

[ADRN Issue Briefing]

Nepal's Gen Z Revolution: The Power of Social Media and Diaspora

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Introduction

The Gen Z movement in Nepal represents a unique phenomenon, as it is potentially the first grassroots movement to evolve entirely online before manifesting in physical demonstrations. The term 'groundswell' is traditionally used to describe significant political protests that result in a shift in government, a concept that has lost its relevance in the public consciousness. Nepal's groundswell on September 8, 2025, was distinctive in that it did not generate a significant number of visitors, even in comparison to its previous events. Two antecedent mass movements in recent decades, *Janadolan* (people's movement) I and II, witnessed mass mobilization on the streets across the country, and the antecedents to the groundswell were observable by the public. The monarchist politics experienced a gradual decline in their political relevance over time. The shift was marked by *Janandolan* I in 1990 which transformed the king's role, reducing his power as a constitutional monarch and transferring sovereignty to the people. Subsequent to the events surrounding *Janandolan* II in 2006, the constituent assembly proceeded to abolish the monarchy in its entirety.

Conversely, the Gen Z movement in 2025 witnessed a marked decline in the number of protestors on the ground, with an estimated 30,000 to 50,000 participants, predominantly from Gen Z, dispersed across the nation. The most significant demonstration occurred in the capital city of Kathmandu, where a substantial number of young individuals converged to march towards the Parliament building on the 8th of September. From their perspective, Parliament was a venue for minor political machinations that exerted minimal influences on the lives and livelihoods of individuals beyond the precincts of the hall, including their own. The protests were manifestations of profound disenchantment, indifference, or even hostility to the charade of traditional parties, who were engaged in a game of musical chairs in the form of multi-party coalitions that had been in office for a significant portion of the period since 1990. Nepal had held six general elections, yet thirty-two prime ministers had served; many had held multiple stints in Baluwatar.

Moment of *Zeitgeist*?

In order to capture the essence of this movement, one must look beyond the footfall at Maitighar Mandala - the designated protest zone. The zone is located a stone's throw away from Singha Durbar (the seat of the government) and the Supreme Court, and three kilometers away from Parliament. The scale of the September 8 protests was comparatively modest in relation to the magnitude of earlier mass movements observed in Nepal. The demographic of Generation Z, constituting approximately 30 percent of the total population, did not exist at the time of the nation's 49 day-long *Janandolan I* in 1990. The movement, which amassed over 200,000 participants, effectively terminated a 29-year prohibition on the formation of political parties. However, this shift in policy was accompanied by a significant loss of life, with the movement resulting in the death of 50 individuals^{1,2}. *Janandolan II* mobilized a significant segment of the population, numbering over 500,000 individuals, who converged on the streets for a duration of 20 days. This mobilization culminated in the complete abolition of the monarchy and the loss of 25 lives³.

In contrast, the 2025 September 8 movement originated from a generation that was digitally connected and had been expressing discontent online for an extended period prior to convening in person. The group's influence stemmed not from its numerical superiority but from the rapid conversion of public exasperation into tangible political ramifications, precipitated by the imposition of a social media ban. The groundswell movement that emerged in September exhibited characteristics analogous to those of *Janandolan I* and II, particularly with respect to its alignment with Nepal's historical precedent of challenging the ruling elite from a grassroots perspective. However, it should be noted that there were significant differences in numerous other aspects. In contrast to the preceding mass movements, which were preceded by months of rallies, this time the street anger led to the collapse of the polity in forty-eight short hours. Subsequently, Prime Minister KP Oli vacated his office a day after the commencement of the mass protests that took place outside Parliament.

