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# **Elections in Nepal**

## *November 19 Constituent Assembly Elections*

Frequently Asked Questions

Europe and Asia

International Foundation for Electoral Systems

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**Frequently Asked Questions**

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*Disclosure:*  
*These FAQs reflect information and decisions made by Nepali authorities to the best of our knowledge. This document does not represent any IFES policy or technical recommendations.*

## **Who are citizens voting for on Election Day?**

Registered voters will cast their ballots to elect members to form a Constituent Assembly (CA), which will be charged with drafting a new constitution for Nepal.

The 2013 CA election is scheduled to take place on November 19, 2013.

## **Why are these elections significant for Nepal?**

This is the second attempt to draft and adopt a new constitution for the country. The first attempt began with elections in 2008. However, the Constituent Assembly (CA) was dissolved in May 2012, as the body's term expired.

A new constitution will enable progress on addressing the many challenges the country faces, ending the political stalemate following the dissolution of the CA.

## **Who can vote?**

Nepalese citizens registered in the voter roll who are at least 18 years old by July 15, 2013, are eligible to vote. The registration captured personal data, photographs and fingerprints of all who registered. This information is stored electronically with the Election Commission of Nepal.

## **How many registered voters are there?**

There are approximately 12.2 million voters registered. In an effort to increase registration in anticipation of the Constituent Assembly elections, mobile voter registration camps were held from April to June 2013, registering approximately 533,000 voters. Camps were held for an additional week in August 2013, resulting in a further 168,000 voters registered.

The current number of registered voters is less than the official voter roll tally from 2008, which was 17,609,895. However, current numbers reflect corrections of duplicate registrations, deceased voters and non-Nepali citizens that were previously included.

## **What is the structure of the government?**

At present, the Nepali government is unitary. The decision to break from the Nepali monarchy and move to a republican government was made during 2006 peace talks. This contributed to an end of hostilities following a 10-year Maoist uprising against the government.

The interim constitution – under which the first Constituent Assembly (CA) election was held in 2008 – provided for a federal structure of government, which would be defined and promulgated by a new constitution. The first session of the 2008 CA confirmed the abolition of the monarchy.

How a federal structure would work in Nepal has been an area of disagreement between political parties; issues include federal boundaries and powers, as well as how these would be distributed (by ethnicity, nationality, geography/resource endowments or language).

## **What is the structure of the Constituent Assembly?**

The Constituent Assembly (CA) will be comprised of representatives who are elected/nominated under a mixed electoral system. The CA will be made of 601 members, 240 of which will be elected under the first-past-the-post electoral system for geographic constituencies across Nepal. Another 335 will be elected using a proportional representation electoral system based on closed party lists of candidates and the final 26 members will be nominated by the incoming government.

## **Are there reserved seats for women? What is the gender balance within the candidate list?**

There are no reserved seats for women; however, Article 7 of the Constituent Assembly (CA) Ordinance (2013) mandates that in making nominations, each party must ensure “the number of women candidates must be at least one third of the total number comprising the number of women candidates to be fielded under the proportional electoral system added to the number of women candidates to be fielded under the first-past-the-post electoral system.”

## **What is the election management body? What are its powers?**

The Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) is a constitutionally-mandated, independent body made of members, a central Secretariat and district offices. The current members include Chief Election Commissioner Neel Kantha Uprety and Commissioners Dolakh Bahadur Gurung, Dr. Rambhakta P.B. Thakur, Dr. Ayodhi Prasad Yadav and Ila Sharma.

The ECN’s mandate is to conduct national and local elections, referendum and Constituent Assembly (CA) elections in a free, fair and credible manner. It is also responsible for the creation and maintenance of the voter roll. The ECN is divided into 17 different committees, including those that cover election security, election monitoring, ballot papers, election dispute resolution, election law, political party registration, voter education, voter roll/voter IDs and election symbol allocation for political parties and candidates.

## **Where do the people cast their votes?**

Registered voters will cast their vote in polling centers designated by the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN). There will be polling places in each of the 58 municipalities and 3,915 village development committees, each having polling centers within. Urban centers will also have multiple polling centers.

In total, there are 10,015 polling places, with some having more than one center. This means that 18,482 separate polling centers will be set up for Election Day. Each center will serve up to 900 registered voters. Additional temporary polling centers will be set up in Nepal army barracks, senior citizen homes, etc. The total number of these additional centers is not yet final.

## **Is out-of-country voting allowed?**

No. All registered voters must cast their vote in Nepal.

