

Political Situation Update

House of Representatives Election 2026

Political Context and Election Management

No. 19 | January 2026

**DEMOCRACY
RESOURCE CENTER**

Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN)

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Lalitpur, Nepal

Phone: 01-5902286

Email: info@democracyresource.org

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1. BACKGROUND

Following the widespread Gen-Z protests on September 8–9, 2025, the coalition government led by Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, comprising the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) [CPN (UML)], collapsed amid calls for political reform and anti-corruption measures.

In response to protesters' calls, President Ram Chandra Poudel appointed former Chief Justice Sushila Karki as interim Prime Minister on September 12, 2025. On the same day, the first cabinet meeting decided to dissolve the existing House of Representatives (HoR). Subsequently, President Poudel formally dissolved the House on the recommendation of Prime Minister Karki. It was then announced that fresh elections for the HoR would be held on March 5, 2026, paving the way for a new democratic mandate.

Nepal's HoR comprises 275 members, elected through a mixed electoral system that combines first-past-the-post (FPTP) and proportional representation (PR). Under the FPTP system, 165 members are directly elected from single-member constituencies drawn based on population, geography, and administrative considerations. The remaining 110 members are chosen through the PR system, in which voters cast ballots for political parties, with the entire country treated as a single constituency. The Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) published the detailed election schedule on November 6, 2025, and has since been preparing to conduct the polls. A total of 114 political parties have registered to contest seats under the FPTP system, while 64 parties have registered for the PR system.

This Political Situation Update (PSU) examines preparations and overall management of the HoR elections 2026 in the context of Nepal's current political environment. It draws on interviews with representatives from various political parties, security experts, ECN officials, and ordinary citizens, as well as a review of previously published reports and materials.

2. POLITICAL MOBILIZATION

The primary responsibility of the interim government is to conduct the HoR elections in a credible manner, ensuring that the entire electoral process is free, fair, peaceful, and conducted without fear. This is seen as a crucial step toward restoring constitutional government and political stability in the country. Initially, the two major traditional parties, the Nepali Congress and the CPN (UML), opposed the formation of the interim government. However, both parties have now fully committed to participating in the upcoming elections. One of the key demands of the Gen-Z movement was reform of political parties. Despite its significance, progress to date on this issue has been limited.

Changes in Party Policy and Leadership

The Gen-Z movement has intensified discussions about the need for a generational shift within Nepal’s political parties. In the evolving political landscape, established parties must adapt their policies and leadership to remain relevant and regain public trust.

In March 2025, the *Brihat Nagarik Andolan* (BNA) concluded that the prolonged dominance of the top leadership of the three major parties in Nepal’s state system—the Nepali Congress, the CPN (UML), and the then Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Center) [CPN (MC)]¹—had fueled growing public disillusionment with democracy. On this basis, the BNA announced a campaign against this leadership-centric political

¹ Nepali Communist Party (NCP) was formed through the merger of various communist factions including the then CPN (MC).

culture, which it termed “*Netaraj*.”² Widespread frustration stemmed from recurring cycles of power-sharing among the same leaders and parties, coupled with persistent issues of corruption, poor governance. This disillusionment deepened further when the chairperson of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), which had presented itself as an alternative political force, became involved in a cooperative fraud controversy. Although the Gen-Z movement demanded changes in party policies and leadership, the party’s top leadership showed little willingness to restructure in line with the spirit of the movement.

CPN (UML) Chair KP Sharma Oli faced intense pressure from the opposition faction within the party to step down. To resist this, he held the 11th General Convention a year before the Central Committee’s tenure.³ The convention, however, re-elected him as chairperson. This not only stopped any leadership change in the CPN (UML) but also sent a clear message that the party rejects the Gen-Z movement’s agenda. Although NCP coordinator Pushpa Kamal Dahal has appeared soft on the Gen-Z movement, he has put a halt to the debate on leadership change, citing party unity.

Within the Nepali Congress, demands for policy and leadership changes also intensified ahead of the House of Representatives elections. Two general secretaries, Gagan Kumar Thapa and Bishwa Prakash Sharma, argued that the party could not contest the elections under President Sher Bahadur Deuba⁴ and therefore supported holding a regular general convention before the elections. However, several powerful factions,

² Chand, Sagar. 2025. Civil Society announced, ‘Mission 84’ to end ‘Netaraj’ (In Nepali). *Nepalviews*, February 18. Available at <https://www.nepalviews.com/story/363093>; accessed on January 22, 2026.