Writ on the Wall

In recent years, a generation with a high level of digital connectivity has been expressing its political dissent against the ruling class online. As a result, numerous groups and individuals have come together across the country organically, both on- and offline. In contemporary society, social media has emerged as a pivotal public sphere. The indications of this phenomenon have been evident for an extended period, particularly among younger demographics. The political class, which was approaching to the twilight of its career, exhibited a striking lack of awareness regarding the prevailing sentiments of rage among the populace. The sequence of events that transpired following the initial peaceful protest, which occurred on a Monday, culminated in the dissolution of a multi-

¹ Global Nonviolent Action Database. n.d. "Nepalese Force King to Accept Democratic Reform, 'Jana Andolan' (People's Movement), 1990." <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/nepalese-force-king-accept-democratic-reform-jana-andolan-peoples-movement-1990>

² *The Guardian*. 2020.03.26. "From the Archive: April 9, 1990: Nepal King Bows to Protests." <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/09/nepal-king-birendra-democracy-1990>

³ Routledge, Paul. 2010. Nineteen Days in April: Urban Protest and Democracy in Nepal. *Urban Studies* 47(6): 1279–1299.

party government within two days⁴. The incident resulted in the tragic loss of 76 young lives. In comparison, Sri Lanka's uprising in March 2025 lasted 25 days before forcing change; Bangladesh's, in July 2024, stretched over 240 days. The 'Gen Z protests' in Nepal were brief yet significant. The study demonstrated the capacity of a technologically adept generation to rapidly transform feelings of exasperation into significant occurrences.

To comprehend the accelerated nature of these events, it is imperative to examine their genesis within the digital public sphere. A considerable number of young Nepalis, a significant proportion of whom were still in school or college and a considerable number of whom resided outside of Nepal, begun to express their frustrations through social media. In recent years, social media platforms have emerged as the predominant political sphere through which young Nepalis and other demographic groups congregate to formulate opinions and contest prevailing narratives. A recent study revealed that at least 76 percent of Nepalis possess a smartphone⁵, and at least 48 percent maintain a social media identity⁶. The consumption pattern of news has undergone a complete metamorphosis, and the very concept of what constitutes news has been redefined. A 2024 media survey revealed that 62 percent of Nepalis obtain news through Facebook, while only approximately 5 percent do so through newspapers⁷.

This shift away from 'traditional media' is a significant factor in the shaping of Nepal's behavioral revolution. The coordination of calls to action on Instagram and Reddit, along with the initiation of virtual debates on X (formerly Twitter) began to demonstrate a shift in the control over the political narrative and story-telling. It became evident that the traditional media was no longer the sole source of reflection for the prevailing public sentiment. In this regard, the protests in Nepal by Gen Z participants were characterized by a relatively modest turnout. It has been posited that the protests would not have escalated into a public demonstration had the government not imposed a prohibition on multiple social media platforms for a period of five days just before September 8. The prohibition merely expedited the unavoidable: if not that week, the youth would have arguably found their way to the streets in due course.

The Trigger Moment

The initial impetus for the Gen Z movement was the incident on September 6, in which a vehicle carrying a provincial minister from the ruling Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), also Prime Minister Oli's party, collided with eleven-year-old Usha Sunuwar and rapidly proceeded towards Oli's party convention held in the outskirts of Kathmandu⁸. The video

⁴ Akhilesh Upadhyay. 2025.09.09. "Why The Old Regime in Nepal Had to Exit." *Hindustan Times*. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/why-the-old-regime-in-nepal-had-to-exit-101757439071547.html>

⁵ *República*. 2023.03.25. "Over 73 Percent of Nepalis Use Smartphones." <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/over-73-percent-of-nepalis-use-smartphones-1>

⁶ Simon Kemp. 2025.03.03. "Digital 2025: Nepal." DataReportal. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-nepal>

⁷ *Nepali Times*. 2024.12.27. "What Do Nepalis Think of the Media?" <https://nepalitimes.com/here-now/what-do-nepalis-think-of-the-media>

⁸ Akhilesh Upadhyay. 2025.09.09. "Why The Old Regime in Nepal Had to Exit." *Hindustan Times*. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/why-the-old-regime-in-nepal-had-to-exit-101757439071547.html>

documentation of the incident rapidly disseminated, becoming a symbol of the apathetic ruling class.

The episode is reminiscent of a seminal moment in Tunisia on December 17, 2010, when Mohamed Bouazizi, a street vendor, set himself afire after dousing himself in paint thinner. This act was a response to the harassment he had endured at the hands of police in Sidi Bouzid, an agrarian city grappling with pervasive poverty. This series of events led to the Tunisian Revolution, which ultimately led to the resignation of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Within a year, the movement had spread to Egypt, where President Hosni Mubarak resigned in February 2011. It subsequently spread to Libya, Syria, and Yemen. Rest as they say is history. The potential historical significance of Nepal's Gen Z protests, and the subsequent impact on the nation, remains to be ascertained.

