



Center for Asian Democracy

Nepal

2022 Pre-Election Report

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*Cover image source: [IFES, 2018](#)

Country Profile

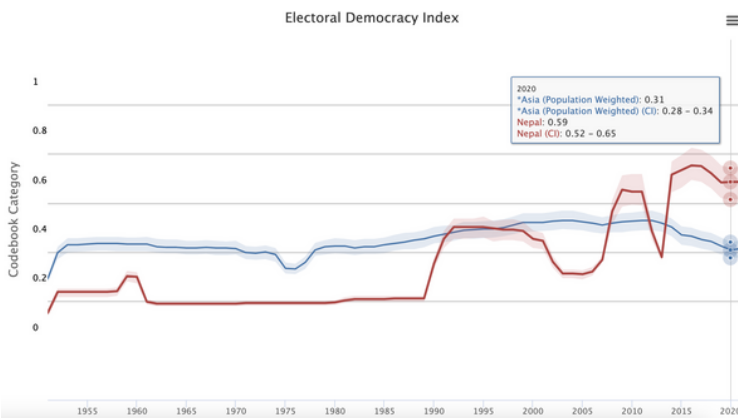
Overview

Nepal's Constitution declares it a "federal, democratic, republican system of governance." It is a representative democracy in South Asia with a population of over 30 million people. The country's constitution took effect in 2015, based on efforts of a Constituent Assembly, and was closely tied to the country's efforts to end a civil war with Maoist insurgents. Its constitution can be reviewed here.



Measures of Democracy

Compared to its peers in Asia, Nepal performs well on leading indices of democracy. V-Dem measures of electoral and liberal democracy visualize this point. Nepal's electoral democracy index of .59 and liberal democracy score of .46 are solidly above the Asian regional average. Each chart visualizes the point that Nepal has made significant progress in the past two decades, while the rest of Asia has seen modest declines.

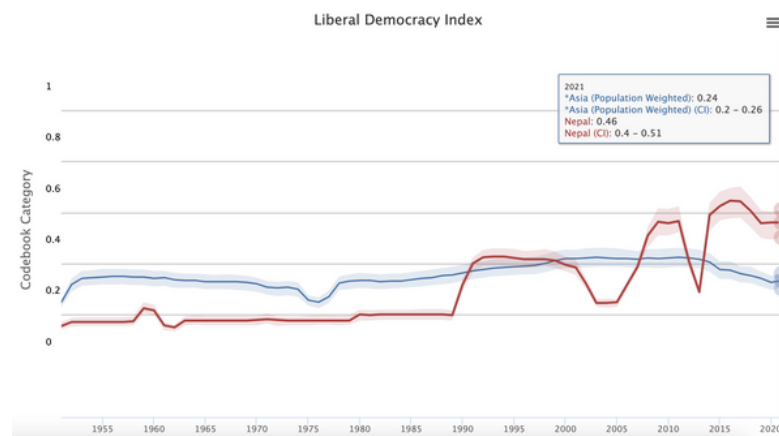


Media Freedom

Press freedom in Nepal has increased recently, although sensitivities remain for reporters, particularly related to coverage of security forces and some rebel groups.



(Reporters without Borders, 2022)



Election Profile

Offices to Be Contested

General elections are set to be held on November 20th, 2022 to elect the 275 members of Nepal's House of Representatives (Pratinidhi Sabha), the lower chamber within the bicameral Federal Parliament. In addition to federal elections, Nepalese voters will also be electing members of the seven provincial assemblies (PAs), 753 municipality executives and over 6,500 local- and village-level councils. The House utilizes a hybrid electoral system in which 165 members of Parliament (MPs) are elected by first-past-the-post (FPTP) and 110 are chosen by proportional representation (PR). Article 60 of the 2017 House of Representatives Election Act further mandates that political parties must meet certain quotas for when submitting their list of candidates for the PR ballot.

Leading Candidates and Parties

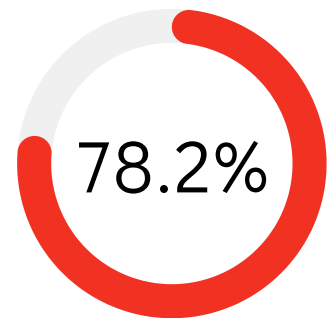
The 2022 election cycle is just the second to take place since the implementation of Nepal's new constitution in 2015, which abandoned the country's monarchy and established a framework for democratic governance.

As a nascent multi-party democracy, Nepal's parties and coalitions remain flexible. There are currently 116 registered parties in, 84 of which have filed with the Election Commission of Nepal to compete in the November elections. There are six primary parties. From largest to smallest they include: the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML), the Nepali Congress (NC), the CPN Maoist Centre (MC), the CPN United Socialist (CPN-US), the People's Socialist Party of Nepal (PSP-N), and the Loktrantrik Samajwadi Party (LSP).

