none of which are adequately addressed by current electoral law.
3. Establish a permanent inter-agency coordination mechanism linking the ECN, Ministry of Home Affairs, Nepal Police Cyber Bureau, Press Council Nepal, Nepal Telecommunication Authority, to coordinate responses to election-related digital risks.
4. Keep election security and digital monitoring functions under civilian institutions, limiting the role of the Nepal Army to exceptional, legally defined circumstances. Election security, digital safety and monitoring functions should remain under civilian institutions and democratic oversight to safeguard the integrity of the electoral process and democratic values.
5. Commission periodic, independent research on the impact of digital platforms and AI on elections and information integrity to keep policy responsive to a fast-changing environment.
6. Invest in nationwide digital, media, and electoral literacy programs targeted with particular focus on rural voters, women, marginalized communities, senior citizens, and first-time voters, to improve resilience against disinformation and digital manipulation.

7. Address Online Gender-Based Violence. Specific mechanisms must be developed within the Election Code of Conduct to identify and penalize OGBV and coordinated harassment targeting women and marginalized groups. Besides, specific law to deal with OGBV must be developed.
8. Enact social media regulation requiring platforms operating in Nepal to maintain a designated local point of contact and a functioning grievance mechanism, overseen by an independent regulatory body, so cooperation with electoral and law enforcement authorities does not depend on the voluntary, inconsistent arrangements.

To Digital Platforms

1. Establish dedicated election integrity teams and a local point of contact in Nepal ahead of, not during, election periods, with a clear escalation channel for government and civil society reporting.
2. Maintain political advertising libraries that disclose sponsor identity, expenditure, targeting criteria, geographic reach, and duration.
3. Publish regular transparency reports on content removal, account suspension, and enforcement actions taken in response to election-related violations, including reporting on coordinated inauthentic accounts and rebranded pages.
4. Strengthen detection of coordinated disinformation campaigns and AI-generated or manipulated media, with attention to performance across Nepali, Devanagari, and

Romanized Nepali content, particularly during election periods.

5. Provide independent researchers and accredited election observers with access to platform data, under appropriate privacy safeguards, to support evidence-based assessment of electoral risks.

To Political Parties and Candidates

1. Publicly commit to ethical digital campaigning standards prohibiting disinformation, hate speech, AI-generated deceptive content, voter manipulation, and coordinated harassment.
2. Disclose digital campaign expenditure and advertising activity, including payments made to third-party IT firms and social media management companies for content creation, targeting, and promotional activities.
3. Ensure campaign staff, volunteers, and supporters are trained on electoral laws, digital ethics, and responsible online conduct, including compliance with election-related regulations. Take responsibility for the conduct of hired digital campaign vendors and outsourced content creators.

To Media, Civil Society, and Fact-Checking Organizations

1. Expand independent monitoring of digital campaigns to identify emerging risks and document violations for evidence-based advocacy, and policy reform.
2. Establish shared methodologies and data-sharing arrangements among fact-checking organizations and

election observation bodies to reduce duplication and produce a more consolidated evidence base than the separate datasets.

3. Strengthen rapid-response fact-checking capacity for the period immediately before and during polling, when corrections have the least time to reach voters before content spreads.
4. Continue and expand public digital literacy and information-verification initiatives, with particular attention to first-time voters and rural audiences who rely heavily on social media platform for election information.
5. Advocate for digital governance frameworks that protect electoral integrity while avoiding overbroad restrictions on legitimate political expression, press freedom, and access to information.
6. Develop and resource a standardized digital election observation checklist, so digital monitoring becomes a core, replicable component of election observation rather than a one-off initiative.

To Development Partners and Research Institutions

1. Support sustained, long-term research on digital elections, platform governance, AI-related electoral risks, and information integrity in Nepal.
2. Provide technical assistance and capacity-building support to the ECN, regulators, civil society, researchers and fact-checking organizations.

