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Political Situation Update

# Internal Party Democracy in Practice

**Leadership Endorsement and Generational Transition  
in the Nepali Congress and CPN (UML)**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Gen-Z-led protest on September 8, 2025, raised critical questions about Nepal’s political, administrative, and constitutional processes. Amid newly announced elections, where securing public trust and electoral support has become imperative, established political parties are striving to demonstrate reform, accountability, and renewed credibility.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, emerging political forces are positioning themselves as distinct alternatives to traditional parties, emphasizing their commitment to change and presenting development-oriented roadmaps to build public confidence.

In this evolving political landscape, some parties have pursued mergers to consolidate their strength and broaden their appeal. Meanwhile, the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) [CPN (UML)] have convened their general conventions to endorse new leadership and signal internal renewal.

The 11<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the CPN (UML), held December 14-17, 2025, and the Special Convention of the Nepali Congress, organized January 11-14, 2026, sparked a multidimensional debate on party agendas, organizational structures, leadership transformation, and the practice of internal democracy. These conventions also provided a platform for deeper reflection on the role, behaviour, and functioning of political parties within Nepal’s broader political system. Against this backdrop, this Political Situation Update examines these two conventions through the lenses of internal democracy, agenda setting, and leadership transition.

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<sup>1</sup> Nepal’s political landscape includes parties with long historical legacies as well as those established in the lead-up to the 2026 House of Representatives elections. For this analysis, parties formed since 2022 are categorized as ‘new’. However, parties created through the merger of older parties are still classified as ‘old’, given their historical roots.

Recognizing that the overall democratic governance system remains fragile without institutionalizing democratic practices within political parties, this analysis seeks to advance critical discussion of the messages conveyed by these conventions and their implications for Nepali politics. Methodologically, the analysis is based on direct observation of activities at the convention venues of both parties, complemented by interviews with party representatives and political analysts. Furthermore, official party documents and media materials have been used to substantiate the analysis.

## 2. POLITICAL CONTEXT AND NEED FOR GENERAL CONVENTION

On September 4, 2025, the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology announced a ban on 26 unregistered social media platforms in Nepal, including Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube. Although the government justified the move as necessary to curb cybercrime and implement directives of the Supreme Court of Nepal, civil society, the media, and youth groups widely perceived it as an attempt to curtail freedom of expression.<sup>2</sup> The ban also served as a catalyst, channelling and amplifying the simmering frustration among Nepali youth.

At the same time, political party leaders and their families enjoyed increasingly luxurious lifestyles, while the lives of ordinary Nepalis were marked by widespread corruption and injustice. Political parties frequently formed alliances to win elections, only to shift partnerships afterward to form governments, creating a musical-chair pattern of power-sharing among the same top leaders. At the same time, public appointments became heavily influenced by partisan divisions, reinforcing a culture of political favouritism rather than merit.

The repeated sharing of leadership among established parties, including the Nepali Congress, CPN (UML), and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) [CPN (Maoist Center), coupled with persistent concerns about corruption and poor governance, fuelled growing public disenchantment with the political system. This frustration intensified

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<sup>2</sup> Kantipur. 2025. Ban on Social Media: A Blow to the Very Soul of Democracy. September 7. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/pathakmanch/2025/09/07/ban-on-social-media-a-blow-to-the-very-soul-of-democracy-33-09.html>, accessed on February 1, 2026 (in Nepali).

when the president of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP)—a party that had positioned itself as an alternative force—became embroiled in citizenship controversies and later in a cooperative fraud case. Together, these developments created a climate of widespread dissatisfaction and distrust, ultimately culminating in the emergence of the Gen-Z protest.

The Gen-Z protest, the police’s forceful response to it, and the resulting violent arson and vandalism led to the deaths of more than six dozen people and left 2,000 injured. The physical damage was valued at billions. Ultimately, on the second day of the movement, the then Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli was forced to step down. On September 13, 2025, President Ram Chandra Poudel appointed former Chief Justice Sushila Karki as Prime Minister. The interim government, led by Karki took responsibility for steering the country toward the electoral process and decided to hold the House of Representatives (HoR) election on March 5, 2026.

To maintain their significance and relevance amid changing political circumstances, political parties needed to update their policies and leadership. Because the age-group issue was also prominent in the Gen-Z movement, the debate over generational transitions in party leadership intensified. Moreover, as the election approached and the public scrutinized which policies and leadership were credible, political parties faced pressure from all sides to prove their competence and relevancy.

The general convention is the mechanism for policy and leadership change within a party. When elections were announced, Nepali Congress, Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), and RSP were approaching the time when they were required to hold their regular conventions, while CPN (UML) and CPN (Maoist Centre) still had one year remaining. Pushpa Kamal Dahal, then chairperson of CPN (Maoist Centre) and a long-time party leader, made soft remarks about the Gen-Z movement. His party, which had held its previous convention in December 2021, was statutorily due for its next convention in December 2026. Chairperson Dahal, who had been facing pressure for a leadership transition even before the Gen-Z

uprising, called a Central Committee meeting on September 25 and 26, 2025. That meeting dissolved the Central Committee and announced a special convention for December 2025.<sup>3</sup> Although some leaders at the meeting argued that leadership should be changed even during the period leading up to the special convention, a majority of members appointed Dahal himself as the coordinator.

Ultimately, the Central Committee of CPN (Maoist Centre) decided to pursue unity with the parties of the Socialist Front.<sup>4</sup> While debate continued in December over whether it would be a unity or a special convention, unification with the Socialist Front and other leftist forces was concluded. With this, the debate within the party regarding the convention and leadership change came to an end, and Dahal has now been established as the Coordinator of the Nepali Communist Party. Janardan Sharma, who had been raising strong voices for leadership transition and party reform, subsequently left this group and went on to form a new party called the Pragatishil Loktantrik Party. Similarly, Madhav Kumar Nepal of Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Socialist) [CPN (Unified Socialist)] maintained his long-standing leadership uninterrupted and became the Co-coordinator in the Nepali Communist Party.

