

First General Convention of the Rastriya Swatantra Party

Policy, Representation, Leadership and Message

No. 22 | August 2026



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Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN)
Lalitpur, Nepal

Political Situation Update

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Phone: 01-5902286

Email: info@democracyresource.org

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	1
2. From Ad-hoc to Statutory Structure	2
3. General Convention Process and Representation	4
3.1 Disputes Over Delegates and Delays	4
3.2 Election Code of Conduct	6
3.3 Election Process and Results	9
3.4 The Framework of Inclusivity in RSP	13
3.5 The Challenge of Integration	17
4. Policy Debate and Self-reflection	19
4.1 From Constitutional Socialism to Social Democracy	19
4.2 Organizational Self-Reflection	22
4.3 Crisis of Internal Democracy	24
5. What is in the Statute?	26
5.1 Ordinary Members' Rights Curtailed	26
5.2 President at the Center of Power	27
6. Conclusion	32

1. INTRODUCTION

The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), formed shortly before the 2022 House of Representatives (HoR) elections, held its first National General Convention four years after its establishment, from June 21–26, 2026. Having begun as a small party, it grew to become the largest political party by the time of the HoR election 2026. The RSP presented itself as an alternative force to the older political parties by questioning their leadership and working styles. However, the party faced criticism for not holding a general convention for a long time. At the same time, with various groups having merged into the party, there was also a pressing need to formulate a shared, cohesive policy. It is against this backdrop that the party held its first national general convention.

This political situation update discusses various dimensions of the general convention, including representation, policy formulation, elections, and their outcomes. For this analysis, in addition to direct observation of the general convention, discussions were held with RSP leaders, party cadres, well-wishers, journalists, convention delegates, and political analysts. Published materials were also used for analysis.

2. FROM AD-HOC TO STATUTORY STRUCTURE

Rabi Lamichhane, who was active in television journalism, announced the formation of the RSP on June 21, 2022 in Kathmandu. The party emerged at a time when public dissatisfaction with old political parties and their leaders was growing. This sentiment combined with a wave of victories for independent candidates in the local elections held in May 2022.¹ Within just five months of its formation, the party won 20 seats in the HoR election 2022, becoming the fourth-largest party.

Party President Lamichhane became the Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister in the then-government led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre). However, shortly after emerging onto the Nepali political landscape, Lamichhane became involved in a series of controversies. He faced allegations of holding dual passports and of having secured his parliamentary seat using his Nepali citizenship before formally renouncing his American citizenship.² After the Supreme Court invalidated Lamichhane's citizenship, he lost both his parliamentary seat and ministerial position, and the party subsequently withdrew from the government.³ In the by-election held on April 23, 2023, Lamichhane was re-elected from Chitwan Constituency No. 2. With an additional seat

¹ In the 2022 local elections, an alternative wave emerged in Nepali politics after Harkaraj Rai in Dharan, Balendra Shah in Kathmandu, and Gopal Hamal in Dhangadhi became independent candidates and became mayors.

² Kantipur. 2023. Rabi Lamichhane's dual passport case: Public Prosecutor's Office requests documents (in Nepali). February 9. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/news/2023/02/09/167592951376157810.html>; accessed on July 9, 2026.

³ Ukera. 2023. Home Minister Rabi's citizenship invalid; loses positions of Minister, Member of Parliament, and Party President (in Nepali). January 27. Available at www.ukeraa.com/news/2023/01/27/28929/; accessed on July 9, 2026.

won in Tanahun in the same by-election, the RSP raised its parliamentary strength to 21 seats and returned to the government. However, after the ruling coalition shifted, it withdrew from the government once again.

Even after that, Lamichhane faced further controversy over alleged misuse of cooperative funds and was arrested. The first national gathering of the RSP, held in Kamaladi, Kathmandu, on September 17–18, 2024, decided to hold the first National General Convention on May 8–10, 2025.⁴ However, after the Butwal bench of the Tulsipur High Court ordered President Lamichhane to be sent to judicial custody for trial in the Supreme Cooperative Fraud case in Butwal on April 4, 2025, the convention could not held as scheduled.

On September 8 and 9, 2025, the Gen-Z group announced protests demanding an end to corruption and poor governance, generational leadership transition, and the lifting of the social media ban. From prison, Lamichhane, and from outside, other RSP leaders expressed solidarity. The then-Mayor of Kathmandu Metropolitan City, Balendra Shah, also lent his support. Following the protests, the KP Oli-led government collapsed, and an interim government was formed under the leadership of former Chief Justice Sushila Karki. Shortly before the March 5, 2026 elections, Balendra Shah's group merged with the RSP. Prior to this, the Bibeksheel Sajha Party had already merged into the RSP. Additionally, by incorporating a faction of the Tharuhat movement led by Laxman Tharu, as well as numerous individuals from older parties, the RSP entered the House of Representatives election and won nearly a two-thirds majority of the seats.

⁴ Setopati. 2024. RSP announces first general convention date (in Nepali). September 18. Available at www.setopati.com/politics/339559; accessed on July 14, 2026.

3. GENERAL CONVENTION PROCESS AND REPRESENTATION

As the ruling party and the largest in Parliament, the RSP's first national general convention attracted considerable public interest. The significance of this convention was immense, as it was expected to clarify the party's leadership, policies, and the management of its various factions. Although Rabi Lamichhane's leadership as the party president was expected to be chosen unanimously, curiosity about how the power dynamic between him and Prime Minister and senior leader Balendra Shah would unfold further heightened interest.

3.1 Disputes Over Delegates and Delays

A meeting of the Central Committee held on June 13, 2026 announced that the first national general convention would be held in Chitwan from June 21 to 23, 2026, to coincide with the party's founding anniversary. However, while delegates were being called to Chitwan for the convention, several conventions at the provincial and local levels were still pending. Following disputes over delegate selection and leadership choices in Madhesh Province, conventions could not be held in seven of its districts, with the sole exception of Parsa District. Consequently, the Madhesh Province convention was put on hold.⁵ Across the country, out of 6,743 wards, conventions were completed in only 4,363; out of 753 municipalities, only

⁵ Mahara, Jayasingh. 2026. RSP provincial convention: Completed in four, ongoing in two, uncertain in Madhesh (in Nepali). *Kantipur*, May 10. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/politics/2026/06/15/rsp-provincial-convention-completed-in-four-ongoing-in-two-uncertain-in-madhesh-59-11.html>; accessed on July 5, 2026.

in 609; and out of 77 districts, only in 64.⁶ In places where conventions had not taken place, their respective ad-hoc committees selected and dispatched delegates to the national convention. In addition, the convention's delegate composition became disorganized, as members of recently merged groups were also included as delegates in an attempt to integrate them.