Although the CPN-UML consented to cover the treatment expenses for Usha, who fortunately did not sustain major injuries, Oli asserted that the social media footage of the incident was being utilized as a pretext to politicize the matter and his convention⁹. As would be expected, the most salient evidence of the growing public resentment was found in the reactions on social media, which far surpassed those on traditional media outlets. The platform swiftly became inundated with comments such as “If the leaders are unable to rectify the situation, the responsibility falls upon us.” “This is not a request — it is a warning.” “If blood must flow, let it flow. If fire must burn, let it burn – Nepal’s voice will not be silenced.” “We must expose NepoKid, expose corruption, and expose politicians”. “The people have endured a protracted period of subjugation, but the time of the people’s rise is at hand.” “The assertion that corruption will fall and the nation will speak is one that merits rigorous examination¹⁰.”

A Misunderstood Generation

In the same week as the hit-and-run incident, social media users in Nepal began documenting their leader’s foreign trips, their children’s expensive schooling abroad, and their luxury lifestyles on TikTok and Instagram using the hashtag #PoliticiansNepoBabyNepal¹¹. The government’s attempt to ban social media occurred only days after this trend gained widespread attention, thereby corroborating the public’s perception that the political class feared the young generation’s retribution. This initial displeasure rapidly escalated into a storm. In response, social media users began to post comments such as “Indonesia did it. The Philippines did it. Bangladesh did it. Now it’s Nepal’s turn!” and “It’s not about social media anymore... It’s about the corrupt system that we have... So please, tomorrow’s agenda shouldn’t be ‘Unbanning social media’; rather, it should be to change the corrupt system that we have”¹².

By the time the online movement have gained significant traction, mass protests erupted in Kathmandu and in other cities, including Itahari, Narayanghat, and Butwal, located outside

⁹ Khabarhub. 2025.06. “Oli Says Accident Used as Pretext to Disrupt UML Statute Convention.” <https://english.khabarhub.com/2025/06/494589/>

¹⁰ TikTok (@routineofnepalbanda). n.d. “TikTok Video.” <https://www.tiktok.com/@routineofnepalbanda/video/7546919622512102664>

¹¹ *The Kathmandu Post*. 2025.09.06. “‘Nepo Kid’ Trend Sparks Anti-Corruption Campaign in Nepal.” <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2025/09/06/nepo-kid-trend-sparks-anti-corruption-campaign-in-nepal>

¹² TikTok (@nepal.360). n.d. “TikTok Video.” <https://www.tiktok.com/@nepal.360/video/7546847567410220309>

Kathmandu. The members of Gen Z were witnessing these events in real time and exhibited a notable degree of defiance. The youth in question had become disillusioned with the constant admonishments from their parents and society at large that the status quo was immutable. Indeed, members of Gen Z have chosen to adopt a proactive stance in their pursuit of social transformation. They possessed minimal sentimental value regarding the reiteration of historical events by party officials who were inclined to laud the merits of the 1990 and 2006 mass movements.

Nonetheless, the indications of a transition had already emerged well in advance of September 8. Traditional media outlets faced challenges in assessing the sentiments of younger Nepalis during the 2022 Kathmandu mayoral election, and significantly underestimated the popularity of independent candidate “Balen Shah”. Media outlets persisted in their focus on the established parties, namely the Nepali Congress and the CPN-UML, which were represented by the candidates. However, the results of the election were quite unexpected. Balen, a 32-year-old candidate, obtained a landslide victory, thus defying the prevailing notion that the ethnic divide would play a significant role in the election’s outcome. This outcome was particularly surprising given the initial vote count, which indicated a strong lead for Balen in the fast-growing outskirts of the city. In contrast, the traditional parties were expected to dominate the “core” area of the city, where voter turnout was typically higher.