RSP Chairperson Rabi Lamichhane became embroiled in disputes over citizenship and later over cooperatives, which ultimately led to his imprisonment. Despite the view that he should not hold party leadership until acquitted in the cooperative case, he has not stepped down. As other leaders also failed to show the courage to lead the party forward, the

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<sup>3</sup> Kafle, Parshuram. 2025. Maoist Central Committee Dissolved, Special General Convention to Be Held in November. *Naya Patrika*, September 27. Available at <https://www.nayapatrikadaily.com/news-details/178687/2025-09-27>; accessed on February 1, 2026 (in Nepali).

<sup>4</sup> On June 19, 2023, four leftist political parties of Nepal CPN (Maoist Centre), CPN (Unified Socialist), Janata Samajwadi Party, Nepal, and the Nepal Communist Party formed a political alliance called the Socialist Front. Later, the Nepal Socialist Party led by Mahindra Ray Yadav joined the front, while the Nepal Communist Party subsequently split from it.

pre-scheduled convention was postponed after he was jailed. Even after four years of its formation, RSP has not held a single convention. Its first convention was announced for mid-April 2026 but was postponed to February after Rabi Lamichhane was arrested in March 2025. Following the Gen-Z uprising, Santosh Pariyar, a central member of that party, proposed an 'early' convention and party reorganization. However, after his proposal was ignored, he eventually left the party and joined the Pragatishil Loktantrik Party.<sup>5</sup>

In the RPP, demands for a general convention had emerged even before the Gen-Z uprising, as the Central Committee's tenure was nearing its end. However, citing extraordinary circumstances, the terms of committees at all levels, including the Central Committee, have now been extended by six months, and the convention is planned only after the upcoming (March 5, 2026) election.<sup>6</sup> Internally endorsing the leadership before the elections was not easy, so most parties appeared indifferent. Nevertheless, CPN (UML) and the Nepali Congress held their conventions.

Since the 10<sup>th</sup> general convention of CPN (UML) was held in December 2021, there was still one year remaining before the regular convention, as required by the party statute. In the past, political parties have not only failed to hold conventions on a regular schedule but have also disregarded legal provisions that allow postponement for up to six months by citing special reasons. However, this time, CPN (UML), acknowledging the country's challenging political circumstances, held its convention in an orderly and peaceful manner, a full year ahead of schedule. It was stated that the convention was held before the due date to update the party by

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<sup>5</sup> Setopati. 2025. Santosh Pariyar Presented a Proposal for an Early General Convention and Party Reform in the RSP Central Committee. September 24. Available at <https://www.setopati.com/politics/370158>, accessed on January 19, 2026 (in Nepali).

<sup>6</sup> Naya Patrika. 2025. The RPP General Convention will be After Elections, the Term of All Bodies will be Extended by 6 Months. November 28. Available at <https://www.nayapatrikadaily.com/news-details/182635/2025-11-28>, accessed on January 19, 2026 (in Nepali).

addressing the questions raised by the events of September 8 and 9.<sup>7</sup> KP Sharma Oli, the chairperson of CPN (UML), was under intense pressure from the non-establishment faction to step down from leadership. The 11<sup>th</sup> convention was convened to neutralize that pressure.

Within the Nepali Congress, the two General Secretaries, Gagan Kumar Thapa and Bishwo Prakash Sharma, argued that the party's leadership must change before the elections. However, after their proposal was rejected by powerful party factions, including the one led by President Sher Bahadur Deuba, they called a special convention.

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<sup>7</sup> Onlinekhabar. 2025. UML is Now Building a Leadership of Three Generations: Youth, Adults and the Elderly [Interview with Surya Thapa]. December 11. Available at <https://www.onlinekhabar.com/2025/12/1825292/uml-will-now-build-three-generations-of-leadership-youth-adults-and-the-elderly>, accessed on January 24, 2026 (in Nepali).

### 3. CONVENTION PROCESS AND OUTCOME

Since the general conventions of political parties reveal the legitimacy of leadership, the internal power balance, the participation of the new generation, and the state of democratic practice, reviewing their processes and outcomes is equally meaningful.

#### ***UML's 11<sup>th</sup> National General Convention***

The 11<sup>th</sup> National General Convention of CPN (UML) was held in Bhaktapur and Kathmandu from December 12 to 18, 2025. It was the first major public political event organized by the party after the Gen-Z uprising. A total of 2,263 representatives from across the country participated, and 2,227 cast their votes. Out of the 19 office-bearer positions, a total of 38 candidates from the two panels of KP Sharma Oli and Ishwar Pokharel, along with four others, had filed their candidacies. After one candidate withdrew, 41 candidates remained in the race. There were 642 candidates for the 301-member central committee.

KP Sharma Oli defeated Ishwor Pokharel for the chairpersonship, securing nearly 75% of the vote. This marked Oli's third term. For general secretary, Oli loyalist Shankar Pokharel defeated Surendra Pandey. The dominance of the Oli panel was evident among the office-bearers. Of the 19 positions, the Oli faction won 17, while only 2 from the Pokharel panel (Vice-Chair Gokarna Raj Bista and Deputy General Secretary Yogesh Bhattarai) emerged victorious.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Kantipur. 2025. Oli Panel Dominates Among 19 UML's Office Bearers, Only Two from Pokharel's Side Elected. December 18. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/politics/2025/12/18/oli-panel-dominates-among-19-uml-office-bearers-only-two-from-pokharels-side-elected-53-16.html>, accessed on January 19, 2026 (in Nepali).