³ Himalaya TV. 2025. UML no longer needs a leader like Oli; He must go to the Commission to give a statement: Yogesh Bhattarai (In Nepali). December 7. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fo9e_Pl6o6s&t=3s; accessed on January 6, 2026.

⁴ Bahrakhari. 2025. Gagan Thapa declares he will skip election unless party leadership changes (In Nepali). December 12. Available at <https://baahrakhari.com/detail/472306>; accessed on January 6, 2026.

including Deuba's own, rejected the proposal, warning that a convention could create divisions and undermine the party's electoral prospects. Despite opposition, a group led by the general secretaries convened a special general convention and formed a new central committee, with Gagan Kumar Thapa as the party's President. After the ECN recognized the new committee, Deuba's supporters, angered by the move, filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court.

In the RSP, party members urged Chairperson Rabi Lamichhane to step aside until cleared in the cooperative fraud case. Yet neither Lamichhane relinquished leadership nor did other senior members step forward to assume it. During Lamichhane's time in custody, the party struggled to conduct effective political activities. Nearly four years after its formation, the RSP had yet to hold a general convention. An initial plan to convene one by May 2025 was postponed to January 2026 following Lamichhane's arrest in April 2025. In September 2025, following Gen-Z protests, central member Santosh Pariyar proposed an early convention and party reorganization, but the proposal was ignored, leading to his eventual departure from the party.⁵

In the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) as well, there was a demand for a regular general convention before the Gen-Z movement, as the central committee's term was about to expire. Instead of holding the convention, the terms of all committees, including the central committee, were extended by six months, postponing the convention until after the upcoming general elections.⁶ The party did not approve its leadership before the elections. These developments across major parties highlight a broader reluctance

⁵ Setopati. 2025. Santosh Pariyar submits proposal for early General Convention and party reorganization to the RSP central committee (In Nepali). September 24. Available at <https://www.setopati.com/politics/370158>; accessed on January 19, 2026.

⁶ Naya Patrika. 2025. After the RPP General Convention HoR Elections, the term of all bodies extended for 6 months (In Nepali). November 28. Available at <https://www.nayapatrikadaily.com/news-details/182635/2025-11-28>; accessed on January 19, 2026.

to facilitate smooth, timely leadership transitions, underscoring a key challenge in addressing the aspirations of the Gen-Z movement.

Political Parties in Preparation for the Elections

Of the political parties represented in the then-HoR, all except the RSP and the RPP opposed the dissolution, calling it unconstitutional. CPN (UML) Chief Whip Mahesh Bartaula and Whip Sunita Baral filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court challenging the dissolution of the House of Representatives as unconstitutional. However, the Nepali Congress formally decided at a Central Committee meeting to participate in the elections, considering the polls the most viable way forward. Despite this decision, several Nepali Congress lawmakers later filed a separate writ petition seeking the restoration of the dissolved HoR. Both the Nepali Congress and CPN (UML) expressed reluctance to fully engage in the electoral process, citing the interim government's alleged failure to ensure a secure environment for campaigning and voting. These actions fueled widespread concerns that the elections might not be held on schedule. However, a breakthrough came when President Ram Chandra Poudel facilitated dialogue among the top leaders of the three major parties—Nepali Congress, CPN (UML), and NCP—and Prime Minister Sushila Karki. These talks helped ease tensions, foster mutual trust, and create a more conducive atmosphere for electoral preparations.

As the election date approached, political parties witnessed a surge in unification efforts and the registration of new parties. The Ujyalo Nepal Party, backed by interim government minister Kulman Ghising and a group close to Kathmandu Metropolitan City Mayor Balendra Shah, initially agreed to merge with the RSP on December 29, 2025. However, just twelve days later, the Ujyalo Nepal Party withdrew from the merger, citing disagreements over political ideology and seat allocation, and

decided to contest independently.⁷ Other notable developments included the formation of the Progressive Democratic Party by leaders such as Janardan Sharma (who had not joined the NCP), former RSP member Santosh Pariyar, and former Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai, and the merger of the Nepal Samajwadi Party, led by Baburam Bhattarai, into it. Likewise, the Janata Samajwadi Party Nepal, led by Upendra Yadav, and the Loktantrik Samajwadi Party Nepal, led by Mahantha Thakur, merged to form a unified Janata Samajwadi Party Nepal.

Independent Mayor of Dharan Sub-metropolitan City, Harka Sampang, entered formal party politics by assuming the chairmanship of the Shram Sanskriti Party. Additionally, the Gatishil Loktantrik Party was formed under the patronage of Birendra Bahadur Basnet. Several other new parties also emerged in this fluid political environment. Despite these mergers and the formation of new parties, the major political forces have not shown a strong tendency to form electoral alliances, unlike in previous elections.

