

Nepal's Upcoming Elections: The Issues that Matter

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Summary

As factionalism runs deep in Nepal's political parties, it is difficult to say that the 20 November 2022 elections will bring long-term political stability to the country. However, whoever leads the next government must work hard to manage the country's economy, domestic politics and foreign policy.

On 20 November 2022, Nepal will hold its second elections for the federal parliament and provincial assemblies under the provisions of the constitution it adopted in 2015. The first elections were held in 2017. Of the total 275 seats in the federal parliament, 165 are directly elected under the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, and 110 members are elected through the [proportional representation system](#). Over 2400 party and independent candidates have filed their nomination papers for the 165 FPTP seats. There are 550 seats in the seven provinces. Of these, 330 members are directly elected, and 220 are brought in through the proportional representation system. For the provincial elections, there are about 3,000 candidates in the field.

The main contest is between the ruling coalition, led by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's Nepali Congress (NC), and the opposition alliance under former prime minister K P Sharma Oli's Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML). The ruling coalition has NC, Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) [CPN-Maoist Centre], Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Socialist), Loktantrik Samajwadi Party and Rashtriya Janmorcha. The CPN-UML has tied up with Hindu nationalist, Rashtriya Prajatantra Party, and its ideological nemesis, Janata Samajbadi Party.

The opposition has expressed faith in Oli's leadership, while in the ruling alliance, there are many contenders for the leadership position. For example, the NC's Gagan Thapa and Ramesh Chandra Paudel have expressed their desire to become prime minister of the country. Another candidate is Pushpa Kamal Dahal, chairman of the CPN-Maoist Centre. In an interview with Himalaya TV, [Dahal said](#), "If the opportunity arises, I have an aspiration to show what I have in store to lead the country and establish what is about economic development."

Several key issues will determine the decision of around 18 million eligible voters. First, Nepal is grappling with a high inflation rate of over eight per cent. Second, about one-fifth of Nepal's population lives on [less than US\\$2 \(S\\$2.81\) a day](#). According to *Nepal: Multidimensional Poverty Index 2021*, published by the National Planning Commission, Nepal made significant gains in reducing multidimensional poverty over five years prior to the outbreak of COVID-19. In 2019, 17.4 per cent of Nepalis were multidimensionally poor. The [five indicators](#) used to calculate the index were nutrition, child mortality, years of schooling, housing and assets. Third, there is the issue of political instability. Since the

abolition of the monarchy in 2008, Nepal has had 10 different governments. Fourth, the opposition and ruling coalition have differences over the Citizenship Amendment Bill. On the issue of whether to grant naturalised citizenship to foreign women married to Nepali men, the CPN-UML, the CPN (Maoist Centre) and other smaller parties demanded a cooling-off period. However, after becoming a part of the ruling coalition, the CPN (Maoist Centre) agreed with the position of the NC and Madhes-based parties not to keep the cooling-off period. In July 2022, after the bill was passed by the House of Representatives and the National Assembly, and the government sent it to President Bidhya Devi Bhandari. Instead of giving her assent, Bhandari returned the bill to the government for [reconsideration](#). On 18 August 2022, the government re-sent the bill to the President. Again, the President did [not give her assent](#). On 25 September 2022, the Supreme Court of Nepal issued a show cause notice in the name of the President's office asking why Bhandari did not [authenticate the bill on time](#).

Besides the internal issues, Nepal's relations with India and China have found space in the poll manifesto of political parties and in the electoral speeches of leaders. In its [election manifesto](#), the NC promises to diplomatically engage with India and China to address border-related disputes. On the other hand, inaugurating his party's elections campaign in the Darchula district, [Oli said](#), "We will bring back land, including Kalapani, Lipulek and Limpiyadhura." He added, "We will not spare even an inch of our land". Oli also said that if his party returns to power, he will balance the country's ties with India and China for [mutual benefit](#).

Interestingly, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Nepal compact and State Partnership Programme (SPP), which, in recent times, evoked political debate in the country, have not become serious [electoral issues](#). Under the MCC, the United States (US) government has agreed to provide US\$500 million (S\$676 million) in grants, while Nepal will contribute US\$130 million (S\$175 million) for projects that prioritise energy and roadways. Opponent of the MCC accused it of being a part of the US' "grand design" to pull Nepal to its side to counter the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. The SPP is an exchange programme between the American State's National Guard and a [partner country](#). Washington accepted Kathmandu in the SPP after it applied twice in 2015 and 2017. In 2022, the SPP debate received traction after a visit by the Commanding General of the US Army Pacific, Charles A Flynn. Under pressure from the opposition and some members of his own party, Deuba's government terminated Nepal's [partnership with the SPP](#).

Given its political history, it is difficult to say how long Nepal will witness political stability after the November 2022 elections. In any case, the incoming prime minister will have a tough job in his hands to manage domestic politics, economy and foreign policy affairs.

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