Prithvi Subba Gurung, Bishnu Prasad Paudel, Ram Bahadur Thapa, Gokarna Raj Bista, and Raghuji Pant were elected Vice-Chairs, while Lekhraj Bhatta, Raghubir Mahaseth, and Yogesh Bhattarai were elected Deputy General Secretaries. The elected Secretaries—Mahesh Basnet, Padma Kumari Aryal (the only women office-bearer), Chhabilal Biswakarma, Sherdhan Rai, Hikmat Kumar Karki, Khagaraj Adhikari, Yam Lal Kandel, Rajan Bhattarai, and Bhanubhakta Dhakal—were all from the Oli panel.

This outcome has further solidified Oli's organizational and strategic dominance. Amending, or having amendments made to, the provisions passed by the Statute Convention to suit his convenience, right at the doorstep of the National Convention, based on the arrogance of a majority within the central committee, is a flagrant violation of the party's internal democracy. The office-bearer counts of 15 and the central committee size of 251, adopted by the UML's Statute Convention, were overturned by a central committee meeting, restoring the numbers to 19 office-bearers and a 301-member central committee. This shows that Oli succeeded in managing internal aspirants and strengthening his faction.<sup>9</sup> Amid dissatisfaction from the faction of Senior Vice-Chair Ishwor Pokharel, Chair KP Sharma Oli presented the statute amendment proposal, decided by the central committee, to the closed session. The convention representatives endorsed the proposed statute.<sup>10</sup> The passage of the statute amendment, decided by the central committee, by a majority of the representatives themselves, became proof of Oli's grip over the organization.

The convention affirmed the party's internal unity and the continuity of Oli's leadership despite external challenges, including the Gen-Z uprising.

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<sup>9</sup> Setopati. 2025. The Old Constitution was Revived in the UML Amid Opposition from Ishwor Pokharel's Faction. December 14. Available at <https://www.setopati.com/politics/376691>, accessed on January 19, 2026 (in Nepali).

<sup>10</sup> BC, Ganga. 2025. The Revised Statute was Passed in the Closed Session of the UML General Convention. *Kantipur*, December 14. <https://ekantipur.com/politics/2025/12/14/uml-general-convention-passes-revised-statute-in-closed-session-00-31.html>, accessed on January 19, 2026 (in Nepali).

However, the large margin of victory and minimal representation of non-Oli factions among office-bearers have left internal dissatisfaction, a generational shift, and democratic practice as long-term challenges.

### ***Second Special General Convention of Nepali Congress***

The second special general convention of the Nepali Congress was held in Kathmandu from January 10 to 13, 2026. This convention was organized in response to the Gen-Z movement, as demands for leadership change, organizational reform, and restoration of public trust intensified within the party. The first special convention was held in 1958 under the leadership of Suvarna Shamsheer to elect BP Koirala as president.

While CPN (UML) had already held its convention under similarly challenging circumstances, Nepali Congress—the country's oldest party, which claims to be democratic—remained uncertain for a long time about whether to hold a regular or a special convention. According to the statute, the regular convention was due in December 2025. Both General Secretaries, Gagan Kumar Thapa and Bishwo Prakash Sharma, favored a regular convention to change leadership, arguing that they could not face the public in the House of Representatives elections under the status quo. However, their proposal was rejected by a powerful faction, including President Sher Bahadur Deuba. The faction opposing the General Secretaries argued that holding a convention before elections would create discord in the party and negatively impact the results of the 2026 House of Representatives election. When Shekhar Koirala's group also aligned with the establishment faction using the same argument, the special convention became extremely challenging.

In mid-October, a petition demanding a special convention was registered with the signatures of 2,488 (54.58%) convention representatives. Article 17(2) of the Nepali Congress statute states that a special central general convention must be convened within three months if at least 40% of central convention members submit a written request to the party center

citing special reasons. President Sher Bahadur Deuba was absent from central meetings after being attacked during the Gen-Z movement, and Vice President Purna Bahadur Khadka served as acting president. After receiving the special convention petition, instead of proceeding with it, they initiated the process for a regular convention. On January 2, 2026, the Central Committee decided to hold the convention in April 2026, arguing that the special convention had become irrelevant because they had begun the regular convention process, and that due to incomplete renewal of active membership and distribution of new memberships, a regular convention couldn't be completed before the elections.<sup>11</sup>

When conventions at lower levels couldn't commence, both General Secretaries announced the postponement of the regular convention and proceeded with the special convention from January 10-13, 2026. Of the 4,743 total representatives, 2,662 (56.12%) participated in the convention, thereby establishing its legitimacy.<sup>12</sup> Despite the Deuba faction's boycott, the special central convention procedure-2026 was passed in a closed session, and the Central Working Committee was dissolved. Ultimately, through unanimous leadership selection, a new central committee was formed. Gagan Kumar Thapa became president, while Bishwo Prakash Sharma and Pushpa Bhusal were elected vice presidents, and Pradeep Paudel and Gururaj Ghimire became general secretaries. However, the establishment faction rejected this and filed a petition with the Election Commission. The Election Commission recognized the committee led by Gagan Kumar Thapa based on majority representative participation. Subsequently, the Deuba faction filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court.

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<sup>11</sup> Nepali Congress. 2026. Decisions of the Nepali Congress Central Working Committee Meeting held on January 2, 2026. Available at <https://www.nepalicongress.org/single/press-release/nc-cwc-meeting-decision-2082.09.18>, accessed on February 6, 2026 (in Nepali).

<sup>12</sup> Kantipur. 2026. 56.12 Percent Delegates Participated NC's Special General Convention, How Many from Which Provinces? January 11. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/politics/2026/01/11/5612-percent-of-delegates-participate-in-congress-special-general-convention-15-36.html>, accessed on February 6, 2026 (in Nepali).