⁷ Kantipur. 2026. Kulman-RSP agreement broken in 12 Days (In Nepali). January 10. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/politics/2026/01/10/kulman-rsp-agreement-broken-in-less-than-two-weeks-33-20.html>; accessed on January 23, 2026.

3. ECN'S MANAGEMENT AND PREPARATION

According to Article 245 of the Constitution of Nepal, the ECN consists of a Chief Election Commissioner and four other commissioners. The Chief Election Commissioner serves as the Commission's chairperson. At present, the positions of Chief Election Commissioner and one commissioner remain vacant, and Ram Prasad Bhandari has assumed the role of Acting Chief Election Commissioner. This is the first time an election is being conducted under the leadership of an acting Chief Election Commissioner, appointed from among the commissioners, in the absence of a formally appointed Chief Election Commissioner.

However, former Chief Election Commissioner Neel Kantha Uprety states that this situation will not affect the electoral process, as the law authorizes the Acting Commissioner to make all necessary decisions. According to him, although the workload increases when only three commissioners are in office rather than five, a three-member commission is sufficient to fulfill election responsibilities given Nepal's geography, electoral constituencies, and population.⁸ Based on the schedule made public by the ECN, the election program is progressing smoothly without obstruction.

Harmful information, including misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech, can undermine the integrity and fairness of elections. In response, the ECN has begun preparing to control and regulate such content. To this end, the ECN established the Election Information Dissemination and Coordination Center at its office on December 26, 2025. The center comprises three coordinated units: the Press Office,

⁸ Interview with Uprety on January 7, 2025.

the Information Integrity Promotion Unit (IIPU), and the Digital Voter Education Unit.⁹

To enhance the operational capacity of the IIPU, the ECN, with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has recently introduced the e-Monitor Plus system and completed staff capacity-building training on its use. In the third week of January, 98 instances of harmful information originating from six outlets identified across electronic and social media platforms were referred for legal action to the Press Council Nepal, the Cyber Bureau of Nepal Police, and the ECN's Central Election Code of Conduct Monitoring Committee, in accordance with the law.¹⁰

Voter Registration

Section 4 of the Voter Registration Act, 2016 originally provided that voter registration would be suspended once an election was announced. However, due to the Gen-Z movement, elections were suddenly declared under special circumstances, and many eligible Gen-Z voters had not yet been included on the voter roll. As a result, the government amended Subsection 4(2) of the Act through an ordinance, allowing voter registration to be conducted within a period specified by the ECN. Following this amendment, the ECN set a voter registration deadline of November 16, 2025. However, due to an overwhelming turnout during this period and at the request of Prime Minister Sushila Karki, the ECN extended the registration deadline to November 21, 2025.

Voters were required to complete the registration form on the ECN's website and then visit the nearest election office to provide biometric data.

⁹ ECN. 2025. Press release regarding the establishment of the Election Information Communication and Coordination Center (In Nepali). December 26. Available at <https://election.gov.np/admin/public/storage/HOR%202082/Press%20Release/2082-09-11%20Press%20Release.pdf>; accessed on January 21, 2026.

¹⁰ ECN. 2025. Main tasks carried out from January 15 to 23 (In Nepali). *HoR Election, 2082 E-Bulletin*, Magh 9. Available at <https://ebulletin.election.gov.np/2026/01/2566/>; accessed on January 21, 2026.

The option for online form submission led to an encouraging level of voter registration. However, problems were reported, including long queues for biometric registration and frequent server outages.¹¹

To address these difficulties, arrangements were made to allow individuals who have or have applied for a National Identity Card to complete voter registration by submitting only the online form, with biometric details drawn directly from the National Identity Card system. This not only simplified online voter registration but also eliminated the need for voters to travel to their place of permanent residence to register. As a result, voters residing outside their home districts were spared additional financial burdens and saved time. According to a student from Namkha Rural Municipality in Humla who registered from Kathmandu, traveling to her home district would have cost at least NPR 100,000.¹²

The DRCN research team found that Gen-Z groups assisted with voter registration in various locations, including Banke and the Kathmandu Valley. According to the ECN, a total of 18,903,689 voters who will have reached the age of 18 by March 4, 2026, will be eligible to vote in this election. This represents an increase of 915,119 voters compared with the HoR election in 2022. Of the total voters, 9,240,131 are women, 9,663,358 are men, and 200 are registered under the “other” category.