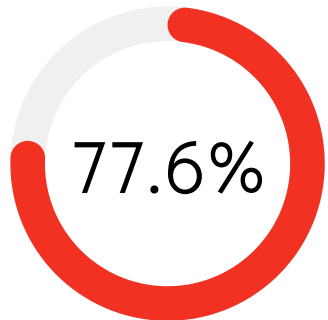
Coalitions have become a fixture of the new Nepalese political landscape. The current ruling coalition comprises the NC, CPN-MC, CPN-US that splintered from the CPN-UML, the Loktrantrik Samajwadi Party (LSP), and Rashtriya Janamorcha (RJ). On the side of the opposition, the CPN-UML has partnered with the Hindu-nationalist Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) and Janata Samajwadi Party (JSP), a discontented former ally of the ruling coalition. The efficacy of these coalitions has been questioned by many observers in Nepal, who note the lack of ideological similarities between the allied parties.

Although both sides have assembled large factions, the 2022 elections are primarily a contest between the dominant parties in each coalition: the Nepali Congress (NC), led by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, and the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), led by former PM K.P. Sharma Oli. Oli was the subject of widespread controversy after Nepal's Supreme Court ordered him to vacate his office in July 2021.

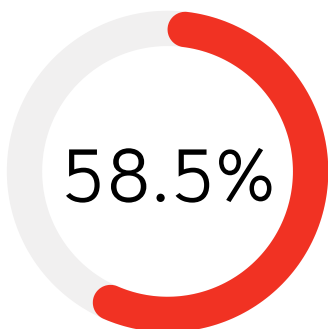
Previous Turnout



2017 General Election (Parliamentary)



2013 Constituent Assembly

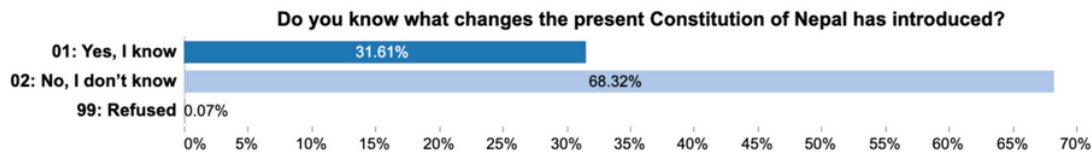


2008 Constituent Assembly

Public Attitudes Regarding Democracy

Compared to other cases in Asia, Nepal has received limited attention in cross-national public opinion surveys with standardized measures of support for democracy. A [2020 Asia Foundation survey](#) captures important dimensions of public opinion on democratic institutions. This brief section highlights representative indicators.

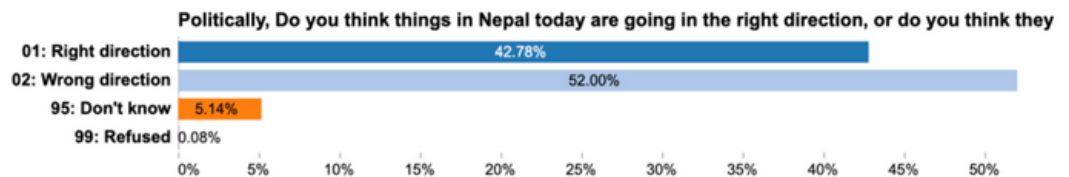
Constitutional Reforms



All figures via [Asia Foundation online analysis](#)

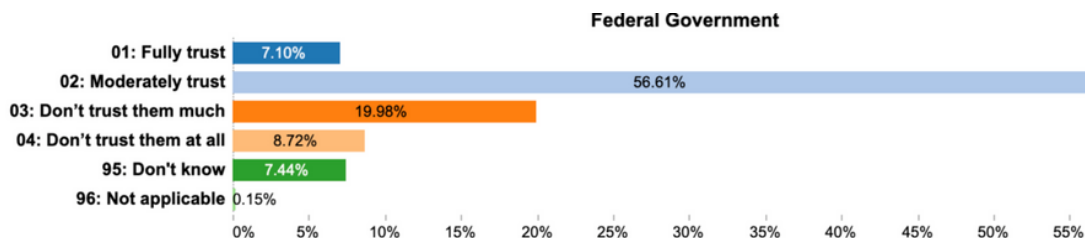
While Nepal's post-conflict constitution instituted robust liberal democratic institutions in many regards, public awareness of these changes is limited. Awareness levels are even lower in more isolated parts of the country.

Democratic Satisfaction



Nepal's citizens are closely divided on satisfaction with the direction of their country.

Confidence in Government Institutions



A solid majority of respondents express some level of trust in government institutions. While the number in the highest category of governmental trust is fairly low, most subjects express a moderate level of federal government trust.

Challenges to Democratic Institutions

One of the greatest issues stemming from the adoption of 2015 constitution is a lack of public awareness regarding the changes the new constitution implemented. In 2020, more than two-thirds (68.4%) of Nepalis were still unaware of many of the changes brought by the 2015 constitution. Just 22.4% of female respondents claimed to be familiar with the constitutional changes, compared to 44.1% of male respondents. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) [capacity-building program](#) in Nepal has recognized the need to “support Nepal’s federalization process by interpreting and assessing the wider implications of the Constitution and other key laws and simplifying them into easily accessible resource materials.”