Although there were risks of polarization and confrontation between the two factions, the tension subsided as candidate nominations and other election processes began immediately afterward.

Overall, the special central general convention was completed amid challenges and controversies. Article 17(2) of the Nepali Congress statute mandates that a special central convention be called within three months if 40% of central members request it, but it does not specify who should convene it. The Deuba faction was confident that since they had a majority in the Central Committee, the secretary at the central office could not call a special central convention without the committee's direction. But Article 27(1) of the same statute states that the central office of Nepali Congress shall remain under the authority of the General Secretary, so both General Secretaries proceeded with the special convention. According to political analyst Tula Narayan Sah, even this special convention would not have been possible if the two General Secretaries had been divided into different factions rather than being together.<sup>13</sup> When one general secretary convened a general convention, another had the authority to submit a letter of opposition. Therefore, this special general convention was conducted under highly challenging and contentious circumstances.

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Sah on January 30, 2026.

## 4. INTERNAL DEMOCRACY

The party convention is fundamentally a democratic forum for policymaking, leadership selection, and organizational practice within political parties. The Constitution of Nepal 2015 and the Political Parties Act 2017 recognize regular internal elections, competition, inclusiveness, respect for dissenting views, and institutionalized decision-making processes within parties as the foundation of democracy. Therefore, a general convention is not merely a formal mechanism for endorsing leadership; it is also a central arena for shaping ideas and policies.

Despite the Central Committee's tenure nearing its end and the growing need for leadership endorsement, especially in the wake of the Gen-Z movement, political parties, except for two, failed to hold such conventions. This should be regarded as an undemocratic step. The CPN (UML) and the Nepali Congress have held their general conventions. This update will examine their conventions in the context of internal party democracy.

### *CPN (UML)*

With one year remaining in the Central Committee's tenure, the party's decision to hold a general convention in a new political context and to elect new leadership through elections appears positive. CPN (UML) Chair KP Sharma Oli's move to convene a general convention to endorse leadership, acknowledging the changed political landscape after the Gen-Z movement, is commendable. Activities such as conducting internal competition at the district level, even in a short and adverse period; selecting general convention representatives through elections; forming the central committee through elections; and not having the leadership appoint office-bearers in the name of consensus indicate robust internal

democracy within the party. However, other decisions and activities during the general convention gradually overshadowed these positive aspects.

There should have been an intensive debate on policies and principles during the general convention. However, the representatives' attention mainly focused on leadership selection. As a result, CPN (UML) has been conducting separate statute and leadership selection conventions. The statute provided that a person who has completed 70 years of age cannot be a candidate for an executive position in any party committee. However, that provision was revoked during the statute convention held on September 6 and 7, 2025, despite opposition.<sup>14</sup>

Standing Committee Member Karna Bahadur Thapa, presenting a dissenting opinion at that statute convention, concluded that the leadership transition was obstructed by the absence of a provision for voluntary retirement of leaders and the failure to implement the imposed age or tenure limit.<sup>15</sup> Instead of making such a dissenting opinion the subject of formal debate, the leadership suppressed it. The irony was that the very next day after the convention scrapped this age limit, the youth movement ousted him and brought the debate on generational transition within the party to the surface.

The provision regarding the two-term limit in the statute was removed in a manner that lacked transparency. The statute passed by the first statute convention, held in Godavari, Lalitpur, in October 2021, included Article 64(1), which stated that any person serving as an office-bearer in a municipality or higher committee shall not be eligible to be a candidate

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<sup>14</sup> CPN (UML). 2021. Statute of Nepal Communist Party (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (In Nepali). Kathmandu: CPN (UML), Central Office. Available at [https://system.cpunml.org/parse-image/623?hash=\\$2y\\$10\\$qfm9j7XveTvU.2I2HqQ83eZk4/Pj0zjoslcngvipSO6mMlChDBYgu](https://system.cpunml.org/parse-image/623?hash=$2y$10$qfm9j7XveTvU.2I2HqQ83eZk4/Pj0zjoslcngvipSO6mMlChDBYgu), accessed on February 9, 2026 (in Nepali).

<sup>15</sup> Onlinekhabar. 2025. Karna Thapa Barred from Presenting Dissenting Opinions at UML Legislative Convention. September 6. Available at <https://www.onlinekhabar.com/2025/09/1757712/karna-thapa-barred-from-presenting-dissenting-opinions-at-uml-legislative-convention>, accessed on January 30, 2026 (in Nepali).

for the same level and same post more than twice.<sup>16</sup> The tenth general convention, held in Chitwan the same year, verbatim endorsed the statute passed by the first statute convention. However, that specific provision of Article 64(1) was missing from the CPN (UML) statute published subsequently.

Even more paradoxical was the context in which, when Madhav Kumar Nepal and Jhalanath Khanal were in leadership, Oli himself played a significant role in democratizing the party and implementing a collective leadership system. The inclusion of the 70-year age limit and the two-term limit in the statute was driven by his insistence. At that time, he was 60 years old and merely an aspirant for the chairmanship. But now, after being established at the center of power, he removed the very provision he himself had introduced and amended policies and rules to suit himself.<sup>17</sup> This act never aligned with the spirit of internal democracy.

At the statute convention, the 301-member central committee was reduced to 251. However, on the second day of the national general convention in December 2025, Chair Oli called a central committee meeting and proposed restoring the number to 301, which had been reduced just three months earlier. The number of office-bearers, reduced to 15, was also restored to 19. He did so because, seeing many aspirants from his own faction, he feared they might join another group if he couldn't manage them.<sup>18</sup> Despite opposition from senior leaders, the decision was passed in a closed session. Political scientist Krishna Pokharel described

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<sup>16</sup> Ratopati. 2021. This is the UML's 88-page Long Statute (with Full Text). October 19. Available at <https://www.ratopati.com/story/203423/uml-bidhan->, accessed on February 12, 2026 (in Nepali).

