

House of Representatives and Provincial Assembly Elections 2022

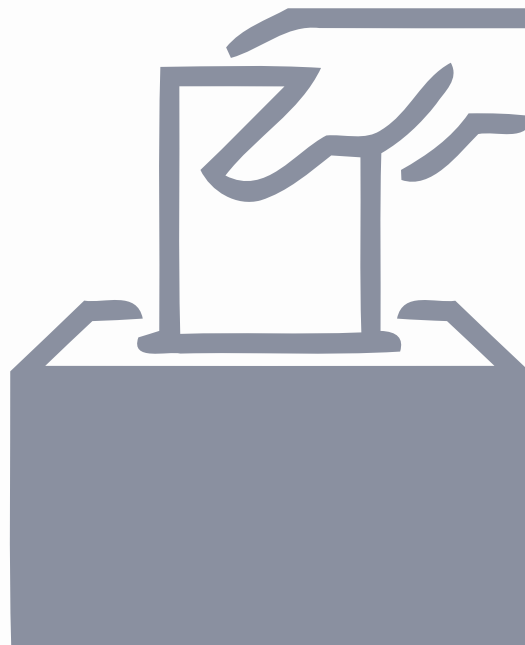


Election Day Update (November 20)



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1. Peaceful and well conducted election amid lesser voter turnout than anticipated

The polling day of the House of Representatives (HoR) and Provincial Assembly (PA) election on November 20 remained mostly peaceful despite some instances of clashes, disputes, and protests against elections in some districts.

According to the Election Commission (EC)'s preliminary estimate at the end of voting period, overall voter turnout is likely to stand at 61%, a little below 70% voter turnout as anticipated by the EC. Despite a peaceful and well conducted election, low voter turnout remained a big concern among election officials, political parties, candidates and civil society. The local elections in May had witnessed a comparatively encouraging 64% voter turnout while it was even higher at 68% during HoR and PA elections – 2017.

Major and minor disputes over voting were reported in 75 polling centers across the country which resulted in halting of voting. In 15 of these polling centers in Surkhet, Nawalparasi, Gulmi and Bajura district elections were canceled to be held at a later date according to the EC. Polling successfully resumed in most of the polling stations, despite disputes, clashes and incidents of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). For instance, the polling at Shambusharan Secondary School in Khairapur of Bardiya district, which was suspended for an hour due to an IED explosion outside the polling station, resumed after an hour. Similarly, voting suspended in some polling stations of Palpa, Surkhet, Sankhuwasabha, Dhanusa and Saptari districts due to disputes

disputes arising from exchange of ballot papers for HoR and PA elections resumed shortly after all party agreement in those polling stations.

Police fired warning shots at some polling centers in Bajura, Dolakha, Darchula, Doti, Syangja, Taplejung, Bajhang, Siraha, Rautahat, and Humla districts to take the situation into control after clashes at the polling centers. In Tribeni municipality-7 of Bajura a person died while two others sustained serious injuries after police fired shots following a clash between parties after the end of voting period.

Similarly, a police personnel deployed at a polling center in Chabbis Pathibhara rural municipality-1, sustained injury after a warning shot fired to control the clash between parties, accidentally hit him. The clash happened due to a dispute related to seizing the ballot box. Likewise, an ASI of Nepal police sustained injury during a clash at Danfe polling center in Chankheli rural municipality-5 of Humla. The clash ensued following a dispute about assisted voting.

Major causes of disputes at polling centers included dispute over proxy voting, oversight of election staff, and alleged attempts by competing parties to overpower polling booths. Also, fringe parties that had announced boycott of the elections, were also found making attempts to disrupt the electoral environment by activities that include placing IEDs, vandalizing ballot boxes, and organizing demonstrations against election.

2. Political rivalry between parties and oversight of election staffs found to be major triggers of disputes at polling centers

The display of unhealthy competition and bitter political rivalry by parties, often attempting to overpower rival parties at polling centers triggered disputes and clashes at some polling centers. In Sindhupalchok, the cadres of CPN UML and CPN Maoist Center clashed in the polling center at Setidevi Panchakanya Secondary School requiring police intervention to bring the situation to normalcy. The clash ensued after CPN UML cadres accused CPN Maoist Center cadres of trying to rig the elections.