The 2015 constitution [enshrines equal opportunity](#) for Nepal’s ethnic, religious, and other minority groups. The primary avenue for increasing representation has been a quota system. Parties’ candidate lists for the 110 seats elected using proportional representation (PR) must be 50% women, with additional percentage quotas for Nepal’s various ethnic and religious minorities. Nepal’s quota system has increased electoral representation for many groups, but certain are still underrepresented. Madhesis, Dalits, and Muslims are all underrepresented in relation to their share of the population.

Nepal’s quota system has produced [mixed results](#) for women. The [2017 election cycle](#) saw women elected to 34% of House of Representatives seats and women elected to 41% of seats at the local level. However, for the 165 FPTP seats in the House, parties nominated a total of 1,944 candidates. Of these candidates, only 146 were women, and only six successfully went on to win seats.

A final challenge facing Nepal is party fragmentation. Without ideological agendas, observers [contend](#) that coalitions are less concerned with policymaking and more focused on maintaining power. Ideological disunity has hindered the efficacy of parties, as shown by [fragmentation](#) of the Communist Party of Nepal, which recorded a landslide victory in 2017 before fracturing into three separate parties.



Group	Quota in federal elections
Women	50% of each party's PR candidates (by group) + 33% of each party's FPTP candidates (new for 2022)
Dalit (the lowest groups in the Hindu caste system)	13.8% of each party's PR candidates
Adibasi Janajati (indigenous peoples)	28.7% of each party's PR candidates
Khas Arya (the dominant Chhetri, Brahman, Thakuri and Sanyasi castes)	31.2% of each party's PR candidates
Madhesi (people from the Southern part of Nepal, called Madhesh or Terai)	15.3% of each party's PR candidates
Tharu (an indigenous group from Terai)	6.6% of each party's PR candidates
Muslims	4.4% of each party's PR candidates

Quotas applicable for House of Representatives elections

Source: ANFREL Pre-Election Assessment Mission Report

Nepal's Regional Context and Democracy

Contemporary relations with China and India are objects of division in the upcoming election. In particular, Nepal's parties are divided over whether or not to proceed with infrastructure projects as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which Nepal joined in 2017 after former PM Kamal Dahal signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Beijing. Nepal's Communist parties are supporters of the BRI, and view the strategic partnership with China as an avenue for transforming Nepal from a landlocked country to a "land-linked" one. The Nepali Congress (NC) is advocating for Nepal to draw funding from a \$500 million grant from the American-backed Millenium Challenge Corporation (MCC). The NC steered the MCC grant through ratification in parliament, and has argued that Nepal would benefit more from foreign aid grants rather than Chinese commercial loans.

Although China is Nepal's greatest source of FDI, India is still more connected to Nepal via the two countries' linked Hindu religious history as well as the open border policy enshrined in the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship. In recent years India's ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has sought to increase its ties with Nepalese political parties, even those that do not share its Hindu nationalist ideology.

Like China, Relations with India will also be on the ballot in Nepal's 2022 elections. Parties such as the CPN-MC and the CPN-Unified Socialist (CPN-US) have promised stricter border enforcement and revisions to the Treaty of Peace and Friendship. Additionally, the CPN-MC has pledged to curb the conscription of Nepalese Gurkha soldiers into the Indian military under the controversial Agnipath scheme. Moreover, Nepal's parties differ in their interpretation of territorial disputes along the border with China and India. While the NC has grouped minor territorial disputes with China alongside major ones with India, the communist parties avoid commenting on disputes with China.

In short, Nepal occupies a unique position as a geopolitical proxy between India and China, and serves as an indicator of the two countries' positions within the Himalayan region. Whether Nepal chooses to lean toward one of the two countries or remain non-aligned will largely be predicated on the results of the 2022 elections, and the decision will influence Nepal's ongoing political and economic trajectory.



China and Nepal Sign MOU related to Belt and Road initiative (2017)

Further Reading

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About the Center for Asian Democracy

The mission of the Center for Asian Democracy, established at the University of Louisville in 2006, is to promote research and teaching about democracy and the prospects for democratization in Central, South, Southeast, and East Asia. Through publications, conferences, workshops, visiting scholars programs, colloquia, and research projects in Asian countries, the Center creates a forum for studying political dynamics in this vital region. The Center is currently led by Interim Director, Dr. David Buckley, Paul Weber Chair of Politics, Science and Religion and Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Louisville.

About the Author

The substantive research of this report was conducted by CAD Undergraduate Research Fellow, Tristin Black, under the supervision of Dr. David Buckley. Tristin Black is a junior at the University of Louisville majoring in political science and pan-African studies. He is also a Brown Fellow at the University of Louisville, and his research interests include US foreign policy and democracy in Asia.

Acknowledgments

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