<sup>17</sup> Dhakal, Amit. 2025. What Deuba did not Tell Oli. *Setopati*, July 20, 2025. Available at <https://www.setopati.com/opinion/364558>, accessed on February 12, 2026 (in Nepali).

<sup>18</sup> Anamol, BP. 2025. Oli overturned the statute to manage leaders, and his group is no longer united. *Ukalo*, December 15. Available at <https://www.ukaalo.com/news/31176/>, accessed on January 30, 2026 (in Nepali).

this practice as “tyranny of the majority.”<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, the centralization of power was legitimized through formal voting.

Another significant development related to the party’s power structure concerns former President Bidya Devi Bhandari’s announcement to return to active politics. At a time when Chair Oli was seeking to remain continuously in central power, Bhandari declared her entry into active politics. However, the central committee, its meeting held in July 2025, decided to bar Bhandari from participating in active politics.

The leadership, which itself enforced provisions such as age and term limits, later removed them to ensure the continuity of power in its own interest, thereby undermining the spirit of internal democracy. According to political analyst Jhalak Subedi, under Oli’s leadership, CPN (UML) is gradually narrowing, and the institutional practice of multi-party democracy is weakening.<sup>20</sup> He notes that the decision-making process has become even more centralized. Although a formal central committee exists, in practice the Chair’s wishes are becoming paramount. This has shifted the power structure away from institutional balance and toward person-centric control.

Overall, the 11<sup>th</sup> National General Convention of CPN (UML) prioritized leadership continuity, power management, and centralization over strengthening internal democracy through debate on ideas, policies, and institutional matters. Regarding the reason for this, CPN (UML) Central Committee member Naresh Rokaya said, “Leadership transition is not just about handing over a position based on age; it is the transfer of experience, knowledge, and actions. Generational succession was not

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<sup>19</sup> BC, Ganga. 2025. The Statute Passed by the UML Legislative General Convention was Overturned within 3 Months. *Kantipur*, December 18. <https://ekantipur.com/politics/2025/12/15/the-statute-passed-by-the-uml-legislative-convention-was-overturned-within-3-months-05-21.html>, accessed on January 30, 2026 (in Nepali).

<sup>20</sup> Subedi, Jhalak. 2025. Democracy is Shrinking within the UML. *Onlinekhabar*, September 5. Available at <https://www.onlinekhabar.com/2025/09/1757011/democracy-is-shrinking-within-the-uml>, accessed on January 30, 2026 (in Nepali).

possible in UML because the second generation did not stake a claim for the main leadership, and thus the first generation repeated itself.”<sup>21</sup> He further commented that while the previous generation was naturally reluctant to give up leadership, the second generation, being weak, failed to inspire confidence among cadres through their capability and activity to assume leadership.

The new political context created by the Gen-Z movement has highlighted the need for internal democracy, transformation, a generational leadership shift, and even reform within political parties. However, because CPN (UML) Chair KP Oli has consistently viewed the Gen-Z uprising as destructive and unconstitutional, the general convention strongly endorsed his stance. In fact, immediately after the movement, a demand was raised by a few members in his own party’s secretariat meeting for him to resign from the chairmanship to pave the way for new leadership.<sup>22</sup> That is also why Oli needed his own endorsement by holding a new general convention a year before the central committee’s term expired.

Having served as both the head of government and the party during the Gen-Z movement, Oli convened this convention to demonstrate that he remains powerful. According to political analyst Rajendra Maharjan, the 11<sup>th</sup> General Convention of CPN (UML) completely disregarded the need for a generational shift and reorganization within the party, forcibly reinstated Chair KP Oli, and sent a message that CPN (UML) lacks the will to reform or transform.<sup>23</sup> Although competition formally exists, the weakening of democratic practices regarding ideas, policies, and dissent increases the risk that the party will become an organization centered on a powerful individual rather than a democratic institution.

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Rokaya on January 8, 2026 (in Nepal).

<sup>22</sup> Kaka, Akshar. 2025. KP Oli’s Resignation Demanded at UML Secretariat Meeting. *Setopati*, October 10. Available at <https://www.setopati.com/politics/371359>, accessed on February 2, 2026 (in Nepali).

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Maharjan on February 9, 2026.

## *Nepali Congress*

Sher Bahadur Deuba was elected president of the Nepali Congress at the 13<sup>th</sup> general convention on March 3, 2016. According to the statute, the central committee's tenure is 4 years, so the 14<sup>th</sup> general convention should have been concluded by March 2020. However, even under normal circumstances, President Deuba extended the term by one year using a special provision in the statute intended for extraordinary situations. The convention, scheduled for February 18-21, 2021, was postponed to August 23-26, 2021, due to active membership disputes. With the membership dispute unresolved, the convention was first postponed to August 31-September 3, 2021, and later again to November 24-28, 2021.<sup>24</sup>

After district-level conventions became difficult due to the membership dispute, the schedule was revised multiple times, and the convention was finally held on December 9, 2021. By then, approximately 9 months had passed since both the 4-year tenure allowed by the Nepali Congress statute and the one-year extension period permissible under extraordinary circumstances had ended. The Constitution of Nepal and the Political Parties Act state that a party's general convention can be held within 5 years, with a possible 6-month extension under special circumstances. Nepali Congress held its convention after exceeding that period as well. No general convention has been held within the 4-year period stipulated by the statute since 1992; all have exceeded that date.<sup>25</sup>

Statutorily, the 15<sup>th</sup> general convention was required to be held by December 2025, yet it was clear that the then-establishment faction of the central committee wanted to extend the term without holding the

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<sup>24</sup> Dahal, Mani. 2021. Pressure of General Convention for the Major Parties. *Kantipur*, September 27. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/news/2021/09/27/163273333625659554.html>, accessed on February 3, 2026 (in Nepali).