Code of Conduct

The ECN has approved and enforced the Election Code of Conduct, 2025. This code applies not only to political parties and candidates but also to government and non-government institutions, bodies, and individuals. The use of social media in election campaigning has been expanding, and it can be used to spread false and hateful information about political parties

¹¹ Chimariya, Amrit. 2025. Young people are excited to exercise their franchise but struggling to get registered (In Nepali). *Ratopati*, November 14. Available at <https://www.ratopati.com/story/523810>; accessed on January 21, 2026.

¹² Interview with the student on January 7, 2026.

or candidates. There is also a strong possibility that artificial intelligence (AI) may be used on social media to conduct exaggerated and misleading campaigns both in favor of and against parties or candidates.

To address these risks, this Code of Conduct aims to regulate the misuse of social media and AI. According to the ECN's Information Officer, Suman Ghimire, UNDP and The Asia Foundation have provided software to the ECN to help monitor and control violations of the Code of Conduct that occur through electronic media.¹³ According to the Election Code of Conduct, 2025, environmentally friendly materials must be used during elections. Likewise, the Code of Conduct includes a new provision mandating that political parties submit their election manifestos to the ECN.

The ECN has also set ceilings on the amount of expenditure permitted for candidates, which are the same as those applied in the 2022 HoR election. Depending on the constituency, candidates are allowed to spend between NPR 2.5 million and NPR 3.3 million. In Nepal, the prevailing political culture and irregularities are also linked to the excessive campaign spending observed in past elections. This has sparked broader debates about the need for comprehensive reform of the electoral system.

According to preliminary findings from a campaign finance study, a candidate spent an average of approximately NPR 25 million to be elected to the HoR in the 2022 elections. This amount is nearly ten times the official expenditure ceiling set by the ECN. A significant share of this spending reportedly went to the daily mobilization of party cadres over several weeks, as well as transportation costs for cadres and voters. Transportation expenses are particularly high in remote, rural, mountainous, and hilly constituencies.

Extensive informal spending also occurs during the 48-hour silence period, with the intent of influencing voters.¹⁴ Campaign finance studies

¹³ Interview with Ghimire on January 21, 2026.

¹⁴ Parajulee, Shekhar. 2082 BS. Nepali Electoral Practice: An Account of the Process (In Nepali). *Samaj Adhyayan* 20: 305–328.

have shown that the ECN's expenditure ceiling is not only impractical but also largely unenforced. In the past, the ECN has faced criticism for failing to adequately monitor violations of the code of conduct and for failing to take effective action despite receiving complaints.¹⁵ Although the ECN is empowered to impose fines of up to NPR 100,000 or cancel a candidate's nomination for code-of-conduct violations, it has not yet exercised these powers to their full extent.

Out-of-District and Out-of-Country Voting

A large number of Nepalis live away from their permanent residence, either within the country or abroad, for employment, education, and other purposes. This significant population, often unable to reach its designated polling stations on election day, has so far been deprived of the right to vote. On March 21, 2018, the Supreme Court directed the government to make the necessary legal and infrastructural arrangements to enable Nepalis living abroad to vote. Although such provisions were included in the Election Management Bill 2080 drafted by the ECN, the government did not table the bill in Parliament.

Clause 4.2 of the agreement reached on November 30, 2025, between representatives of the Gen-Z movement and the Government of Nepal states that arrangements will be made to allow voters temporarily residing outside their home districts or electoral constituencies to vote in the upcoming elections from the districts where they are residing. It also commits to advancing the development of the policy, legal, and institutional frameworks necessary to ensure the voting rights of migrant Nepali citizens working formally or informally in different countries, Nepalis engaged in professions and businesses abroad, and Nepali students living overseas.

On January 5, 2014, the Supreme Court issued a directive instructing the government to introduce a "None of the Above" (NOTA) option on

¹⁵ DRCN. 2022. *Observation of the Nepal House of Representatives and Provincial Assembly elections 2022* (In Nepali). Lalitpur: DRCN.

ballot papers, allowing voters to express dissatisfaction with all candidates. The agreement between the Gen-Z group and the interim government also included this proposal. However, former Minister for Communications and Information Technology Jagadish Kharel stated that, due to opposition from the top leadership of major political parties, the government did not enact the required legislation.¹⁶ As a result, out-of-district voting, voting by Nepalis living abroad, and the NOTA option cannot be used in the upcoming elections.