This assertion is demonstrably false. The ascendance of Balen, a multifaceted individual who concurrently serves as a wrapper and structural engineer, was discernible to the younger demographic of voters. However, neither the conventional media outlets nor the political establishment recognized this as an indication of a broader underlying trend. However, due to an inability to perceive the rapid transformation of Nepali society, they remained entrenched in their respective silos, existing in a state of para-reality that was both disconnected from the actualities and expectations of the youth demographic and the older generation.

Notably, a significant segment of the latter population swiftly adopted the spirit of Gen Z, albeit with a discernible degree of skepticism. Individuals who can articulate their concerns in a coherent manner on social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube or Instagram, for instance, have the potential to rapidly amass a substantial following. This has given rise to a public sphere that is both faster and more open in nature. As a result, traditional institutions are finding it challenging to either comprehend, control, or keep tab of this new environment. The sequence of events that transpired in the days leading up to and following September 8 unfolded with remarkable rapidity.

Discord Parliament

On September 9, a significant portion of Nepal’s public infrastructure was destroyed, including buildings associated with all three branches of government (Singha Durbar, the Supreme Court, and the Parliament). This occurred in response to the killing of 19 young protesters the previous day. At approximately 12 a.m., when the army was mobilized to address escalating levels of violence, the Chief of Army Staff Ashok Sigdel convened with members of Gen Z at the Army Headquarters. The army articulated its position, asserting that the responsibility for establishing an interim government would fall upon Gen Z. This assertion was accompanied by the assertion that this generation had been

the catalyst for a transformation in the movement, which subsequently gave rise to violent protests¹³ and further political developments.

According to various sources, the Nepal Army played a vital role in preventing a complete breakdown of law and order in the aftermath of the police shooting on September 8 and the subsequent day. The army constituted the sole remaining public institution of authority. The public demonstrated sufficient confidence in the organization to grant its commandos the initial priority of securing the boundary walls of ministerial quarters in Bhainsepati, situated across the Bagmati River in Lalitpur.

Concurrently, Gen Z members returned to digital spaces in an attempt to comprehend the present moment, a gesture that was met with astonishment by the Nepali public and, to a certain extent, by themselves. A Discord group chat comprising over 100,000 participants conducted a vote on potential leadership and selected former Chief Justice Sushila Karki as their preferred prime minister¹⁴. These discussions were not organized by activists or media elites; Gen Z had not even appointed a leader or leaders. These entities materialized inherently from the collective consciousness of young Nepalis within and outside the nation, a phenomenon precipitated by a pervasive sentiment of marginalization experienced by this demographic in the context of both the political establishment and prevailing media narratives.

Nepal's experience is indicative of a broader global pattern. This phenomenon of youth-led activism was not unique to Nepal; similar movements have already emerged in Mongolia in July 2025, Indonesia in August, and Madagascar soon after. Bangladesh had witnessed student protests a few months earlier. However, none of these movements have demonstrated a comparable degree of sustained digital growth to that observed in Nepal. A collective examination of these cases indicates that individuals from diverse age groups are adopting novel organizational methods, frequently by observing each other online rather than adhering to conventional ideological frameworks.

This global resonance was further exemplified in October by the appearance of Nepal's flag during youth-led demonstrations in Tbilisi following the Gen Z protests in Nepal¹⁵. A Georgian protestor was observed holding Nepal's flag during an act of civil disobedience. The Nepalese Gen Z movement has emerged as a symbol of resistance for the younger demographic. This generation, characterized by its technological prowess and social awareness, has the potential to compel the stagnant political establishment to alter its course and heed their demands, provided they maintain organizational cohesion and perseverance. This phenomenon signifies a paradigm shift, as it demonstrates that contemporary protest movements are no longer confined to physical demonstrations. Instead, they have evolved into a series of online interactions, characterized by the dissemination of symbols and narratives, which serve to establish connections between disparate movements. These movements, while seemingly disparate, are unified by a shared objective: the pursuit of accountability and reform.