<sup>25</sup> Bhattarai, Madhusudhan. 2025. Congress's many Excuses for not Being Able to Hold the General Convention on Time. *Ratopati*, August 31. <https://www.ratopati.com/story/510219/congresss-many-excuses-for-not-being-able-to-hold-the-general-convention-on-time>, accessed on February 2, 2026 (in Nepali).

convention. That faction feared losing its dominance after the convention. In particular, since then-President Sher Bahadur Deuba had already completed two terms, there was no possibility of him becoming president again, and he also did not see a favorable environment for securing his faction. According to political analyst Tula Narayan Sah, Deuba wanted to remain at the center of power longer by being able to distribute tickets himself to Nepali Congress candidates and by making a pre-poll alliance with CPN (UML) in the upcoming elections. Sah speculates that Deuba was also dominated by the fear of facing legal cases if he became powerless.<sup>26</sup> For this reason as well, Deuba seemed eager to extend the term without holding a convention before the elections, at any cost.

When discussions about the party convention arose within the party after the Gen-Z movement, the faction loyal to Sher Bahadur Deuba argued that such an exercise could not be undertaken on the eve of elections. However, after more than 52 percent of the general convention representatives submitted signatures demanding a special convention, it was announced that a regular convention would be held.<sup>27</sup> Instead of making the necessary preparations, the matter was delayed until the term expired. Ultimately, concluding that there was insufficient time, the Central Committee, by a majority, passed a proposal to extend the Central Committee's tenure until April 2026 under Article 43, citing exceptional circumstances. However, those advocating for the special convention did not let the matter rest.

After all efforts to sideline the special convention failed, the Nepali Congress leadership expelled General Secretaries Gagan Kumar Thapa and Bishwo Prakash Sharma, along with Joint General Secretary Farmullah Mansoor, for five years.<sup>28</sup> In the morning, Gagan Kumar Thapa was the

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Sah on January 30, 2026.

<sup>27</sup> Gorkhapatra. 2025. Special General Convention Demanded in NC: 2488 Signature Collected. October 15. Available at <https://www.gorkhapatraonline.com/news/175633>, accessed on February 2, 2026 (in Nepali).

<sup>28</sup> Nepali Congress. 2025. Decisions Made by Central Committee of Nepali Congress on January 14, 2026. Available at <https://www.nepalicongress.org/single-press-release/>

General Secretary of the Nepali Congress; by afternoon, he was no longer even a general member due to the party's action; and by evening, the second special convention of the Nepali Congress elected him its president.

This entire process makes it clear that in the practice of the Nepali Congress so far, internal democracy has been constrained. However, the special convention held amid these extraordinary circumstances also conveyed a distinct political message. In this context, political analyst Rajendra Maharjan remarked, “The recently concluded convention of Nepali Congress has proven that the party's internal struggles can be brought to a logical conclusion. At a time when leadership incompetence and outdated styles had become major issues in street protests and intellectual discourse, this convention sent a clear message that generational change is a natural solution to leadership transition. However, a leadership transition alone is not sufficient; the question of how it addresses governance, democratization, and the real problems faced by citizens at the grassroots level remains unanswered.”<sup>29</sup>

Although there had been discussions about leadership change and generational shift within Nepali Congress, the expected changes had not materialized in practice. The previous generation's dominance persisted in the party's leadership. The establishment faction of Nepali Congress was not in favor of change, but, lacking significant power within the party, it could not muster the courage to face either a regular or a special convention and ultimately found itself unexpectedly sidelined from the political landscape. The second special convention, held under extraordinary circumstances, not only brought about a leadership change in Nepali Congress but also facilitated a generational shift. The 79-year-old Sher Bahadur Deuba was replaced as party president by 49-year-old Gagan Kumar Thapa. A 30-year gap is evident between the old and new leadership.

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[decisions-of-the-meeting-of-the-nepali-congress-central-working-committee-on-29-and-30-paush-2082](#), accessed on February 2, 2026 (in Nepali).

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Maharjan on February 9, 2026.

Beyond this, the special convention also made far-reaching policy decisions. For instance, these decisions included not forming pre-poll alliances, barring anyone from becoming Prime Minister more than twice, deciding candidates through primary elections based on party membership, and allowing someone to become a parliamentarian through proportional representation only once.<sup>30</sup> However, the effectiveness of these new policies will depend on how the new leadership implements them and how the subsequent regular convention receives these decisions. This special convention has provided an opportunity to give the Nepali Congress a new direction, but the success of the new leadership will depend on practical work and unity.

### ***Age, Gender, Ethnic, and Regional Inclusion***

In the changed political context following the Gen-Z movement, the 11<sup>th</sup> National General Convention of CPN (UML) and the Second Special General Convention of Nepali Congress were seen as opportunities for leadership change, youth participation, and the restructuring of internal democracy. However, the outcomes fell short of those expectations.

In the CPN (UML), KP Sharma Oli was elected party chair for a third term. Accordingly, the generational leadership transition did not occur, and policy and organizational reforms became secondary. Data on youth participation in the Central Committee further underscore this trend. The National Youth Policy 2025 defines citizens under 35 as youth. Among the candidates for office-bearer positions in the party's Central Committee, there was not a single individual under 35. Only one candidate was under 50 (41-year-old Rachana Khadka, who contested for the position of Secretary); 12 were in the 50–59 age group, 26 were in the 60–70 age group, and 2 were above 71 years.