Nepalis currently reside in more than 150 countries worldwide, and arranging voting facilities in all of them without adequate preparation is difficult. Millions of Nepali workers are based in Gulf countries, but local laws there also restrict voting gatherings. It may not be possible to enable voting for all Nepalis living abroad in this election; however, human rights lawyer Anurag Devkota, who works for Law and Policy Forum for Social Justice, argues that if the interim government had at least introduced a pilot arrangement allowing staff of Nepali embassies abroad to vote, it would have compelled future governments to expand such provisions.¹⁷

¹⁶ Republica. 2026. Nepalis abroad will not be able to vote this time: Minister Kharel. January 6. Available at <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/nepalis-abroad-will-not-be-able-to-vote-this-time-minister-kharel-80-46.html>; accessed on January 9, 2026.

¹⁷ Interview with Devkota on January 9, 2026.

4. CANDIDACY NOMINATION

Political parties have already submitted closed lists of candidates for the PR system. They have also submitted their candidacy for the FPTP system, and the final list of candidates has been published, and election symbols have been allocated. The debate over selecting candidates through democratic processes has been ongoing for a long time. The agreement between the Gen-Z group and the interim government also includes a provision to enact a law requiring political parties to select candidates through primary elections. However, even in this election, parties did not adopt a democratic system for candidate selection.

Instead, the traditional approach continued, with constituency-level committees recommending multiple names to the central leadership, which then made largely subjective decisions. This process appeared to be dominated by the preferences and biases of the top leadership, and there have been instances in which candidates were selected without any recommendation from lower party bodies, as well as people securing candidacies after switching parties on the day of nomination. As a result of these practices, several independent candidates have contested, rebelling against their parties' official nominees.

The failure to adopt a democratic method for candidate selection provides strong evidence of the lack of internal democracy within political parties. The RSP had developed a candidate selection mechanism for the FPTP system for the HoR elections in 2025. This mechanism included a scoring system that weighed participation in the Leadership Academy, political proximity, inclusivity, and primary elections. However, this system was not used in the current FPTP candidate selection process. According to RSP Vice President Swarnim Wagle, the method was not adopted because

there was not enough time, as they had to engage in efforts to unite with other parties, and participation by party members in the primary elections conducted for PR was very low.¹⁸

Although the RSP held a primary election to select candidates for the PR system, the process was controversial. Other political parties did not follow any prescribed method. The political report presented at the second special general convention of the Nepali Congress also stated that candidates would be selected through primary elections. However, President Gagan Thapa later claimed that this was not feasible due to time constraints and that the current practice of selecting candidates would not be implemented in the upcoming elections.¹⁹

Once again, the nomination of candidates by Nepal's political parties has been determined by the subjective judgments of the senior leadership, bypassing more democratic and transparent processes.

FPTP Electoral System

Nomination registration for the FPTP electoral system was completed nationwide on January 23, 2026. Of the 3,487 candidates registered across 165 constituencies, 72 withdrew their candidacies and nine were disqualified. As a result, 3,017 men, 388 women, and one candidate from the “other” category are contesting the election. Candidate selection is overwhelmingly dominated by men, with women accounting for only 11.39 percent of total candidacies.

Similarly, the presence of Dalit candidates is extremely low, with only 232 candidates (6.81%). According to data analyzed by the Dignity

¹⁸ Satyal, Manoj. 2026. Why did the RSP nominate its candidates without holding primary elections (in Nepal)? *Setopati*, January 19. Available at <https://www.setopati.com/politics/380116>; accessed on January 23, 2026.

¹⁹ Onlinekhabar. 2026. From next time, candidates will not be selected in this way in the Congress: President Thapa (in Nepal). January 23. Available at <https://www.onlinekhabar.com/2026/01/1855849/from-next-time-candidates-will-not-be-selected-in-this-way-in-the-congress-president-thapa>; accessed on January 23, 2026.

Initiative, the candidate pool includes 1,320 Khas Arya (38.76%), 813 Adivasi Janajati (23.87%), 778 Madhesi (22.84%), 141 Tharu (4.14 %), and 122 Muslim candidates (3.58 %).

An analysis of candidates from the five major parties—Nepali Congress, NCP, CPN (UML), RPP, and RSP—shows a strong dominance of Khas Arya candidates, while women and Dalit candidates account for only 6.91 percent and 2.18 percent, respectively.²⁰ Regarding age distribution, 1,056 candidates are between 25 and 40 years old, 1,925 are between 41 and 60, and 425 are 60 or older.²¹ Overall, the candidate pool is heavily skewed toward individuals over 40.