The schedule was to hold the inauguration ceremony on June 21, the closed session and elections on June 22, and to conclude the convention on June 23 with the announcement of results. However, even before the closed session could begin, disputes over delegate selection had surfaced, and the atmosphere appeared tense. A large crowd of delegates from various districts, voicing grievances over their omission from delegate lists, gathered at the RSP Election Committee office throughout the convention's third day (June 23). During the inauguration ceremony, senior leader Balendra Shah had said of the RSP, "We are an express vehicle. We do not stop anywhere. We must finish the convention on time and focus on the development of the nation." However, the convention's chaotic management and two-day schedule overrun were hardly the hallmarks of an 'express vehicle'.

Numerous complaints and objections were filed against the preliminary list of delegates. The biggest dispute concerned the delegates from Madhesh Province. Verifying the list alone consumed considerable time due to grievances, such as the names of some selected delegates not appearing on the list at all, or entirely different individuals being listed due to technical errors. The dispute over delegates became so complex that the RSP had yet to publish the total number of delegates on its website to date (as of mid-August 2026). The number of delegates continued to fluctuate until the convention's close. Although delegates for five out of the seven provinces were made public, the number of delegates for Gandaki and

⁶ The organizational report submitted by General Secretary Kabindra Burlakoti to the general convention states that conventions are yet to be held in Humla, Dolpa, Rukum East, Manang, Mustang, Dhanusha, Bara and Sarlahi districts.

Bagmati provinces has not been published. However, according to RSP General Secretary Bipin Acharya, the total number of delegates is 3,849.⁷

The delay in the closed session caused frustration and anger among the delegates who had arrived from various parts of the country. They complained that while food was provided, no accommodation had been arranged, even as proceedings dragged on. A delegate associated with the RSP since its founding remarked, “The first national convention of a new party should have been more organized and conducted in a fresh manner to set a new precedent. However, that did not happen. The failure to finalise delegate selection even after the event had begun is not only a managerial failure but also an institutional weakness.”⁸

The challenge of how to ensure representation for the various factions integrated into the party recently also complicated the delegate-related disputes. RSP Central Committee Member Khagendra Sunar took the view that, as a large party attracting many people, it was natural that accommodating everyone would take time. He added, “Just for the sake of doing it on time, we cannot move forward by hurting anyone’s feelings. We must move forward by keeping everyone happy.”⁹

The RSP had indeed made various preparations to conduct the convention in an organised and successful manner. Once the dates were fixed, the party carried out membership distribution and renewals, delegate selection, and the formulation of a code of conduct in various phases. Although efforts were made to streamline the management by forming 18 sub-committees, these arrangements did not fully materialize.

3.2 Election Code of Conduct

With the aim of making the general convention’s election clean, fair, and transparent, the RSP Central Election Commission issued the ‘National

⁷ Interview with Acharya on August 11, 2026.

⁸ Interview with the delegate on June 22, 2026.

⁹ Interview with Sunar on June 23, 2026.

General Convention Election Code of Conduct 2026'. However, the first three provisions of Point 1 of the Code of Conduct were seemingly violated by both delegates and leaders. The guidelines prohibited candidates from campaigning on social media. Furthermore, distributing or displaying pamphlets, banners, flexes, or other promotional materials in the vicinity of the general convention was also banned. The Code of Conduct specified that the election would be based on individual competition, strictly prohibiting any panel, alliance, joint list, or group-based campaigning. For non-compliance, the Central Election Commission or designated committee could take action ranging from requesting clarification to disqualifying candidacies, depending on the severity of the violation. Despite these rules, campaigning was already underway before the final delegate list had even been confirmed. Candidates promoted themselves using visiting cards, small banners, and social media. A candidate for the Central Committee, Ananda Bahadur Chand, distributed free bottled water with his name printed on the bottles. Other representatives, however, protested his campaigning style.

During the inauguration ceremony itself, both the senior leader and the party president stated that factional practices would not be encouraged. President Lamichhane went so far as to say that anyone who campaigns or asks for votes on behalf of others is not a true RSP member. However, this was not reflected in practice. Once the results for the central committee members were made public, 11 aspirants emerged for the position of general secretary. Despite party documents and speeches emphasizing the importance of competition, President Lamichhane tried until the final hour to make all office-bearer positions consensus-based.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ratopati. 2026. Overnight efforts to reach consensus among office bearers fail, preparations to move forward with election process (in Nepali). June 26. Available at www.ratopati.com/story/573043/rsvp-general-convention-overnight-efforts-to-reach-consensus-among-office-bearers-fail-preparations-to-move-forward-with-election-process; accessed on July 14, 2026.

The RSP, which had long criticized the factional practices of older political parties, witnessed practices that mirrored factionalism during its very first convention. General secretary candidates including Ranju Darshana, Kabindra Burlakoti, Pramod Neupane, and Ganesh Parajuli withdrew their candidacies in open support of Bipin Kumar Acharya.¹¹ Their public endorsement of Acharya sent ripples of excitement and tension through the convention hall. Other candidates protested, claiming that such endorsements were contrary to the party's official policy. Manish Jha, another candidate for general secretary, requested President Lamichhane directly from the convention floor to put a stop to such practices. Ganesh Karki, a Central Committee member and general secretary candidate, also argued that such open endorsements would unduly influence a free election, stating that it was not a healthy practice.¹²

Furthermore, media outlets claimed that the faction aligned with Balendra Shah had prepared and distributed its own separate list of preferred candidates. *Kantipur* daily published a candidate list on June 25, 2026, claiming it was distributed by an unidentified group, and asserted that it included candidates from the Balendra Shah faction.¹³ *Setopati* published a report on July 27, 2026 stating that a leader from that faction had confirmed that Balendra Shah's chief advisor, Kumar Ben, had distributed the list.¹⁴ These instances indicate that the RSP's national convention was not entirely free from factionalism.