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<sup>30</sup> Nepali Congress. 2026. *Contemporary Political Proposal Presented by General Secretary: Second Special General Convention of Nepali Congress*. Kathmandu: Nepali Congress.

Under the Senior Citizens Act, 2006, individuals aged 60 and above are classified as senior citizens. Of the candidates, 28 (68.29%) fell into that category. Notably, the principal contenders for the party chair, namely KP Sharma Oli and Ishwar Pokhrel, were both over 70 years old. These facts reveal the dominance of the older generation in CPN (UML) leadership and the limited role of youth. A Central Committee member of All Nepal National Free Students' Union stated, "Until a retirement system is established, leadership transfer will not be easy." According to him, leadership that remains continuously in power enjoys structural advantages even in internal competition, thereby reducing meaningful change.<sup>31</sup>

The state of gender inclusion is also important for understanding the power structure. The Constitution and laws require political parties to ensure at least one-third women's participation at all levels and to reflect diversity. However, the 11<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the CPN (UML) did not appear to be gender-inclusive. Among candidates for office-bearer positions, women's participation was only 9%. Four women contested, with one for Vice-Chair and three for Secretary. Of them, only one Secretary candidate was elected, while men were elected to the remaining 18 positions.

During the Statute Convention in September, voices called for 50 percent women's participation. Some leaders expressed concern that this demand had not been addressed. Leaders, including CPN (UML) Central Committee member Binda Pandey, have long demanded that women's participation be ensured in proportion to their population. There have also been calls to mandate quotas for women in the positions of Vice-Chair, General Secretary, Secretary, and other clusters to increase representation.<sup>32</sup> However, the CPN (UML) has not ensured women's participation, even in internal leadership contests. Similarly, from an inclusion perspective,

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with the Central Committee Member on December 12, 2025.

<sup>32</sup> Parajuli, Asmita. 2025. Women of CPN-UML Reduced to Token Representation: How Many were Included in the Central Committee? *Khabarhub*, December 19. Available at <https://khabarhub.com/2025/19/900546/>; accessed on January 28, 2026 (in Nepali).

office-bearer positions continued to be dominated by the Khas/Arya community (33 individuals, or 78.57 percent). Among the total candidates (41 individuals), seven (17.07 percent) were from Indigenous/Janajati communities, one (2.43 percent) from the Madheshi community, and one (2.43 percent) from the Dalit community. Of the four women candidates, one belonged to an Indigenous/Janajati community, while the remaining three were from the Khas/Arya community (see Table 1).

Thus, even at the office-bearer level, the dominance of the Khas/Arya community remained intact. The absence or minimal presence of candidates from Muslim and other marginalized communities indicates that the power structure appears oriented toward reproducing traditional dominance rather than fostering inclusivity.

At the Second Special General Convention of the Nepali Congress, one President, 13 office-bearers, and 121 Central Committee members were elected.<sup>33</sup> Compared with the previous leadership, the new leadership appears more inclusive. In the party's history, Pushpa Bhusal is the second woman to serve as Vice President, after Shailaja Acharya. Among the eight Joint General Secretaries, representatives have been included from women, Indigenous/Janajati, Dalit, Madheshi, Khas Arya, Muslim, Tharu, and backward regions. Joint General Secretary Faramullah Mansoor is the first person from the Muslim community to be elected to an office-bearer position in the party.

The Special General Convention emphasized leadership renewal and youth participation. However, none of the 13 office-bearers is under 35. Only two are under 50: Mukta Kumari Yadav (48) and Gagan Kumar Thapa (49). The office-bearer positions are predominantly held by individuals

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<sup>33</sup> In the Central Committee memberships of both the CPN (UML) and the Nepali Congress, representation has been ensured on the basis of various inclusive categories. These include women, persons with disabilities, individuals from backward regions, youth, as well as members of Khas Arya, Madhesi, Muslim, Tharu, and other communities. Notably, the youth category has a particularly strong presence.

aged 50–60. Vice President Bishwo Prakash Sharma, General Secretary Pradeep Poudel, and other Joint General Secretaries fall within this bracket.

Three office-bearers are under 70, and one is 74 years old (under 80). While the Special General Convention brought about a leadership change and a degree of generational transition, it failed to ensure meaningful youth participation at the decision-making level. The Gen-Z movement created the momentum for the Special General Convention; however, the convention does not appear to have provided adequate space for youth representation among the office-bearers.

From a gender perspective, although the office-bearer positions appear somewhat inclusive, they are not fully inclusive. Since the 14<sup>th</sup> General Convention, there have been calls to ensure 33 percent women participation among office-bearers. However, at the Special General Convention, only 3 of the 13 elected office-bearers (23 percent) were women. Although President Gagan Kumar Thapa stated at the inaugural ceremony that the Special General Convention had been given an opportunity by the majority to change both policy and leadership, women’s participation among office-bearers did not increase as expected.

While the Joint General Secretaries were selected inclusively, the decisive positions—President, Vice President, and General Secretary—remain dominated by the Khas Arya community. Of the five individuals elected to these three key posts, four are men and one is a woman. Of the eight Joint General Secretaries, two belong to the Khas Arya community. Even within the open category for women, priority appears to have been given to candidates from the Khas Arya community. Consequently, 7 office-bearers (54 percent) are from the Khas Arya community (see Table 1). This overrepresentation of a single community indicates the underrepresentation of others and underscores the need for the dominant community to critically reflect on its structural advantages. This is against the democratic norms and the spirit of Nepal’s constitution.

