Nepal's Political Earthquake

RSP's Historic Victory and the Dawn of a New Democratic Chapter

■ EARTH NEWS POLITICAL DESK

Nepal's latest parliamentary elections have produced nothing short of a political earthquake. In a dramatic upheaval that has upended the country's long-entrenched political order, the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) has secured a landslide victory, sweeping aside the traditional giants that have dominated Nepal's politics for decades. The outcome marks one of the most decisive mandates in the country's democratic history and signals the public's deep frustration with the old political establishment.

For years, Nepal's political landscape has been defined by coalition instability, ideological realignments, and recurring struggles among veteran leaders. The 2026 snap elections, however, have shattered that pattern. The RSP's overwhelming mandate represents not merely an electoral win but a profound statement from the electorate — a rejection of the status quo and an endorsement of political renewal.

With the bell symbol of the RSP emerging as the clear choice of voters across the country, Nepal now stands at a crossroads. The scale of the victory offers immense possibilities for reform, but it also brings formidable responsibilities. Whether this political shift will translate into lasting transformation remains the defining question of Nepal's next chapter.

A Mandate Unlike Any Other

The numbers themselves illustrate the magnitude of the political shift. In the 275-member House of Representatives, the RSP secured 125 seats through the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) electoral system and an additional 58 seats under proportional representation. This brings the party's total to 183 seats — placing it within touching distance of a two-thirds majority.

Such a commanding electoral outcome is rare in Nepal's political history. For a nation accustomed to fractured mandates and coalition negotiations, the result represents a clear break from the past. The RSP's vote share, hovering around 52 percent, underscores the depth of public support behind the party's promise of reform and political renewal.

In contrast, Nepal's traditional powerhouses have suffered severe setbacks. The Nepali Congress (NC), historically one of the country's most influential parties, managed to secure only 37 seats. The Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist), or CPN-UML, won 25 seats, while the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) secured 17.

Other political forces fared even worse. The pro-monarchy Rashtriya Prajatantra Party, once seen as a resurgent force advocating for the restoration of the monarchy, managed to win just a single seat. Meanwhile, smaller parties such as the Shram Sanskriti Party secured only marginal representation.

Perhaps most striking is the dramatic decline in independent candidates and emerging parties. While independent candidates had enjoyed modest success in the previous election cycle, only one managed to secure a seat this time. Several newly formed political groups failed to make any significant electoral impact.

Taken together, the results reveal a sweeping consolidation of political power — one that reflects voters' determination to bring decisive leadership to Kathmandu.

From Political Debut to Dominant Force

What makes the RSP's victory even more remarkable is the party's relatively recent entry into Nepal's political arena. Formed only in 2022, the party contested its first general election that same year and surprised observers by winning 20 seats — a notable achievement for a newcomer in a system traditionally dominated by well-established parties.

However, the scale of its success in the latest election has surpassed even the most optimistic expectations.

The RSP's meteoric rise is closely tied to the growing public demand for political accountability and governance reforms. Over the years, widespread frustration with corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and economic stagnation had steadily eroded public confidence in traditional parties.

By presenting itself as an alternative to the entrenched political establishment, the RSP tapped into this deep well of public dissatisfaction. Its leaders positioned the party as a platform for change, appealing especially to younger voters and urban middle-class citizens who felt alienated from conventional politics.

The party's ability to translate this sentiment into electoral success demonstrates the growing appetite for fresh leadership in Nepal's democratic system.

The Role of the Generation Z Protests

The political developments leading up to the election cannot be understood without considering the events of September 2025. The widespread protests led by young citizens — often referred to as the "Generation Z protests" — fundamentally reshaped Nepal's political discourse.

Triggered by allegations of corruption and governance failures, the protests quickly escalated into a nationwide movement demanding political accountability and systemic reform. The demonstrations brought thousands of young people onto the streets and amplified calls for transparency and justice.

