

MP-IDSA *Commentary*

Power without Majority: Nepal 2026

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February 18, 2026

S*ummary*

Given the leadership rivalries and organisational weaknesses, no single party is expected to secure a majority in the March 2025 elections.

Since K. P. Sharma Oli’s government fell on 9 September 2025 due to Gen-Z protests, discussions about the next government in Kathmandu have intensified. Ahead of the parliamentary elections on 5 March 2026, the interim government released the election code of conduct on 16 February, which outlines campaign regulations.¹ This has clarified the election timetable and reduced resistance from some political groups. The Election Commission’s 64-point directive allows candidates and parties to hold rallies and publish materials starting 15 days before the election, enabling campaign activities until 2 March.²

Election Preparations

Opinions on election preparations remain divided. The interim Sushila Karki government emphasises the need for timely elections and readiness for a peaceful, free and fair process. In contrast, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML) expresses doubt about the government’s commitment. On 3 February, UML Chairman Oli stated that the Supreme Court should decide whether to restore parliament before the elections. He also highlighted challenges in the Himalayan districts due to adverse weather conditions.³ UML Vice-Chairman Ram Bahadur Thapa accused the government of using excuses to avoid holding elections.⁴

Amid these tensions, on 5 February 2026, the government authorised joint teams—including the Nepal Police, Armed Police Force and Nepal Army—to patrol various locations and enhance security measures. A total of 320,000 security personnel have been deployed to uphold law and order until the election concludes.⁵ The Election Commission reports that of 11,901 polling booths, 4,614 are classified as highly sensitive and 4,442 as sensitive.

Major Political Parties in Fray

According to the Election Commission, of the 143 registered political parties in Nepal, 121 registered under the First Past the Post (FPTP) system to participate in the House of Representatives (HoR) elections. Among these, 68 parties shortlisted candidates

¹ [“EC Reminds Parties for Election Campaign Until March 2”](#), *Republica*, 16 February 2026.

² [“House of Representatives Election: Election Commission's 64-point Instructions to Parties”](#), *Kantipur*, 15 February 2026.

³ [“PM Karki, UML Chair Oli Hold Talks in Baluwatar”](#), *Khabarhub*, 5 February 2026.

⁴ [“Govt Conspiring to Postpone Election, Says UML Vice Chair Ram Bahadur Thapa”](#), *Khabarhub*, 4 February 2026.

⁵ [“Joint Patrols Including the Army Begin for Election Security”](#), *New Spotlight Online*, 5 February 2026.

for nomination to contest in the elections. This election saw more political parties participate in the HoR elections than in November 2022, when approximately 57 parties filed candidacies under the FPTP.⁶ Approximately 22 new political parties were registered with the Election Commission during the post-Gen-Z movement in Nepal.

Although new political parties have emerged and the total number of parties has grown, traditional parties still hold sway in Nepali politics. The so-called Gen-Z leaders, who initially sparked excitement about structural change, did not develop into a powerful political force. Many of them chose to remain neutral, while others aligned themselves with the older parties.

The top five national political parties—the Nepali Congress (NC), CPN-UML, Communist Party of Nepal (NCP), Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), and Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP)—are expected to compete in the 2026 HoR elections. These parties have a nation-wide presence, and each has nominated candidates for more than 160 seats. If the election results are fractured, these parties could potentially form a government in Kathmandu through alliances. The performance of these parties in the 2022 elections is highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1. Top Political Parties in Nepal in the 2022 Elections

S. No.	Parties	FPTP	PR	Total
1	Nepali Congress (NC)	57	32	89
2	CPN-UML	44	34	78
3	CPN (Maoist Centre), now NCP	18	14	32
4	Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP)	08	13	21
5	Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP)	07	07	14

Source: The Election Commission of Nepal.

In the post-Gen-Z era, youth participation in nation-building is essential to prevent misgovernance. Key issues of young leadership, party structure and past governance performance will shape electoral outcomes. Surprisingly, major national parties lack

⁶ [“57 Political Parties File Nominations Under FPTP for HoR Election: EC”](#), *Republica*, 11 October 2022.

balance in these areas, creating a gap between public expectations and political readiness.

The NC, the largest and oldest party in the 2022 HoR election, continues to struggle to set aside internal divisions. Although the party has held special conventions and elected Gagan Thapa, a young leader, it remains structurally weak, and it carries the stigma of being a partner of the CPN-UML, which is accused of using force against Gen-Z protesters on 8–9 September 2025. Thapa is yet to secure the active support of former party President Sher Bahadur Deuba, who retains significant influence in Sudurpaschim and other regions. Other pro-Deuba senior leaders of the party have also maintained a low profile during the campaign.

Unlike the NC, the CPN-UML is an organisationally robust, cadre-based party with strong grassroots networks and influential thematic front organisations. Since the 1990s, it has primarily remained Nepal’s second-largest party, except in 2008. However, in the upcoming elections, it risks losing youth support due to the nomination of K. P. Sharma Oli (74 years old) as the Prime Ministerial candidate, who will face younger contenders from the NC and RSP. Furthermore, under Oli’s leadership, CPN-UML is widely regarded as underperforming and is criticised for corruption, nepotism and authoritarian tendencies.

The NCP, the third-largest party, is a coalition of 11 communist parties united under Prachanda’s left parties’ unity programme. Prachanda, a former Maoist leader, established the NCP after the party’s electoral decline following Janardan Sharma’s departure from the Maoist Centre in 2025, along with a weak organisational structure and declining support. Since the 2013 elections, the party has consistently underperformed. It has often secured a reasonable number of seats in the HoR through pre-election alliances with either the NC or the CPN-UML. If the NCP contests the upcoming elections independently, its continued existence might be at risk.

