

## Election 2026: Nepal Strives for a Change

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### Summary

*As Nepal goes to the poll on 5 March 2026 to elect members of the lower house of parliament in the aftermath of the Gen-Z movement, changes in the representatives' faces and political parties' strengths in the lower house are imminent. Whether this will translate into tangible progress, as called for by the Gen-Zs, is uncertain.*

Nepal will head to the polls on 5 March 2026. This election is taking place two years earlier than the regular election. The September 2025 [Gen-Z movement](#) had forced the erstwhile government under the premiership of K P Sharma Oli to step down. The interim government formed in the aftermath was given a clear mandate to hold the election for the lower house of parliament within six months. The election is taking place within the given timeframe. The [interim government](#) deserves credit for making this possible amidst several doubts.

The election will choose 275 members of parliament, with 165 elected under the first-past-the-post system and 110 through the proportional representation system. The four major political parties contesting the election are the same as those in the earlier elections: Nepali Congress (NC), Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist and Leninist) [CPN (UML)], Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) and Nepali Communist Party (NCP). The NCP is led by Prachanda of the erstwhile Nepal Communist Party (Maoist Centre) [NCP (MC)], which merged with several small factions of different communist parties to form the NCP after the Gen-Z movement.

The strengths of these parties in the lower house are set to alter considerably. In the dissolved lower house, the largest party was the NC, followed by CPN (UML), NCP (MC) and RSP. However, it did not signify their individual strength since the NC and NCP (MC) had contested the election by forming a pre-election alliance. In the coming election, the political parties are contesting the election individually. However, the expected changes in their strengths in the lower house are going to be for other important reasons than what the avoidance of pre-election alliance might explain.

The Nepali people at large had hoped for changes in political leadership after the deaths and destructions that occurred during the Gen-Z movement. They wanted then [Prime Minister Oli](#) to take responsibility for the killings of the youth and retire from active politics. However, Oli managed to retain his position as the CPN (UML) chair, albeit following due process through the [party general convention](#). He is also contesting the election from his previous constituency while [purging some of the younger leaders](#) from his party who had stood against his leadership.

As my own field observations and communications with people in his constituency reveal, Oli might have lost much ground. The region that falls in the Jhapa 5 constituency today has

been his constituency since the beginning of his fray into politics, and he won six of the seven elections he contested since 1991. However, this time, Oli might lose the election. A popular candidate, Balendra Shah of the RSP, popularly known as Balen, contesting against him has added to his pressures. It is not only Oli who might be facing defeat, but his party CPN (UML) in general is likely to [lose badly](#) this time.

Prachanda, on the other hand, has changed his constituency, which he has often done in the earlier elections as well in search for a safe place. As a result of his growing unpopularity in general, it remains to be seen if he would win in this election. However, in any case, his party, the NCP, will almost certainly perform very poorly.

In contrast, there has been a [historic change](#) in the NC; not because Sher Bahadur Deuba, then party chair, wished so but due to intervention by youth leaders and party cadres. Gagan Thapa and Bishwa Prakash Sharma, two relatively young then General Secretaries of the party, with massive support of party cadres, succeeded in organising the party's special general convention. The convention chose Gagan as the party chair. Several senior leaders who opposed the convention were discarded. Gagan was also chosen as the prime ministerial candidate. The party central committee now consists of several new and young faces.

[Gagan](#) is also a leader who has been engaged in Nepal's politics for more than 30 years since he was a high school student. He is admired by many with the belief that he is one of those few politicians in Nepal who might be able to deliver on the promises. Hence, the change in the NC might help it from experiencing the same fate as that of the CPN (UML). However, there is also a large group of people that despises the NC as an old party associated with corruption and bad governance.

A desire to place a new party in power has given the RSP significant competitive edge in the upcoming election. The party chair, Rabi Lamichhane, has been embroiled in several [legal complications](#), but people view them as being framed against him. The RSP's popularity has gained further momentum after Balen joined the party as a senior leader and its prime ministerial face. Balen was an independently elected mayor of Kathmandu Metropolis and has a huge fan following despite his [mediocre performance](#) as the mayor and his [unruly behaviours](#). Election analyses of 10 constituencies conducted by [Setopati](#), a popular online news media in Nepal, whose earlier election analyses have mostly been correct, show that the RSP's candidates might be the winners in all those constituencies. This suggests that the RSP might be set for a big win in this election.

Nepal is set to witness significant changes in the structure of the lower house after the coming election. There will be several new faces, most of them young ones. Who forms the government, what policies they adopt and implement, and whether Nepal will experience real changes in governance and development are to be seen in the coming days.

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