¹¹ Ratopati. 2026. Bipin's position as General Secretary is strengthened with the support of five leaders (in Nepali). June 26. Available at www.ratopati.com/story/573113/bipins-position-as-general-secretary-is-heavily-influenced-by-the-support-of-five-leaders; accessed on July 14, 2026.

¹² Interview with Karki on July 2, 2026.

¹³ Pokharel, Gaurab. 2026. RSP's general convention management in turmoil (in Nepali). *Kantipur*, June 25. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/politics/2026/06/25/rsp-general-convention-candidates-dissatisfied-with-secret-list-and-serial-number-of-voting-machines-25-10.html>; accessed on July 29, 2026

¹⁴ Sharma, Shobha. 2026. Rabi faction dissatisfied with candidacy for general secretary, Balen group suspicious of statute amendment (in Nepali). *Setopati*, July 28. Available at www.setopati.com/politics/394563; accessed on July 29, 2026.

3.3 Election Process and Results

At the National General Convention, RSP amended its statute for the fourth time, restructuring the party's organization. As a result, the number of office-bearers increased from 12 to 18, and the number of central committee members rose from 129 to 158. Under the new arrangement, of the 18 office-bearers, seven positions are filled through election while the remaining 11 are appointed through the party president's nomination. The party president nominates one of three vice-presidents, one of two general secretaries, two of five joint general secretaries, one spokesperson, three deputy spokespersons, one treasurer, and two deputy treasurers. Similarly, in the 158-member central committee including the president, the presidents of the seven province committees serve as ex-officio members, and the central committee president nominates 51 central committee members.

At the convention, 379 candidates had filed for 99 central committee member seats. RSP had set the requirements for central committee candidacy at 21 supporters, one proposer, and a fee of NPR 21,000. When asked by the Democracy Resource Center Nepal (DRCN) about the basis for the fee, RSP Central Election Commission Deputy Chief Ram Gurung stated that the NPR 21,000 fee was set in lieu of the party's policy against accepting donations.¹⁵ When asked whether this fee appears to create a barrier particularly for young people and those from marginalized communities, he said that he maintained that NPR 21,000 was not excessive and that RSP representatives were capable of bearing the cost. General secretary candidate Ganesh Karki, however, noted that there is also a provision for a fee waiver for those unable to pay, provided the committee they represent recommends them.¹⁶ Voter turnout in the

¹⁵ Interview with Gurung on June 23, 2026.

¹⁶ Interview with Karki on July 2, 2026.

central committee election stood at 76.67 percent.¹⁷ As the convention ran over schedule, some delegates had already departed without voting.

One Person, One Post: The Debate from Below Failed to Reach the Top

The debate over ‘one person, one post’ had surfaced within RSP after Sumana Shrestha resigned from the position of Joint General Secretary on March 31, 2025, arguing that both the Member of Parliament (MP) and Joint General Secretary roles are full-time positions and that one person cannot effectively handle both simultaneously.¹⁸

The issue resurfaced again during this general convention. However, much like Shrestha’s resignation appeared to be an exception, the discussion once again remained confined to informal conversation and cadre-level dissatisfaction. Although the ‘one person, one post’ agenda sought to take shape at provincial and district conventions, it could not be institutionalized within the party. No formal discussion on the matter took place at the National General Convention either. Some delegates interviewed by DRCN also expressed dissatisfaction over the failure to implement ‘one person, one post.’

A delegate from Rukum East said, “We joined this party because we did not get opportunities in other parties. But here too, since the MPs themselves are aspiring for party positions, the chances of others getting opportunities have weakened.”¹⁹

The issue of MPs not seeking places in party committees had been raised forcefully at the provincial convention. A video emerged of

¹⁷ Mahara, Jayasingh. 2026. 76.67 percent vote in election for RSP central member (in Nepali). *Kantipur*, June 25. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/politics/2026/06/25/7667-percent-vote-in-election-for-rsyp-central-member-57-12.html>; accessed on July 15, 2026.

¹⁸ Nagarik. 2025. Sumana resigns saying ‘one person, one position’, and the RSP appoints an in-charge with dual responsibility (in Nepali). April 17. Available at <https://nagariknews.nagariknetwork.com/politics/1472441-1744903723.html>; accessed on July 14, 2026.

¹⁹ Interview with the delegate on June 22, 2026.

Sarin Tamang, a defeated candidate from Sunsari Constituency No. 1, challenging MPs not to form panels or campaign on anyone's behalf at the provincial committee convention.²⁰ Akshar Kaka, editor of the online media *Sidhakura*, citing the example of MPs being defeated at the provincial level in the name of 'one person, one post', said, "But it seems that won't be the case at the central committee."²¹ Sitting MPs had been candidates for the provincial president position in Bagmati, Gandaki, Lumbini, and Sudurpashchim provinces, but they were defeated.²²

RSP has no clear binding policy on 'one person, one post.' Nevertheless, before the district and provincial conventions, RSP had issued an internal circular on June 4, 2026, directing MPs not to take on responsible leadership roles at the district and provincial levels.²³ However, the MPs who defied this circular and stood for election at provincial conventions were unsuccessful. In Parsa District, the MPs from Constituency Nos. 1 and 2 had themselves contested for the president position. Buddhi Prasad Pant (Hari) from Constituency No. 1 was also elected.

Although discussions on the matter occurred in one-on-one or small group conversations at the National General Convention, no substantive or broad-based discussion took place. Instead, MPs were elected in notable numbers to the central committee membership.

²⁰ Live News Raftar. 2026. RSP convention controversial: Sarin Tamang alleges cheating and factionalism (in Nepali). June 11. Available at www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2167893360634539; accessed on July 14, 2026.

²¹ Interview with Akshar Kaka on June 22, 2026.

²² Onlinekhabar. 2026. Four MPs defeated in the RSP provincial presidency race (in Nepali). June 16. Available at www.onlinekhabar.com/2026/06/1955355/three-mps-defeated-in-the-rsvp-provincial-presidency-race; accessed on July 14, 2026.

²³ Mahara, Jayasingh. 2026. RSP provincial convention: Four MPs who contested for the presidency despite rejecting party policy are defeated (in Nepali). *Kantipur*, June 16. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/news/2026/06/16/rsp-provincial-convention-four-mps-who-contested-for-presidency-despite-rejecting-party-policy-defeated-01-06.html>; accessed on July 14, 2026.