Ensuring Inclusion in the FPTP System

On December 5, 2025, the ECN issued a directive to political parties to comply with Articles 38(4) and 42(1) of the Constitution of Nepal, as well as Article 47 on the implementation of fundamental rights. The ECN instructed parties to ensure proportional and inclusive representation in the electoral system and to guarantee the representation of women candidates in the FPTP election process, with at least one-third of nominated candidates being women. It also directed parties to plan candidate nominations to ensure gender balance and inclusive representation. Section 57(2) of the Political Parties Act 2017 further states that it is the duty of each political party to comply with the ECN's instructions.

The ECN had issued the same directive to political parties during the 2022 HoR and Provincial Assembly elections; however, the parties did not comply.

²⁰ Bhatta, Kamal Raj. 2026. Widespread imbalance between population structure and FPTP candidacy - Khas Aryas dominate, Dalits are very few. *Naya Patrika*, January 24. Available at <https://www.nayapatrikadaily.com/news-details/186978/2026-01-24>; accessed on January 25, 2026

²¹ Daya, Dudraj. 2026. 52 percent of voters are youth, but only 31 percent of candidates are. *Kantipur*, January 25. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/feature/2026/01/25/52-percent-of-voters-are-young-31-percent-of-candidates-are-young-46-35.html>, accessed on January 25, 2026.6

According to discussions with women leaders from the Nepali Congress and the CPN (UML), the parties' top leadership at the time rejected the directive, arguing that the ECN lacked the authority to issue such instructions to political parties. An ECN official noted that the top party leadership was reluctant to implement the provision and that women leaders were unable to exert sufficient pressure within their parties to ensure compliance.²²

The responsibility for advocating and implementing laws that promote women's rights does not rest solely with women. The formulation and enforcement of constitutional and legal provisions are collective obligations of the state, political parties, and male leaders as well. The effective implementation of such laws benefits not only women but society as a whole, including men.

The draft Election Management Bill 2023, prepared by the ECN, also includes a provision requiring that at least 33 percent of candidates contesting under the FPTP system in HoR elections be women. However, the bill was never tabled in Parliament. As a result, in the absence of a binding legal provision, proportional and inclusive participation in FPTP elections has not been achieved in this election either.

Debate on the PR System

Equal access and representation of citizens at every level of the state structure is the core spirit of federalism. The Constitution states that participation should be ensured through PR, reflecting Nepal's social diversity. The objective of the PR system is to bring socially, educationally, and economically backward classes and communities, who cannot contest elections or win even if they do, into the mainstream. However, there are many past examples of the powerful and accessible classes being represented through this system.²³

²² Interview with the official on January 7, 2026.

²³ Giri, Anbika. 2024. Women's political participation in federal Nepal: Achievements and barriers. Lalitpur: Democracy Resource Center Nepal.

Political parties have submitted their lists of candidates for the upcoming election under the PR system. Following the inclusion of individuals who are socially, economically, and politically privileged, relatives of top party leaders, and other well-connected persons, there has been widespread criticism that the PR system is being misused. Past practice shows that figures ranging from former prime ministers to industrialists, as well as family members of political leaders, have been elected through the PR system. An examination of the identities of members of parliament elected under this system reveals the dominance of classes and communities that have benefited from structural advantages. Even in the PR lists submitted for the forthcoming election following the Gen-Z protest, the situation has not changed.

The PR lists submitted by political parties for the upcoming election include a disproportionately high number of candidates from urban areas. Among these, the highest numbers come from the Kathmandu, Morang, and Jhapa districts.²⁴ Civil rights activist Pawan Thapa Magar states, “It is a grotesque mockery of democracy that the benefits of provisions for oppressed communities are being appropriated by the country’s billionaires and the relatives of political leaders. This farce has been ongoing for years; even the names of those who make donations, secure the release of top leaders from prison, or offer them shelter in times of difficulty appear on the PR lists.”²⁵ He further stated that while the traditional political parties had long misused this system, new political parties have now also joined in doing so.

The media often ridicule the speech and mannerisms of lawmakers from marginalized communities who enter Parliament through the PR system and question their competence, yet they do not ask how much political

²⁴ Dahal, Mani. 2026. Severe imbalance in proportional representation: Kathmandu’s dominance (In Nepali). *Nepal News*, January 21. Available at <https://nepalnews.com/2026/01/21/extreme-imbalance-in-proportional-representation-kathmandu-dominates/>; accessed on January 21, 2026.