> **Nepal's 2026 parliamentary election marks a dramatic rupture in the country's political history. The resounding victory of the Rastriya Swatantra Party is not merely a triumph of a new political force; it is a powerful expression of public impatience with decades of entrenched leadership, fragile coalitions, and unfulfilled promises. For a generation of Nepalis — particularly the youth who mobilised during the 2025 protests — the vote represents a demand for accountability, transparency, and effective governance. Yet the magnitude of the mandate carries its own risks. With unprecedented political authority comes the burden of delivering real change in a system long plagued by institutional inertia and economic constraints. The RSP's ability to translate its reformist rhetoric into tangible outcomes will determine whether this electoral earthquake becomes a turning point in Nepal's democratic journey or merely another chapter in its turbulent political evolution.**

The government's response to the protests proved disastrous. The violent crackdown by security forces, which resulted in several deaths and widespread outrage, triggered a political crisis that ultimately forced the resignation of Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli.

The aftermath of these events created a profound shift in public sentiment. Many voters began to question whether the traditional political leadership was capable of addressing the country's challenges.

In this climate of disillusionment, the RSP emerged as a credible alternative.

The Rise of Balen Shah and New Leadership

A key factor behind the RSP's popularity has been the rising influence of Balendra Shah, popularly known as Balen Shah. Having previously served as the mayor of Kathmandu, Shah built a reputation as a dynamic and unconventional leader willing to challenge entrenched interests.

His governance style, often marked by direct engagement with citizens and decisive policy actions, earned him a loyal following among urban voters. While his tenure as mayor was not without controversy, Shah's image as a reformist outsider resonated strongly with voters seeking change.

In the parliamentary elections, Shah delivered one of the most dramatic victories by defeating former prime minister K.P. Sharma Oli in Jhapa-5 — Oli's own home constituency — by a staggering margin of nearly 50,000 votes.

The result symbolised the collapse of old political strongholds and the emergence of a new generation of leaders.

Alongside Shah, RSP chair Rabi Lamichhane has also played a central role in shaping the party's identity. A former television journalist known for his anti-corruption advocacy, Lamichhane built his public reputation through investigative reporting that exposed governance failures and bureaucratic malpractice.

Together, Shah and Lamichhane represent a new political narrative — one that blends activism, media influence, and grassroots mobilisation.

A Generational Shift in Nepali Politics

Beyond the headline numbers, the election results reveal another important trend: the increasing representation of younger leaders in parliament.

Approximately 38 percent of the newly elected members are under the age of 40 — a dramatic increase from the previous election, where only 11 percent of lawmakers belonged to this age group.

The RSP played a major role in this generational transformation. Of the 61 candidates under 40 who won seats, 52 belong to the party. Similarly, the RSP accounts for a majority of the representatives in the 41–50 age bracket.

This shift reflects a broader societal change. Nepal's young population, increasingly connected through digital platforms and global networks, has become more politically aware and assertive.

Their growing participation in electoral politics suggests that the country's democratic institutions may be entering a phase of generational renewal.

The Promise of Reform

Central to the RSP's electoral appeal was its ambitious governance agenda. Even before releasing its official manifesto, the party introduced what it called a "citizen contract" — a document outlining its commitments to the public.

The contract focused on five key themes:

1. Good governance and anti-corruption measures
2. Expansion of Nepal's middle class
3. Creation of domestic employment opportunities
4. Improvement of connectivity and infrastructure
5. Greater engagement with the Nepali diaspora

Economically, the party has set ambitious targets, including raising Nepal's per capita income to around US$3,000 and achieving an annual economic growth rate of 7 percent.

These goals reflect a broader vision of transforming Nepal into a more prosperous and inclusive economy. However, achieving them will require substantial reforms in governance, infrastructure development, and investment policies.

Critics have also questioned whether such ambitious targets are realistically achievable in the short term, given Nepal's structural economic challenges.

The Burden of Expectations

While the RSP's electoral triumph has generated widespread optimism, it also comes with enormous expectations.