Candidates and their delegates also raised questions about the serial numbering of candidates on the electronic voting machines. General secretary candidate Karki wrote on his social media: “It appears my name is listed at number 133 in the open category. How did the names of those who registered after me in the preliminary list end up above mine? How did those who registered before me end up below? On what basis were the positions of names assigned on the voting machine? These are questions that remain.”²⁴ According to RSP Central Election Commission Chief Bhuwan KC, the serial numbers were assigned based on the order in which candidates registered.²⁵ Karki’s questions, however, cast doubt on that explanation.

President Rabi Lamichhane and open-category Vice-president Swarnim Wagle were elected unanimously. It was almost certain that Balendra Shah would be nominated as a senior leader.²⁶ A total of 33 candidates had filed for the seven office-bearer positions to be elected by the convention. The most contested position was that of general secretary, with 11 candidacies filed. After six of them withdrew, five remained in the race.²⁷ Among them, Bipin Kumar Acharya won with 673 votes. After Biraj Bhakta Shrestha withdrew his candidacy for vice-president, Swarnim Wagle was elected unopposed. In the women's vice-president category, Sobita Gautam defeated Tosima Karki with 789 votes. Similarly, 11 candidates had filed for the two open joint general secretary positions, among whom

²⁴ Karki’s facebook status on June 25, 2026. Available at www.facebook.com/ganess.karki/posts/pfbid02ejwcvmoEcsfcisPFNY1Ps24Bh93bQF95kGL9RwWZEysxeQKk8fjyohe9mZYBYdMI; accessed on July 29, 2026.

²⁵ Pokharel, Gaurab. 2026. RSP’s general convention management in turmoil (in Nepali). *Kantipur*, June 25. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/politics/2026/06/25/rsp-general-convention-candidates-dissatisfied-with-secret-list-and-serial-number-of-voting-machines-25-10.html>; accessed on July 29, 2026.

²⁶ Central committee meeting held on July 29, 2026 has officially nominated Balendra Shah as Senior Leader. Available at <https://rspnepal.org/news/press-2083-04-13>; accessed on July 31, 2026.

²⁷ Due to the fact that Ranju Darshana withdrew her candidacy at the last minute, her name could not be removed from the electronic voting machine.

Asim Shah and Hari Dhakal defeated the other candidates with 472 and 410 votes respectively. Among the five candidates for the women's joint general secretary position, Nisha Dangi won with 736 votes.

Out of 3,849 convention delegates, only 1,341 voted for office-bearers, while the remaining did not.²⁸ For the office-bearer election, 53 cast their votes remotely from abroad via a mobile app, and 1,288 voted at the convention venue through electronic voting machines. Since this amounted to nearly a one-third of the total delegates, questions were also raised about the legitimacy of the office-bearer election. General secretary candidate Ganesh Karki argued that this should not be measured against the standard of legitimacy, given that only elected central committee members are eligible to stand as candidates for office-bearer positions.²⁹ According to him, since only those same delegates who had first voted for central members were eligible to contest for office-bearer positions, the fact that other delegates did not vote for office-bearers carries no bearing on legitimacy. However, Part 6 of the statute which deals with governing the central level (convention, committee, and secretariat) clearly states in Section 22, Clause 8(b) that office-bearers are to be elected by the direct vote of all convention delegates. Karki's argument and the statutory provision entitling all convention delegates to vote for office-bearers thus appear to be in conflict.

3.4 The Framework of Inclusivity in RSP

There is a notable difference between RSP's statute (2022) and the statute with the fourth amendment (2026) regarding provisions related to inclusivity. The statute (2022) had placed inclusivity primarily as a principle and in the form of general quotas. The statute (2026) has

²⁸ Kantipur. 2026. Over 4,000 delegates to RSP general convention, only 1,341 voted to elect office bearers (in Nepali). June 26. Available at https://ekantipur.com/politics/2026/06/26/over-4000-delegates-to-rsvp-general-convention-only-1341-voted-to-elect-office-bearers-11-41.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com; accessed on July 7, 2026.

²⁹ Interview with Karki on July 2, 2026.

transformed it into an outcome-ensuring system with tier-wise designated seats, mathematical formulas, and binding implementation mechanisms.

The amended statute has made inclusivity a foundational principle of the party's operation itself. Part 3, Section 7(8) mandates that all party committees, departments, and bodies to have meaningful representation of at least 33 percent women and 33 percent youth, as well as equitable representation of all classes, regions, and marginalized communities. Sections 22(4) and (6) allow for the displacement of even higher vote-getters if quotas are not met; Sections 22(7), 25(6), and 28(5) make it mandatory to fulfill quotas through nomination; and Sections 31(4)(b) and 33(3) stipulate that if the women's or Dalit quota is not fulfilled, the position must remain vacant and cannot be filled by others. This confirms that the declaratory inclusivity provisions of the 2022 statute have been transformed into a binding, outcome-oriented system in 2026 statute. However, the provision of 50%+1 youth participation that existed in 2022 statute has been reduced to 33 percent in 2026 statute.

RSP has made history by electing approximately 50 percent women to central committee membership from its first general convention.³⁰ Of the total 384 candidates, 80 were women, of whom 49 were elected. However, only two women were elected as office-bearers: the women's vice-president and the women's joint general secretary. After Ranju Darshana withdrew her candidacy for general secretary, women were not considered for that position, nor for the other posts filled by consensus. Joint General Secretary Asim Shah is from the Muslim community. All other office-bearers, including the remaining two women, are from the Khas-Arya community. There is no representation of indigenous nationalities, Dalits, or other marginalized communities. Party President Lamichhane had already apologized for the underrepresentation of Rai and Limbu

³⁰ Setopati. 2026. Nearly 50 percent women elected to RSP central committee (in Nepali). Available at www.setopati.com/politics/392292; accessed on July 4, 2026.

communities in the 2026 HoR elections.³¹ Yet, among the office-bearers elected by the convention, representation of the Rai, Limbu, and other indigenous nationalities is zero. Similarly, Dalit representation is also zero. RSP leaders say the party will seek to address this gap in leadership inclusivity through presidential nominations.³²

Table 1: Elected Central Committee Members (99)

Ethnic Cluster	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
Khas Arya	32	27	59	59.6%
Indigenous Nationalities	7	12	19	19.2%
Madheshi	6	5	11	11.1%
Dalit	3	4	7	7.1%
Muslim	2	1	3	3.0%
Total	50	49	99	100%

Source: Central committee member election result notice issued by RSP Central Election Commission on June 25, 2026.