Unlike established parties, the RSP is a four-year-old party lacking a strong ideology or proven leadership. It only participated in the 2022 elections, focusing on populist issues. Its organisational structure is weak, with limited grassroots presence outside Kathmandu and Pokhara. The party relies on the popularity of its senior leader, Balen Shah, the party’s official PM candidate, and on its populist stance. Although it appears united, there is a clash of personal ambitions among Rabi Lamichhane, Balen Shah and Swarnim Wagle, who was previously a member of the NC. Many senior leaders have left the party due to issues related to internal democracy and Rabi Lamichhane’s leadership style.

As the fifth-largest party, the RPP holds a distinctive role in Nepali politics. Its main electoral aims include reviving the Monarchy and establishing a Hindu Rashtra. Like other major parties, it is highly factional and prone to frequent splits. Following significant changes in Nepal’s political landscape during the Gen-Z protests, the RPP (Lingden) and RPP-Nepal (Kamal Thapa) merged on 31 December 2025 to present themselves as the second alternative amid ongoing struggles of democratic forces to bring stability following the abolition of the monarchy. However, the party is yet to select its Prime Ministerial candidate, raising questions about its internal cohesion. Although it is the third-oldest party, it has generally received about 4 per cent of the popular votes in elections since 2008.

The structural strengths and weaknesses of the five major parties indicate that no party is likely to secure a majority (137 seats) in the upcoming elections. Older parties possess strong organisations but struggle with internal discipline and leadership, while the RSP has youthful leadership but weak candidates and questionable grassroots presence. Populist parties may aim to maximise seats under proportional representation, whereas established parties focus on first-past-the-post seats given their grassroots strength.⁷ This scenario could result in a fractured verdict and the formation of a coalition government in Kathmandu, possibly led by the RSP, NC or CPN-UML. Surendra Pandey, a senior CPN-UML leader, noted in a *Kathmandu Post* interview on 16 February 2026, that “no party, including UML, is likely to secure a majority in the upcoming elections”, stressing that such promises are misleading.⁸

Poll Commitments

Apart from leadership, party organisation and historical governance records, none of these parties has produced a convincing poll manifesto that meets Gen-Z’s expectations. According to the media reports, 37 of the 68 parties, including the NC and CPN-UML, did not comply with the directives. Although Section 37 of the Code of Conduct required parties to submit their policy blueprints before commencing full-fledged campaigning, they have not submitted their blueprints or manifestos to date. The RSP had prepared only a one-page ‘citizen contract paper’ on 15 February with few details.⁹

⁷ Purushottam Poudel, “[Balen’s Presence May Not be Enough for RSP to Do Well in Madhesh](#)”, *The Kathmandu Post*, 16 February 2026.

⁸ Gyanu Ghimire, “[No Party Will Get a Majority; the Country May Remain in a Cycle of Instability: Surendra Pandey](#)”, *Khabarhub*, 16 February 2026.

⁹ “[Many Parties Start Campaigning Without Manifestos, Breaching Election Code of Conduct](#)”, *The Kathmandu Post*, 16 February 2026.

The NCP and RPP have identified structural issues in Nepali society but have not proposed solutions. Nepal requires more than US\$ 48 billion in infrastructure investment to support its economic growth.¹⁰ The National Planning Commission estimates that Rs 21.065 trillion (US\$ 145.07 billion) is needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.¹¹ This funding cannot be sourced domestically, making external investment essential. Foreign direct investment (FDI) in Nepal fell by nearly 40 per cent in the second quarter of the 2025–2026 fiscal year due to the impacts of Gen-Z protests.¹² While the manifestos mention projects and social security programmes, they do not clarify the funding sources.

India and China are the top investors in Nepal. Instead of focusing on FDI policies to attract more investment, the NCP has maintained a traditional approach that prioritises Nepal’s sovereignty and self-reliance. This involves addressing border issues with India through dialogue and engaging in multilateral forums.¹³ Meanwhile, the RSP and RPP have yet to outline their foreign policy strategies.

Conclusion

With the election code of conduct in place and the polling date approaching, many in Nepal remain uncertain whether elections and a new government in Kathmandu will be held by mid-March. Yet the fragmented party landscape—marked by leadership rivalries, organisational weaknesses and incumbency fatigue—makes an outright majority highly improbable.

While it is unlikely that any party will secure an outright majority, post-election negotiations are expected to centre on either the CPN-UML or the RSP. The UML has the most robust nation-wide organisational foundation and a proven track record in coalition-building. In contrast, the RSP serves as the primary vehicle for the electoral discontent expressed by the post-Gen-Z generation. In a fragmented legislative environment, these two parties are well-positioned to lead competing coalition efforts. Although the 2026 election may not yield a clear winner, it will ultimately determine which of these two entities dictates the terms of Nepal’s upcoming coalition government.

¹⁰ [“Nepal Infrastructure 2023: Investment and Financing Needs”](#), Report, Confederation of Nepalese Industries (CNI) and Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS), September 2019, p. 31.

¹¹ [“Nepal Requires Rs 21.065 trillion to Implement SDGs: NPC”](#), *The Himalayan*, 20 April 2025.

¹² [“FDI Commitments See Over 52 Percent Rise Despite Political Uncertainty”](#), *The Kathmandu Post*, 16 January 2026.

¹³ [“HoR Election 2026: Everything You Need to Know About the Nepali Communist Party Manifesto”](#), *Nepal News*, 15 February 2026.

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