For many voters, the election was not merely about choosing a new party but about demanding accountability from the political system itself. The electorate's message was clear: the era of complacency and political stagnation must end.

This means the new government will face immediate pressure to deliver tangible results.

One of the first tests will be the implementation of recommendations from the commission investigating the deaths and violence associated with the September protests. Acting on these recommendations could trigger political tensions, particularly if it involves holding senior officials accountable.

Moreover, managing the transition from opposition rhetoric to responsible governance will be a delicate task. Campaign promises often resonate during elections, but translating them into workable policies requires administrative competence and political pragmatism.

Challenges Within the Party

Despite its impressive electoral success, the RSP faces several internal challenges.

One key issue is the need to maintain unity within the party leadership. The partnership between Rabi Lamichhane and Balen Shah will be crucial in determining the government's stability.

Both leaders bring distinct strengths but also face criticism. Lamichhane has previously been embroiled in controversies, including allegations related to financial irregularities involving cooperative funds. In 2023, Nepal's Supreme Court also removed him from office after ruling that he had failed to reapply for Nepali citizenship following the renunciation of his US citizenship.

Similarly, Shah's leadership style has occasionally attracted criticism, particularly regarding his limited engagement with traditional media and some policy decisions during his tenure as mayor.

Managing these controversies while maintaining public trust will require careful political navigation.

Governing Without Coalition Constraints

One of the most significant advantages of the RSP's electoral mandate is the absence of coalition pressures.

Nepal's recent political history has been dominated by fragile coalition governments, often characterised by shifting alliances and policy paralysis. The RSP's near two-thirds majority offers an opportunity to pursue reforms without the constant threat of coalition breakdown.

However, governing with such overwhelming power also carries risks. Without strong opposition oversight or coalition partners to balance decision-making, there is a possibility of excessive centralisation of power.

Furthermore, while the RSP dominates the lower house, it currently lacks representation in the upper house of parliament, where the Nepali Congress holds a majority. This could complicate the passage of certain legislative reforms.

Nepal's Foreign Policy Balancing Act

The election outcome has also attracted significant attention from Nepal's international partners.

India was quick to congratulate the RSP leadership, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi becoming the first foreign leader to speak with Rabi Lamichhane and Balen Shah after the results were announced. New Delhi also provided logistical support during the election process, underscoring its continued interest in Nepal's political stability.

In his response, Lamichhane emphasised the importance of "development diplomacy" — a phrase suggesting that the new government intends to prioritise economic cooperation and infrastructure partnerships.

For Nepal, managing relations with both India and China has long been a delicate diplomatic balancing act. The RSP government will need to navigate this complex geopolitical landscape while safeguarding Nepal's strategic autonomy.

A Defining Moment for Nepal's Democracy

Ultimately, the RSP's victory represents more than just a change in government. It reflects a deeper transformation within Nepal's democratic society.

The electorate has delivered a clear message that political legitimacy must be earned through performance, transparency, and accountability. The dramatic decline of traditional political parties illustrates the risks faced by institutions that fail to adapt to changing public expectations.

At the same time, the success of a relatively new political force demonstrates the resilience of Nepal's democratic framework. Despite the turbulence of recent years, the country's institutions have managed to conduct credible elections and facilitate a peaceful transfer of power.

The Road Ahead

As Nepal enters this new political era, the path forward will not be easy.

Economic reforms, institutional strengthening, and social inclusion will all require sustained political commitment. The RSP government must also ensure that its policies address the concerns of rural communities, ethnic minorities, and economically marginalised groups.

Most importantly, it must demonstrate that political change can translate into improved governance.

If the new leadership succeeds in delivering meaningful reforms, Nepal could enter a period of political stability and economic progress not seen in decades. But if the government fails to meet public expectations, the disappointment could be equally profound.

For now, however, the mood across Nepal is one of cautious optimism.

The people have spoken with remarkable clarity. They have rejected the old order and embraced the promise of change.

Whether that promise will be fulfilled now rests with those who have been entrusted with power.