Section 22(3) of RSP’s amended statute (2026) stipulates that of the 99 central committee members, 32 equitable-inclusive seats are distributed as follows: Khas-Arya 10, Adivasi Janajati 9, Madheshi 5, Dalit 4, Tharu 2, and Muslim 2. Since 25 of the open 32 seats and 5 of the seven ex-officio central members are also Khas-Arya, Khas-Arya dominance persists on the membership side of the central committee as well. This makes it clear that

³¹ Onlinekhabar. 2026. Rabi apologizes for lack of representation of Rai, Limbu communities in RSP (in Nepali). March 18. Available at www.onlinekhabar.com/2026/03/1893217/rabi-apologizes-for-lack-of-representation-of-rai-limbu-communities-in-rsvp; accessed on July 9, 2026.

³² Mahara, Jayasingh and Raju Chaudhari. 2026. There was ‘confusion’ in the Vice-president’s report, but the issue that came from the President is the party’s final line: Bipin Acharya (in Nepali). *Kantipur*, June 28. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/Interview/2026/06/28/there-was-confusion-in-the-vice-presidents-report-but-the-issue-brought-forward-by-the-president-is-the-partys-final-line-bipin-acharya-40-30.html>; accessed on July 29, 2026

RSP remains conservative in its approach to ethnic inclusivity. According to political analyst Tula Narayan Shah, since the party is founded on the basis of good governance and opposition to corruption, regardless of what is written in its documents, RSP is a party that promotes meritocracy over inclusivity.³³

Table 2: Office Bearers (7 - president, vice-president 2, general secretary, joint general secretary 3)

Ethnic Cluster	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
Khas Arya	4	2	6	85.71%
Indigenous Nationalities	0	0	0	0%
Madheshi	0	0	0	0%
Dalit	0	0	0	0%
Muslim	1	0	1	14.29%
Total	5	2	7	100%

Source: RSP’s Website.

RSP appears to have prioritized consensus and nomination over election for office-bearer positions. The president and vice-president were elected by consensus, while the senior leader was nominated. There is also a provision for 12 of the office-bearers to be filled through nomination alone. This has raised serious questions about internal democracy and inclusivity. Although consensus is presented as a form of unity, it restricts free competition. A party that claims to champion merit over favoritism,³⁴ yet prioritizes nomination over election, is not living up to its democratic ideals.

³³ Interview with Shah on July 5, 2026.

³⁴ RSP. 2026. What we don’t do. Available at <https://rspnepal.org/about/what-we-dont-do>; accessed on July 29, 2026.

3.5 The Challenge of Integration

Right before the 2026 HoR elections, Bibeksheel Sajha Party, a faction of the Tharuhat movement led by Laxman Tharu, the group led by Balendra Shah, and others were integrated into RSP. Accordingly, provisions were made through an amendment to the party statute to include delegates of these groups among office-bearers through nomination.³⁵ However, since only a limited number of leaders could be nominated in this way, lower-level representatives were left uncertain about their roles within the party. Beyond them, the difficulty of integrating leaders and cadres who had come from older political parties such as Nepali Congress, Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) [CPN (UML)], and the Maoists was also visible at the convention venue. This challenge was not addressed in party President Lamichhane's political report or in any other official party statements.

Prime Minister Balendra Shah's influence is naturally greater than that of both the group that joined RSP from the Tharuhat movement background and the group from the former Bibeksheel Sajha Party. This influence on decision-making extends beyond the party's internal power structure, reaching into candidate selection in upcoming elections as well. How RSP ensures transparency in the nomination process remains to be seen in practice.

Even as confusion persisted over how the remaining nominations to the central committee would be handled, many from these three groups were seeking to office-bearer positions. Although Sunil Lamsal from the Balendra Shah group claimed the vice-president post and Bhupadev Shah claimed the general secretary position, the failure to reach a 'power-sharing' agreement created confusion over nominations for office-bearer and central

³⁵ OnlineKhabar. 2026. Balen's confidants are to rely on nominations, one and a half dozen leaders are out of the election fray (in Nepali). June 24. Available at www.onlinekhabar.com/2026/06/1961718/balens-confidants-are-the-focus-of-nominations-one-and-a-half-dozen-leaders-are-out-of-the-election-fray; accessed on July 8, 2026.

committee positions.³⁶ Discussion at the convention venue was widespread regarding what place leaders coming from other parties would hold within RSP. Khagendra Sunar, a leader who joined RSP from Nepali Congress, noted that his colleagues had expressed concerns about the matter.³⁷

³⁶ Mahara, Jayasingh. 2026. Confusion in nomination of office bearers and members in RSP due to 'partitioning' disagreement (in Nepali). *Kantipur*, July 7. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/politics/2026/07/07/confusion-in-nomination-of-office-bearers-and-members-in-rsp-due-to-partitioning-disagreement-08-59.html>; accessed on July 9, 2026.

³⁷ Interview with Sunar on June 23, 2026.

4. POLICY DEBATE AND SELF-REFLECTION

RSP presented three documents at its first national convention. In the closed session, which opened a day late due to delegate disputes, General Secretary Kabindra Burlakoti's organizational report, Vice-president Swarnim Wagle's economic-political preamble, and President Rabi Lamichhane's political report and preamble were all presented. Since these documents will serve as the benchmarks against which RSP and its government are measured in the years ahead, a brief analysis of their key claims is provided here.

4.1 From Constitutional Socialism to Social Democracy

RSP, which had adopted constitutional socialism as its founding principle, declared social democracy as its core ideology, offering three reasons for departing from constitutional socialism: the country's constitution and a party's ideology are separate matters; it is not clear that socialism can be achieved simply by writing it into the constitution; and since the constitution is a document of compromise subject to periodic amendment, it cannot itself be treated as an ideology.