²⁵ Interview with Thapa on January 9, 2026.

parties, the parliamentary secretariat, or other institutions have invested in building these representatives' capacities. This has reinforced the narrative that only those who can speak fluent, polished, and "standard" Nepali deserve to come through the PR system.

The PR lists for an election held on the very foundation of a youth-led movement resemble those of the past, providing strong evidence that political parties have not reformed. Young people had placed greater expectations on new political parties than on the traditional ones. However, it is ironic that the PR lists of these new parties also feature well-known urban faces and businesspeople. This has fostered two misleading narratives among the public: first, that one must be well-known to engage in politics; and second, that politics is the domain of the wealthy alone. The use of a mechanism designed to mainstream marginalized classes and communities by powerful groups is not only an abuse of the PR system but also a continuation of the marginalization of those very communities. Dhanakumari Sunar, a leader of the Scientific Socialist Communist Party, links women's representation in politics to property ownership. She argues that the dominance of a single class and community in politics is increasingly undermining the gains achieved through struggle, movements, and sacrifice.²⁶ Meaningful participation of marginalized classes and communities is essential for social justice. However, the party's candidate selection appears to have deviated from this principle.

²⁶ Sunar, Dhankumari. 2026. After harshly critiquing the proportional system (In Nepali). *Sandhan*, January 6. Available at <https://sandhaann.com/archives/7174>; accessed on January 10, 2026.

5. SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS

It is a fundamental condition of elections that political parties, candidates, and citizens can participate freely in electoral activities in a fear-free environment. Primarily, potential political clashes between competing parties—especially between established and new parties—have been identified as an electoral security challenge. According to the ECN, there are 10,967 polling locations and 23,112 polling centers for the upcoming election. Among these, 3,680 polling locations have been classified as highly sensitive, 4,442 as sensitive, and 2,845 as general.

An integrated security plan for the 2026 elections has been implemented. In accordance with this plan, all security agencies are developing strategies based on a thorough analysis of security challenges.²⁷ Eighty thousand personnel of the Nepalese Army will be deployed one month before the elections.²⁸ Excluding the Nepal Police and the Armed Police Force (APF), the Nepal Police plans to deploy 133,980 temporary election-police personnel, while the APF plans to deploy 15,110 such personnel for the elections.²⁹ This is the first time the APF will be deployed as election-police.

²⁷ Nepalkhabar. 2026. Unified voice of the three security agencies: We are ready to conduct the elections in a fear-free manner (In Nepali). January 9. Available at <https://nepalkhabar.com/politics/262110-2026-1-9-16-56-53>; accessed on January 10, 2026.

²⁸ Onlinekhabar. 2026. Eighty thousand army personnel to be deployed for the House of Representatives election (In Nepali). January 8. Available at <https://www.onlinekhabar.com/2026/01/1844215/80000-troops-to-be-mobilized-for-upcoming-house-of-representatives-elections>; accessed on January 9, 2026.

²⁹ Naya Patrika. 2026. The Nepal Police will recruit 133,000 election police personnel, and the Armed Police Force will recruit 15,000 personnel for the elections (In Nepali). January 3. Available at <https://www.nayapatrikadaily.com/news-details/185327/2026-01-03>; accessed on January 10, 2026.

Following the Gen-Z protest, 4,554 escaped prisoners remain at large.³⁰ Likewise, some of the weapons looted from security agencies have yet to be recovered. These developments have raised concerns that the elections could turn violent. However, despite security challenges, Nepal has numerous examples of successfully conducted elections. The first and second Constituent Assembly elections were held amid significant security challenges. The first Constituent Assembly election in 2008 followed the insurgent Maoists' signing of the peace agreement and their entry into the electoral process. Nevertheless, the Maoist youth wing, the Young Communist League, remained in various camps with semi-military structures. Similarly, the Nepali Congress and the CPN (UML) had also formed youth cadres. Some Maoist weapons were reportedly outside cantonments.

In the second Constituent Assembly election, a group that had split from the Maoists, along with a coalition of 33 parties, boycotted the elections and engaged in anti-election activities. In the Madhesh region, armed groups also boycotted the elections, further complicating the situation. Likewise, in the 2017 and 2023 HoR elections, the Communist Party of Nepal (led by Netra Bikram Chand) opposed the elections.