**Table 1: Age, Gender, Ethnic, and Regional Inclusion in Newly-Elected Office Bearers in CPN (UML) and Nepali Congress**

Position	Name	Age	Gender	Inclusion Group
<b>CPN (UML)</b>				
Chair	KP Sharma Oli	74	Men	Khas Arya
Deputy Chair	Prithvi Subba Gurung	68	Men	Indigenous Group
	Bishnu Prasad Paudel	66	Men	Khas Arya
	Ram Bahadur Thapa Badal	70	Men	Indigenous Group
	Gokarna Bista	60	Men	Khas Arya
	Raghuji, Panta	68	Men	Khas Arya
General Secretary	Shankar Pokharel	63	Men	Khas Arya
Deputy General Secretary	Lekh Raj Bhatta	66	Men	Khas Arya
	Yogesh Bhattarai	59	Men	Khas Arya
	Raghu Bir Mahaseth	64	Men	Madhesi
Secretary	Mahesh Basnet	51	Men	Khas Arya
	Padma Kumari Aryal	57	Women	Khas Arya
	Sher Dhan Rai	55	Men	Indigenous Group
	Yam Lal Kandel	64	Men	Khas Arya
	Rajan Bhattarai	57	Men	Khas Arya
	Chhabi Lal Bishwakarma	63	Men	Dalit
	Khaga Raj Adhikari	64	Men	Khas Arya
	Hikmat Karki	61	Men	Khas Arya
Bhanu Bhakta Dhakal	64	Men	Khas Arya	

Nepali Congress				
President	Gagan Kumar Thapa	49	Men	Khas Arya
Vice- President	Bishwo Prakash Sharma	56	Men	Khas Arya
	Pushpa Bhusal	65	Women	Khas Arya
General Secretary	Pradip Poudel	50	Men	Khas Arya
	Guru Raj Ghimire	57	Men	Khas Arya
Joint-General Secretary	Dila Sangroula Panta	63	Women	Khas Arya
	Prakash Rasaili Snehi	50	Men	Dalit
	Bahadur Singh Lama	55	Men	Indigenous Groups
	Udaya Shamsher Rana	56	Men	Khas Arya
	Mukta Kumari Yadav	48	Women	Madhesh
	Farmullaha Mansoor	74	Men	Muslim
	Yogendra Chautari	51	Men	Tharu
	Karna Bahadur Budha	62	Men	Undeveloped Geography

Source: Secretariat of Respective Political Parties

## 5. CONCLUSION

The Nepali Congress and the CPN (UML) have made highly significant contributions to Nepal's democratic movement. Since the Rana regime, these parties have continuously struggled to establish democracy in the country. They played a leading role in the movements against the Panchayat system and King Gyanendra's direct rule. They also played a central role in institutionalizing democracy in Nepal. However, in recent years, the same generation and individuals have long led both parties and the government, and their performance has been unsatisfactory. This has led to growing public dissatisfaction with political parties, which has incentivized the creation and activities of the Gen-Z movement.

The changed political context following the Gen-Z protest exposed the need for internal democracy, transformation, generational leadership transfer, and, to some extent, organizational restructuring within the parties. In this context, CPN (UML) Chair KP Sharma Oli secured his re-endorsement by holding a general convention a year earlier than scheduled. As he held leadership of both the party and the government during the Gen-Z movement, he used the convention strategically to reaffirm his power. This move came after voices within the party demanded his resignation to pave the way for a new chairperson.

A similar situation arose within the Nepali Congress, which was a coalition partner in government during the movement. However, the establishment faction in this party lacked the courage to proceed with a general convention. Subsequently, under the leadership of General Secretaries Gagan Kumar Thapa and Bishwo Prakash Sharma, the process for a special general convention moved forward. Taking the risk of a possible party split, their initiative proved meaningful, and the Nepali

Congress acquired new leadership. This has been one of the most visible impacts in Nepal's political sphere following the Gen-Z movement.

After the Gen-Z movement, questions were also raised about the role of political parties. Although Nepali Congress and CPN (UML) endorsed their leadership and policies through special and regular conventions, respectively, a closer analysis reveals numerous instances of factionalism and personal interests overriding the rule of law. The establishment faction within Nepali Congress appeared reluctant to change, but because the internal balance of power was not in its favor, it could not withstand either a general or a special convention and ultimately exited the political landscape unexpectedly. This situation arose largely because it failed to understand the sentiments of its own party workers.

Other political parties have yet to endorse their leadership and policies. The practice of repeatedly extending central committee tenures under exceptional circumstances and amending party statutes to suit leadership interests has exposed weaknesses in internal party democracy. The 11<sup>th</sup> National General Convention of CPN (UML) failed to meet expectations for leadership change and the strengthening of internal democracy. This once again highlighted the absence of leadership development, generational transition, and a culture of retirement within the party. To remain in office, KP Oli had already laid the groundwork by amending both the 70-year age limit and the two-term limit set by the party statute. After becoming CPN (UML) Chair for the third time, debate has emerged over whether to legally limit the party chair to a maximum of two terms.

Democracy remains incomplete without the meaningful participation of women, Dalits, Muslims, Indigenous nationalities, and other marginalized communities. However, neither the CPN-UML nor the Nepali Congress convention demonstrated substantive inclusivity at the leadership level. This reaffirms that the Constitution's inclusive provisions remain poorly implemented within political parties, and that within the Nepali Congress, CPN (UML), and other traditional parties, certain communities, genders,

age groups, and classes continue to dominate. For building democratic parties in the long term, structural reforms appear essential, including fixed-term limits, age limits, institutional respect for dissent, and mandatory representation of women and marginalized communities at decision-making levels. Without such reforms, expectations of leadership change will remain confined to debate, and the risk of democratic erosion will deepen. In the Nepali Congress, a special convention was held amid weak democratic practices, resulting in new leadership and a new structure. It remains to be seen how effectively this can institutionalize democratic practices within the party.

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.



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