Analyst Tula Narayan Shah considers this RSP's 'major departure'.³⁸ "Earlier, they said 'constitutional socialism' just to have some kind of ideology to point to, and they never once explained what it meant. This time they have stated social democracy more clearly and have examined the relationship between the market and the state," he adds. Analyst Sucheta Pyakurel, however, questions the document's very claims. Her argument is that the RSP government's own conduct—granting large concessions

³⁸ Interview with Shah on July 5, 2026.

to the private sector on raw materials while taxing ordinary citizens even for education and healthcare—reveals a misalignment between document and practice.³⁹

On economic policy, Wagle's report clarifies the economic dimension of social democracy as a social market economy, acknowledging that private investment is the source of long-term prosperity. It signals, however, that a market-oriented economy will suffer distortions if the state does not play a strong regulatory role. Yet the RSP government, with Wagle himself as Finance Minister, is preparing to reopen the Hetauda Textile Industry.⁴⁰ The report also sets the goal of transforming Nepal's economy from 'rent-seeking' to value creation.

Both documents hold that the state should ensure equality of opportunity rather than equality of outcomes, and reject distribution-focused populism. From this, it can be understood that RSP's social democracy places greater emphasis on productivity than on redistribution which, according to Pyakurel, differs from classical social democracy's meaning of 'social control over the state.'⁴¹ She argues that social democracy means society controlling the state, placing people's interests at the center, implementing welfare policies and a progressive tax system, but RSP's priority is the market, and the question of class has altogether disappeared from its discourse.

Views on constitutional amendment appear in both documents. These include: a directly elected executive for stable leadership, a system under which MPs cannot become ministers, a fully proportional electoral system, converting the National Assembly into a non-partisan expert body, and a proposal to reduce the number of local government units to

³⁹ Interview with Pyakurel on July 9, 2026.

⁴⁰ Timilsina, Nabin. 2026. Prime Minister's Office takes steps to run Hetauda textile industry, cleanup begins (in Nepali). *Onlinekhabar*, June 19. Available at www.onlinekhabar.com/2026/06/1957652/prime-ministers-office-takes-steps-to-run-hetauda-textile-industry-cleanup-begins; accessed on August 5, 2026.

⁴¹ Interview with Pyakurel on July 9, 2026.

one-third and make them non-partisan. However, the language of Wagle and Lamichhane differs on the question of provincial structure. Wagle's preamble calls for “restructuring of federalism, including the abolition of provincial assemblies,”⁴² while Lamichhane’s report takes a comparatively softer position, speaking of “restructuring of provincial assemblies and provincial governments.”⁴³

According to Tula Narayan Shah, Wagle views the provinces purely through the lens of expenditure and development rather than understanding them in the context of identity.⁴⁴ Sucheta Pyakurel similarly notes that RSP treats federalism not as a division of power but as a British-style ‘devolution’, something the center grants downward and can take back.⁴⁵

This linguistic divergence between the official documents of the ruling party signals either internal disagreement within the party or a deliberate strategic ambiguity designed to avoid alienating identity-based voters, including those from the Madhes. General Secretary Bipin Acharya has stated that President Lamichhane’s political report alone constitutes the party’s official position.⁴⁶ In his first campaign speech from Janakpur, senior leader Balendra Shah had pledged to further strengthen federalism. Researcher Sohan Sha suggests that Wagle and Lamichhane may have

⁴² Economic and political proposal presented by Swarnim Wagle at the first national convention of the RSP on June 23, 2026.

⁴³ Political report and proposal presented by Rabi Lamichhane at the first national convention of the RSP on June 23, 2026.

⁴⁴ Interview with Shah on July 5, 2026

⁴⁵ Interview with Pyakurel on July 9, 2026

⁴⁶ Mahara, Jayasingh and Raju Chaudhari. 2026. There was ‘confusion’ in the Vice-president’s report, but the issue that came from the President is the party’s final line: Bipin Acharya (in Nepali). *Kantipur*, June 28. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/Interview/2026/06/28/there-was-confusion-in-the-vice-presidents-report-but-the-issue-brought-forward-by-the-president-is-the-partys-final-line-bipin-acharya-40-30.html>; accessed on July 29, 2026.

been trying, through their respective reports, to quietly sideline Balendra Shah's ideological stance on that point.⁴⁷

The convention has given RSP with its first comprehensive ideological picture. Yet the internal ambiguity regarding the provinces, and the alignment between the declaration of social democracy and actual government policy, remain unclear. According to writer and activist Jeevan Kshetri, RSP is still in the process of becoming a party, and just as individuals mature over time, the party too will need time to develop.⁴⁸ Since the real test of a party lies not in the writing of documents but in their implementation, RSP's future steps will be what ultimately reveals its true intentions.

4.2 Organizational Self-Reflection

The political report acknowledges that the party is still in a “transitional phase of transforming from a political movement into an institutionalized party.” It highlights risks such as the tendency to pit ‘new versus old’ factions against each other within the party, a factional mindset, group-based protectionism, and reliance on individuals rather than organizational methods. As solutions, the report proposes ending the culture of ‘former faction’ identities, selecting open leadership based on merit, establishing a Leadership Academy for leadership development, and launching a campaign to connect members with production and entrepreneurship.

Similarly, the organizational report claims to have built a ‘social structure of trust’ comprising over 500,000 members and nearly 5 million supporters. However, it admits the reality that with only 17.2 percent female

⁴⁷ Views expressed by Sha during the Democracy Dialogue on the First General Convention of the RSP organized by DRCN and Martin Chautari on July 21, 2026.

⁴⁸ Interview with Kshetri on June 21, 2026.

members, this structure is not fully balanced and equal, framing this as an organizational challenge.⁴⁹

The organizational report places high importance on the fact that 60 percent of party-affiliated individuals are youth, viewing this as a sign of youth trust in the party. While the party statute (2022) had provisioned for 50%+1 youth representation in the Central and Provincial Committees, the statute (2026) mandates a 33 percent youth participation rate across all levels of committees, departments, and bodies.⁵⁰ This reflects RSP's effort to integrate youth across all levels.

Following the disclosure in General Secretary Kabindra Burlakoti's report that 35,257 out of 523,465 members were under 18 years of age, RSP faced criticism for violating Article 39 (Rights of the Child) of the Constitution.⁵¹ However, a statement issued by the newly elected General Secretary Bipin Acharya clarified that due to a technical error, unapproved applicants had also been included in the total count.⁵²

A ruling party engaging in self-reflection within the primary document of its own general convention can be seen as a positive step. However, the document remains silent on how to transform this unbalanced and unequal state into a balanced and equal one. Acknowledgment alone is not reform. Therefore, the utility of this self-reflection would have been far

⁴⁹ Organizational report presented by Kabindra Burlakoti at the first national convention of the RSP on June 23, 2026.