Likewise, Police fired 3 rounds of warning shots in the polling center at Badharmal Secondary School in Siraha to control the situation after the cadres of CPN–Unified Socialist and Janata Samajwadi party tried to capture ballot boxes.

Similarly, oversight by election staff while distributing ballot papers also triggered disputes in some polling centers. The voting at Mahendra Secondary School's polling center 'C' of Khadbari municipality

in Sankhuwasabha district was temporarily suspended as the election officer gave the wrong ballot paper to the voters. The voters were mistakenly given the ballot paper of Provincial Assembly Elections in place of the ballot paper for House of Representative elections. It was known only after 31 votes were casted, which triggered the dispute and temporary suspension of polling. Also, a similar incident was reported at a polling center in Saraswoti Secondary School of Chainpur municipality of the same district.

Likewise, Incidents of oversight during distribution of ballot papers were also reported in some polling centers of Palpa, Dhanusa, Parsa, Saptari, and Gulmi districts causing disputes. As most of these oversights were identified in the early hours of polling day, voting resumed shortly in those polling centers with an agreement to cancel those votes and allow the voters to vote again.

3. Attempts to obstruct election by election boycotting forces have minimum affect

The political parties and groups, in particular the Nepal Communist Party (Bahumat), (a breakaway faction of CPN (Biplav)) and CPN (Biplav) were seen active in attempting to obstruct and disrupt the election in different places without much effect.

Cadres of CPN (Bahumat) engaged in demonstration, pamphlet distribution around polling centers, and intimidating voters as a part of their campaign against the election on the polling day. In Kathmandu, police arrested a group of CPN (Bahumat) cadres from Maitighar

Mandala as they were demonstrating against elections. Similarly, police arrested the district level leaders and cadres of the CPN (Bahumat) party from Kanchanpur, Arghakhanchi, and Makwanpur districts, on the charge of conducting anti-electoral activities. Likewise, police arrested a cadre of CPN (Bahumat) from Machhapuchhre rural municipality-8 based polling center after he vandalized the ballot box.

The cadres of CPN (Biplav) were also found attempting to disrupt elections in some places. CPN (Biplav) cadres tried to torch a ballot box at a polling station in Brahmasthan of Rapti municipality in Chitwan. Police also arrested cadres of the party from Darchula on the charge of engaging in anti-electoral activities.

Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and suspicious items resembling IEDs were found near polling centers in Achham, Dailekh, Dang, Gorkha, Ilam, Jhapa, Kailali,

Kalikot, Kanchanpur, Morang, Mugu, Panchthar, Sunsari districts on the polling day. Although no political force or group officially took the responsibility for placing these devices, police attributed the blame for these to forces boycotting the election. In most cases, these IEDs were diffused by security forces. IEDs went off in Panchthar, Kailali, Bardiya, Morang, and Ilam districts causing panic among voters and brief halting of voting but no serious injury or damage were reported in any of these incidents. In Sunsari, a minor girl sustained injury after an IED was detonated at a polling center in Barju rural municipality-6.

The minimal effect on the electoral process from the forces boycotting the election can be attributed to their waning support base and an effective election security mechanism from the government.

4. Peaceful election exhibits maturing democracy

Despite disputes in some polling centers, political parties, candidates, and their representatives showed willingness to resolve disputes through dialogues, as a result of which the elections for the HoR and PA were held peacefully and successfully in more than 99 percent of the polling centers. This to a large extent shows that political parties in Nepal have come to fully embrace the culture of democratic electoral process. Likewise, the Election Commission Nepal also

displayed excellent competency in managing the electoral process which facilitated a conducive environment for elections.

The successful completion of polling day is therefore a milestone in institutionalization of democracy as Nepal looks forward to welcoming its second House of Representatives and Provincial Assembly as envisioned by the Constitution of Nepal-2015.