3. Support multi-stakeholder dialogue among government, the ECN, digital platforms, academia, civil society, and media to develop coordinated, rights-respecting responses to emerging digital electoral risks.

These recommendations are intended to close the specific gaps identified in this report, including opaque enforcement, an outdated legal and data protection framework, uneven platform accountability, unregulated digital campaign financing, inadequate protection against gendered and identity-based online harm, fragmented monitoring, and uneven digital literacy, while keeping any future regulation of online political content consistent with constitutional and international human rights standards.

ANNEX -A

List of Key informant interview

- Hon. Sagun Shamsheer JB Raba, Commissioner, Election Commission of Nepal (ECN)
- Mohan Kumar Shrestha, Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP)
- Yubaraj Dulal, Communist Party of Nepal (CPN)
- Ain Bahadur Mahara, Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist)
- Krantishikha Dhital, Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP)
- Bhishma Raj Angdambe, Nepali Congress
- Tika Ram Pokharel, National Human Rights Commission of Nepal
- Ram Prasad Dahal, Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ)
- Aaren Rai, Shram Sanskriti Party
- Nischal Rai, Nepali Congress
- Narayan Prasad Bhattarai, Spokesperson, Election Commission of Nepal
- Representative, Nepal Police Cyber Bureau
- Ram Sharan Bohora, Information Officer, Press Council Nepal
- Kabindra Burlakoti, Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP)

ANNEX -B

List of Participants from Focus Group Discussion

- Achyut Gautam, Bhugolpark
- Ajabi Paudyal, The Annapurna Post
- Ananda Raj Khanal, Nepal Digital Leads
- Anuj Raj Dhungel, Technology Khabar
- Arvind Mishra
- Bhawana Bhatta
- Bhuwan KC, CMR Nepal
- Daya Dudraj, Kantipur Publication
- Dovan Rai, Body & Data
- Durga Dahal
- Ganga Kadel
- Gopal Siwakoti, NEOC
- Kamala Panthi, Sancharika Samuha
- Kundan Aryal, Tribhuvan University
- Kushal Paudel
- Laxman Datt Pant, Media Action Nepal; GFMD
- Manuka Kunwar, Radio Nepal
- Neelam Sharma, Purple Foundation
- Nirmala Sharma, Federation of Nepali Journalists
- Nutan Sharma
- Prabesh Subedi, Digital Media Foundation
- Prakash Shaulakoty, Federation of Nepali Journalists
- Prekkshya Bimali, Accountability Lab Nepal

- Prince Shah, SpeakUp Nepal
- Puspa Thapaliya, Yuwalaya
- Rom Kant Pandey, Tribhuvan University
- Rup Sunar, Dignity Initiative
- Sabitri Rasaily, Nepal Television
- Sahara Bhandari
- Sandhya Sitoula, NAAMII
- Sarthak B.
- Shekhar Parajuli, Democracy Resource Centre
- Shiva Basnet, TechPana
- Showmya Risal
- Shree Ram Paudel, Tribhuvan University
- Supriya Adhikary
- Suvechchha Chapagain, Accountability Lab Nepal
- Taranath Dahal, Freedom Forum
- Ujjwal Acharya, CMR Nepal
- Ujwal Adhikari, EOC-Nepal

(Focus Group Discussions were organized on March 22, May 14 and May 15 of 2026)



Digital Rights Nepal

Digital Rights Nepal is a not-for-profit organization founded in 2020, committed to promoting and safeguarding digital rights in Nepal. DRN's mission is to ensure that everyone in Nepal gets access to the free, open, secure, reliable, and affordable internet and is equipped, empowered, and enabled to uphold their digital rights. DRN staunchly advocates for online freedom of expression, privacy, data protection, access to information, and democratic internet governance. Similarly, DRN actively engages on cyber laws, policies, and cybersecurity concerns, striving to create a safer digital landscape. DRN takes pride in nurturing the next generation of digital rights advocates, shaping a future where digital rights are universally respected and protected.



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