⁵⁰ In Part 7, Article 23, 2 (f) of the RSP Statute (2022), and Part 8, Article 27, 2 (e) deals with the Central Committee and the Provincial Committee respectively and says that the participation of youth will be 61 out of a total of 121 in the Central Committee and 50%+1 in the Provincial Committee. In Part 3, Article 7, Clause 8 of the Statute (2026), it is mentioned that the participation of youth in committees, departments and bodies at all levels will be 33 percent.

⁵¹ Mahara, Jayasingh. 2026. 35,000 members under 18 in RSP: Violation of law and international conventions (in Nepali). *Kantipur*, June 29. Available at <https://ekantipur.com/politics/2026/06/29/35000-members-under-18-in-rsp-violation-of-law-and-international-conventions-34-43.html>; accessed on August 5, 2026.

⁵² Statement issued by RSP on July 1, 2026. Available at <https://rspnepal.org/news/press-2083-03-17>; accessed on August 5, 2026.

more meaningful had it been accompanied by a clear roadmap for reform alongside the admission.

4.3 Crisis of Internal Democracy

RSP, which emerged as an alternative to the undemocratic and syndicate-style practices of older parties, fell short of public expectations for internal democracy. The convention process highlighted how even a new party ultimately falls into the vicious cycle of centralized control and procedural opacity. In particular, irregularities surfaced, including disputes over delegate selection in Madhesh Province and elsewhere, the designation of delegates without holding district conventions, and disagreements over candidate ordering on electronic voting machines.

A second serious aspect is the extreme indifference toward ideological debate and discussion. Delegates interviewed at the convention venue by DRCN researchers clearly demonstrated more interest in what their role in the party would be rather than in policy. The closed session appeared to be limited to merely fulfilling procedural formalities. Delegates were not given adequate time to thoroughly study the presented reports, express dissenting views, or present their own perspectives. The rush to approve reports by applause immediately after they were presented showed that the leadership had no interest in listening to policy criticism or the independent conscience of grassroots delegates. This poses a risk of steering the party forward based solely on ‘populism’ and the ‘deification of leadership’ rather than methodology and ideology, tendencies for which RSP has faced criticism since its founding.

The starkest contradiction, however, lies in the sweeping power granted to the party president through the statutory amendments, as discussed in Section 5.2. It appears as though the disease of power and authority centralization from older parties has infected RSP as well. A

party advocating for methodology, technology, and the younger generation failed to implement transparent competition, adequate ideological debate, and a decentralized leadership system within its own internal structure. This increases the risk of turning the party into just another version of the older parties rather than a true ‘alternative.’

5. WHAT IS IN THE STATUTE?

The fourth amendment of the statute stands as the most enduring achievement of the First National General Convention. The amended statute appears to bring greater clarity regarding RSP's ideology, organizational structure, and inclusivity. However, it has removed certain provisions that the party had initially set up to differentiate itself from older parties. The revised statute also introduces distinct clauses codifying foundational pillars such as the prohibition of nepotism, primary elections, the right to recall, digital participation, and conflict-of-interest rules.

Similarly, the structural framework of the party has been altered, as discussed in the Election Process and Results section. While direct elections have been introduced for office bearers, the number of nominated office bearers exceeds that of elected ones. By narrowing the path to elected executive roles like office bearer positions, RSP also faces the risk of institutionalizing a pattern where discretionary decisions by the party head dominate, similar to older parties. This contradicts the intent of Point No. 3 under “What We Will Not Do?” on RSP's own website, which states: “We will not pass over competition, merit, and competence to hand out appointments.”

5.1 Ordinary Members' Rights Curtailed

The RSP Statute (2022) provided for two types of membership: primary and ordinary, and assigned internal voting rights to ordinary members. The amended Statute (2026) introduces a tiered membership structure; ordinary members may upgrade to active membership after meeting criteria including at least six months of membership, party training, voluntary

contributions, and regular levy payments, gaining the right to vote in internal elections and participate in the candidate selection process. Only active members hold the right to run for any position (internal executive position or people's representative position). A new tier of lifetime membership has also been added, conferred on the basis of a one-time special financial contribution or sustained active involvement.

The most liberal aspect of the Statute (2022) was the direct rights granted to members. The parliamentary party leader (and thus the party's candidate for Prime Minister or Chief Minister) was elected by the votes of all ordinary members and could be recalled by a majority of ordinary members. Elected public representatives could be recalled by ordinary members of their respective constituencies; and Article 84 established that "sovereignty resides in the members," allowing a majority of relevant members to overturn decisions at any level of the party.

The new statute has altered the form of all three mechanisms. The parliamentary party leader is now elected solely by the votes of elected MPs. While the recall process for public representatives begins with complaints from a certain percentage of active members, the final decision rests with a two-thirds majority of the Central Committee. There is no executive provision in the new statute allowing a majority of members to overturn decisions made at various levels. Notably, while the statute's list of unamendable provisions requires that 'sovereignty vested in party members' be preserved, the practical mechanisms for exercising this sovereignty have been removed.

5.2 President at the Center of Power

Despite appearing to attempt a transition toward a 'digital and agile' structure distinct from traditional political parties, the RSP remains centered on its president in terms of power. Parts 6 and 13 of the new statute increase the proportion of nominations within the organizational structure. The statute provides for 51 central committee members to

be nominated directly by the president. As nearly one-third (33%) of the central committee relies on direct presidential nomination, the president's political majority and grip within the committee appear set to remain consistently strong. Although this provision is said to be aimed at incorporating experts, youth, and inclusive clusters (women, Dalit, Janajati) left out during elections, it grants the president the opportunity to construct a favorable bloc.

Under the new statute, office bearers other than the president (such as senior leaders, vice-presidents, general secretaries, joint general secretaries, etc.) are not elected by the general convention; rather, they are nominated or endorsed by the central committee based on the president's proposal and recommendation. To become an office bearer through presidential nomination, one must first be a central committee member, a role for which names must be put forward by the president. Because the general secretary and vice-presidents assume office through the president's direct initiative and proposal, they remain functionally accountable to the president, significantly narrowing the space for internal dissent or the formation of alternative factional groups within the party.