Election-related violence since 2008 has gradually decreased. However, spending on election security has steadily increased. Rajendra Dahal, editor of *Shikshak Monthly*, argues that the growing presence of security personnel may not yield long-term benefits. He says, "The practice of deploying security forces everywhere while weakening the role of citizens poses a long-term threat to democracy."³¹ It appears necessary to

³⁰ Onlinekhabar. 2026. Over 4,500 prisoners still at large (In Nepali). January 5. Available at <https://www.onlinekhabar.com/2026/01/1841884/4500-prisoners-still-on-the-run>; accessed on January 9, 2026.

³¹ Dahal, Rajendra. 2026. The threat posed by the militarization of elections (In Nepali). *Himal Khabar*, January 19. Available at <https://www.himalkhabar.com/144757/parliament-election-threat-to-militarization>; accessed on January 19, 2026.

be cautious, as the excessive presence of the army and security personnel may also create fear among citizens.

This time, citizens are eager to participate in the elections, and major political parties have also confirmed their participation. According to security expert Indra Adhikari, there will not be a major security challenge in the elections. She states, “Once the security agencies have identified potential threats, they develop strategies accordingly. After the integrated security plan is implemented, the agencies coordinate and work together. This helps address the weaknesses observed among security agencies during the Gen-Z movement and fosters an environment of trust among all three security mechanisms. To further boost the morale of the security personnel, the government must immediately provide physical resources, including vehicles.”³²

³² Interview with Adhikari on January 7, 2026.

6. CONCLUSION

The Gen-Z protest was fundamentally an expression of public dissatisfaction stemming from the governing inefficiency of political parties, rampant structural corruption, unemployment, and poverty. The primary mandate of the interim government was to conduct the HoR election in a fair and fear-free environment. Since the parliament is the main forum for debating and deciding on the changes demanded by Gen-Z through protests, elections are the best option for resolving the current political and constitutional crisis. Major political parties held deep distrust toward the Karki-led government and filed a writ in the Supreme Court demanding the reinstatement of Parliament. These actions suggested that the initial electoral environment was not conducive. However, after multiple rounds of negotiations between the leaders of the major parties and the government, the parties eventually came to support the elections.

Despite various challenges, the ECN appears committed to holding the elections as scheduled. In the coming days, the ECN must promptly and strictly enforce the election code of conduct and act against those who violate it. There is a high likelihood that hate speech and disinformation will be spread through social media and other platforms using AI during this election. Such activities must be strictly controlled to ensure a fair election. For this purpose, the ECN must be equipped with adequate resources by the government.

Although the nomination process for both PR and FPTP electoral systems appeared festive, the number of candidates from women, Dalit, Muslim, and other marginalized communities in the FPTP elections remains very low. This undermines the spirit of inclusive democracy that Nepal is committed to upholding. In the FPTP system, the ECN merely

fulfilled a procedural formality by instructing parties, as it had in previous elections, to ensure that women candidates reached one third of total candidates. Even under the PR system, individuals from economically and socially marginalized communities were overshadowed by elite, urban, and celebrity figures with greater capacity to use social media extensively. Notably, even parties that claim to represent alternative political forces followed the existing practice of nominating such individuals on their PR lists. This has undermined the very significance of the PR system. Furthermore, the absence of arrangements such as out-of-district voting in this election has weakened the effectiveness of the government's proactive efforts to expand the voter registration roll.

One of the principal demands of the Gen-Z movement was policy reform and leadership change within political parties. This election has given political parties an opportunity to rejuvenate themselves by acknowledging their shortcomings to voters and presenting new leadership and agendas. The movement could have been a decisive moment in leadership transitions within political parties. In the Nepali Congress, two General Secretaries—Gagan Kumar Thapa and Bishwa Prakash Sharma, among others—have challenged the existing leadership and helped break the leadership deadlock. However, such prospects have diminished in other parties. How voters perceive efforts to obstruct policy reform and leadership change within parties will be reflected at the ballot box. Furthermore, the election results will reveal the extent to which voters trust new faces from newly formed political parties.

Founded in 2014, Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) is a national non-governmental organization dedicated to the study and research of social and political issues. Since its establishment, DRCN has consistently undertaken in-depth and evidence-based research into various aspects of Nepal's transitional political landscape, including the implementation of federalism, local-level restructuring, and election observation. The outcomes of these studies are shared with stakeholders, fostering discussions and debates. DRCN's overarching objective revolves around advancing efficient governance within Nepal's federal framework through these rigorous research endeavors and thoughtful discourse.

DEMOCRACY
RESOURCE CENTER

Democracy Resource Center Nepal

Lalitpur, Nepal

Tel: +977-1-5902286

info@democracyresource.org

<https://www.democracyresource.org/>