## **How will voters with disabilities cast their ballots?**

Voters may seek assistance from another individual at polling centers or ask polling officials for assistance. There are also a limited number of voting centers, 49, that are better equipped for voters with disabilities. These centers include ramps to make the facility more accessible and can be found in the districts of Kathmandu, Siraha, Sarlahi, Banke, Kailali, Kanchanpur, Morang, Sindhuli, Baglung, Rupendehi, Parsa, Kaski, Dang, Jhapa and Dhankuta.

## **What is the method of voting?**

Voters will cast two paper ballots: a blue one for candidates elected via the first-past-the-post system and a red one for political parties on the proportional representation list. On the ballots, all candidates and political parties are designated by unique symbols; candidate/party names or photographs are not included. Each ballot goes in a separate ballot box.

Ballots will be marked with a special ink stamp against the candidate or party symbol of the voter's choice.

## **Where are voting, counting and tabulation held?**

Voting will be held at polling centers across Nepal. Counting will be held at the district level within counting centers arranged by returning officers, in coordination with district election officers. Counting officers will manually count all ballots.

Tabulation of both the proportional representation and first-past-the-post votes will be done at district election offices at the constituency level. Proportional representation results will then be forwarded to the Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) headquarters in Kathmandu for calculation and announcement. First-past-the-post results will be managed by returning officers in their respective constituencies. Ballots will be transported primarily by road – or helicopter, if needed – with a security escort.

The ECN issued an updated vote counting directive for this election, providing clear guidance on the vote counting process to ensure credibility of results.

## **Will the election management body use a media center?**

Yes. A media center will be created at Election Commission of Nepal headquarters in Kantipath, Kathmandu. The center will collect information on results from district election officers and returning officers, and disseminate other election-related information – including audiovisual clips and photos – to national and international media. The center is equipped with computers and high-tech facilities. It will also be used for media monitoring during elections.

## Who can observe during Election Day?

National and international observers affiliated with organizations accredited by the Election Commission of Nepal, together with special guests invited by the commission, may observe this election.

At present, the following organizations are accredited to observe.

### National observers:

- National Election Observation Committee
- Democracy and Elections Watch
- General Election Observation Committee
- Election Observation Committee
- Informal Sector Service Center-led effort
- Constituent Assembly Election Observation Joint Forum and Press Club of Nepal

### International observers:

- The Carter Center
- Asian Network for Free Elections
- European Union
- The Asia Foundation: High-level mission from the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation and other countries

There will be both short-term and long-term observers across these organizations. Short-term observers will arrive shortly before Election Day, and long-term observers will be in Nepal during the pre-electoral period.

## How are they accredited?

Those national and international organizations that applied for observer status and met the legal criteria set by the Constituent Assembly Election Law received approval for observation from the Election Commission of Nepal.

Observer groups shall – as part of the “duties of observer groups and observers” – submit a preliminary observation report within 30 days of the election, as well as a comprehensive report within 90 days following the publication of election results.

## Are there any security concerns around the elections?

An alliance of 33 smaller parties led by the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) announced a formal boycott of elections. A *bandh* (public strike or demonstration) is scheduled for November 11-20. The *bandh*, as planned, entails obstructing other political parties from campaigning and targets election candidates and election materials. The pre-election period has already seen some violence against candidates; seizure of party offices and burning of campaign materials; destruction of Election Commission of Nepal voter education and poll materials; and hampering/obstructing of campaign activities. At the same time, there is a growing resistance to the *bandh*. Many fear the protest could

spark confrontation between rival youth wings of pro and anti-poll parties and see voters denied access to the polls.

### **How is the Nepali government approaching security?**

The Nepali government is deploying approximately 54,000 personnel from the Nepal Police Department and 22,000 from the Armed Police Force, as well as hiring nearly 44,000 temporary police officers for the elections.

Additionally, about 60,000 members of the Nepalese army are being deployed across the country. While the army was deployed during elections in the 1990s, they were not active in election security during the 2008 Constituent Assembly elections, in accordance with the Comprehensive Peace Accord of 2006. The interim constitution was amended in September 2013 to allow for their deployment.

### **When will official results be announced?**

Results of first-past-the-post polls will be announced by the returning officer of a constituency once counting is completed. Counting will begin when all ballot boxes from all polling centers arrive at the returning officer's office.

The results of proportional representation candidates will be announced when the Election Commission of Nepal has tabulated and confirmed results received from all returning officers. Currently, there is no specified timeframe.

## Resources

- Interim Constitution of Nepal (2007) ([English](#))
- Official website of the Election Commission of Nepal ([Nepali](#))