‘Ceremonial’ Senior Leader

Following an agreement between Balendra Shah and Rabi Lamichhane on December 28, 2025, the post of senior leader was created specifically for Shah. Placed second in seniority behind Lamichhane but lacking any executive responsibilities, this post was granted statutory legitimacy during RSP's First National General Convention. Once it became clear that Balendra Shah would assume the role of senior leader, the position drew widespread public attention. Statutorily and legally, however, the role remains ceremonial.

Part 6, Article 22, Sub-article 8(a) of the statute fixes the total number of office bearers at 18. The office bearers include the president, 3 vice-presidents, 2 general secretaries, 5 joint general secretaries, 1

spokesperson, 3 joint spokespersons, 1 treasurer, and 2 joint treasurers. Among these, the president, along with 1 vice-president (Open), 1 vice-president (Female), 1 general secretary, and 3 joint general secretaries (2 Open, 1 Female), will be elected, while the remaining 11 office bearers will be appointed through nomination.

Sub-article 8(c) of Article 22 outlines the nominated office bearers: 1 vice-president, 1 general secretary, 2 joint general secretaries, 1 spokesperson, 3 joint spokespersons, 1 treasurer, and 2 joint treasurers, completing the total count of 18 office bearers. Provisions regarding the Senior Leader are tucked into Sub-article 11(j) of Article 22 under the “Duties, Responsibilities, and Rights of Party Office Bearers.” This single clause combines provisions for nomination, order of precedence, and duties, responsibilities, and rights.

Although given the second position in seniority behind the president, the provisions governing the senior leader’s duties, responsibilities, and rights remain abstract, limiting the role to providing suggestions, serving a balancing function, and fulfilling tasks assigned by the central committee or office-bearer meetings. Furthermore, nominations for the position can only be initiated by the president. Thus, statutorily speaking, the post of Senior Leader appears strictly ceremonial.

Nevertheless, the RSP lists “Our Central Committee and Office Bearers” on its website including the senior leader. General Secretary Bipin Acharya argues that because the post of Senior Leader will only be occupied by individuals who make significant contributions to the party’s political journey, the suggestions provided by a Senior Leader hold immense weight. He maintains that while the Senior Leader does not oversee the daily executive operation of the party, they play a crucial role in steering its direction—meaning the position should be understood as a meaningful post rather than merely a ceremonial one.⁵³

⁵³ Interview with Acharya on August 11, 2026.

The new statute allows for the nomination of two or more ‘senior leaders’ based on necessity and contribution. This nomination can only be carried out by the central committee upon the president’s proposal. This arrangement provides the president with political flexibility to adjust the order of precedence when accommodating influential external leaders (such as Prime Minister Balendra Shah or others) into the party.

The new statute does not merely position the party president as the administrative head of the party, but empowers this position to hold the keys to controlling both the parliamentary party and the government. Under Clause 68(1-e) and Clause 11(a)(3) of the statute, a powerful provision dictates that if the Parliamentary Party Leader fails to follow the ‘policy guidance’ issued by the president, the position of the Parliamentary Party Leader becomes vacant or can be removed by the president. This is the most potent and debated clause in RSP's statute.

In a parliamentary system, the Parliamentary Party Leader is typically paramount within the parliament, and the authority to remove them rests solely with the MPs from that party. However, RSP’s statute makes the president's whip or guidance binding in running parliament and the government even when the president is not the Parliamentary Party Leader (for instance, if Balendra Shah were to serve as the Parliamentary Party Leader). The provision allowing the president to dismiss them for violating guidelines keeps the Prime Minister or the Parliamentary Party Leader permanently under the president's control.

Regarding the Secretariat, a maximum 33-member body formed for daily operations and swift decision-making, apart from 13 ex-officio office bearers, the remaining 20 members are designated as needed by the president from among central committee members. The Secretariat is the party’s most powerful executive body. Because the president selects the majority of its members (20 people), the president will never fall

into a minority when decisions are taken during a crisis. Under Part 11 (Clauses 38 and 39), the sole authority to appoint heads and members of the central departments that shape party policy and agenda—and to assign their work—rests with the president.

Looking at the statute's organizational framework, the president's authority to nominate 51 Central Committee members, the exclusive right to propose office bearers, and the extraordinary power to direct and even dismiss the Parliamentary Party Leader clearly demonstrate that the president is the all-powerful core of the party. While this makes the party's decision-making process swift and efficient, from the perspective of internal democracy and checks and balances, power appears excessively centralized in the hands of the president. As a result, RSP seems to have become yet another party that institutionalizes the supremacy of individual decision-making over collectivism, much like traditional political parties.

6. CONCLUSION

Taking a holistic view of RSP's First National General Convention, the party appears to have moved forward toward institutionalization, while simultaneously widening the gap between its conduct and its foundational promises. RSP, which emerged as an alternative force with 21 seats in the House of Representatives, transformed into a ruling party with a majority within four years. Through this convention, it gained leadership legitimacy, an ideological identity rooted in social democracy, and a more developed statute through its fourth amendment. For a party that had been operating on an ad-hoc structure, these are significant achievements. However, certain trends revealed by the convention process itself leave unanswered questions regarding just how democratic this institutional transformation will ultimately be.

The convention's achievements and contradictions exist side by side. By achieving nearly 50 percent female representation among the 99 elected Central Committee members, RSP introduced a novel practice in Nepali party history. However, with female representation limited to just two office bearers, zero representation of Indigenous Nationalities, Dalits, and Tharus, and the Khas Arya share reaching three-quarters, the inclusivity enshrined in the statute has failed to translate into practice. Similarly, a party advocating for open competition settled its top two elected posts—the President and the Vice-president—unanimously. A party claiming to be 'smart' through methodology and technology found itself entangled in delegate disputes and a chaotic schedule.

The most serious challenge lies in the balance of power institutionalized by the amended statute. For a party that emerged promising to offer an alternative to the centralized leadership style of old parties, replicating that

very style poses not merely an ideological question but an existential one—its primary political capital rests on the claim of being a ‘different party’.

In summary, the First National General Convention provided RSP with a statutory foundation to transition from a political movement into an established party. However, the question of whether a democratic institution or a leader-centric structure will be built upon that foundation remains open. How quickly and in which direction the gap between the expectations generated by the convention and the contradictions exposed by it narrows will determine whether RSP becomes a sustainable alternative in Nepali politics or remains merely a new edition of old tendencies.

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 Nepal

Lalitpur, Nepal

Tel: +977-1-5902286

info@democracyresource.org

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