¹³ Tulsi Rauniyar. 2025.11.04. "The Inside Story of How Gen Z Toppled Nepal's Leader and Chose a New One on Discord." *WIRED*. <https://www.wired.com/story/nepal-discord-gen-z-protests-vote-prime-minister-election/>

¹⁴ Pranav Baskar. 2025.09.11. "Nepal's Social Media Ban Backfires as Politics Moves to a Chat Room." *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/11/world/asia/nepal-protest-genz-discord.html>

¹⁵ Ujjwal Satyal. 2025.11.10. "Nepali Flag Spotted in Georgia Protest — Nepal's Gen Z Movement Echoes Globally." *República*. <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/nepali-flag-spotted-in-georgia-protest-nepals-gen-z-movement-echoes-globall-89-80.html>

Nationalism in the Digital Age: Linking Villages to Diaspora

Within the context of Nepal, this juncture gave rise to a novel form of civic confidence. The phenomenon under discussion was not confined to a specific language or cultural group. During a live television interview, a television presenter urged a Gen Z representative, who was speaking in a blend of Nepali and English, to adhere strictly to Nepali so that it would be more comprehensive to a broader audience. The response exhibited by the prominent television anchor was emblematic of a traditional, conventional response: in this space, individuals from diverse linguistic, geographic, and class backgrounds were able to find a safe space to express themselves in their own ways. The movement's strength derived from its heterogeneity rather than from a fixed set of demands, the influence of leaders, or the persuasive efforts of the media.

In light of the aforementioned factors, it is imperative to acknowledge the heterogeneity inherent within the Gen Z movement. The subjects of this study hold a wide array of political views, ranging from royalism to leftism. Their backgrounds are similarly diverse, encompassing fields such as heritage conservation, as well as various forms of influencer activities, including fashion, automobiles, food, travel, lifestyle, health, and finance. Intriguingly, a segment of Gen Z has expressed discontent with the rapid emergence of factions within the Gen Z movement. A significant number of individuals have expressed a preference for returning to their respective villages as opposed to engaging in centralized activism in Kathmandu¹⁶. The participants in this study hail from various districts, including Panchthar, Bardiya, and Baglung, and are not familiar with the location of Durbar Marg, a fashionable and exclusive neighborhood in Kathmandu. They are even less aware of the rationale behind the convening of Gen Z gatherings in this particular locale¹⁷. To the subjects of this study, their villages are more immediate and intimate, and the movement has yet to reach their home.

However, a unifying theme emerges from their experiences: the perception of a nation where opportunities are perceived to have been subverted by elite political figures and a network of crony capitalism, resulting in pervasive policy corruption and pronounced instances of nepotism. In 2025, Nepal ranked 107th on the Corruption Perception Index, indicating a perceived level of corruption within the nation's government and public sectors¹⁸.

A Fine Balance

In this context, on 12 September, the transition government under Sushila Karki, Nepal's first-ever female prime minister, announced that the next election will take place on March 5, 2025. In 2017 and 2022, the electoral process was initiated with approximately three months of preparatory measures, followed by a one-month period dedicated to the tabulation of votes. The voting process took place in late November, within the announcement of the results occurring by mid-December. Conversely, the forthcoming election on March 5, 2026, affords the government and the Election Commission a considerably more constrained timeframe for preparations, party registrations,

¹⁶ Author interview with members of Gen Z United group. 2025.11.05.

¹⁷ Author interview with members of Gen Z United group. 2025.11.05.

¹⁸ Transparency International. 2024. "Corruption Perceptions Index 2024." <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024>

candidate nominations, and ballot printing and transporting them to distant booths, some of which are situated in remote regions of the Himalayan mountains.

Preliminary data on voter registration indicates that the upcoming election may be influenced by an unusually youthful electorate. Following the reopening of registration on September 26, a total of 64,000 new voters has registered. A significant proportion of the electorate will be first-time voters, either because they have recently attained the age of 18 or have previously abstained from the franchise. This surge in interest can be attributed to a resurgence of political engagement in the aftermath of the uprising.

Nevertheless, skepticism regarding the efficacy of these measures persists. The efficacy of the vote in engendering substantive changes remains a subject of considerable skepticism. Some observers express concerns that newcomers may encounter challenges in navigating the complex bureaucratic structures. The salient question is not the number of new voters who join the rolls, but whether they will find a compelling reason to cast their ballots, particularly if the groundswell diminishes by the time of Election Day. Participation is contingent upon the participant's confidence in the system's ability to accurately record their voices.

Nepali's diaspora, comprising over two million citizens residing abroad, constitutes a significant political constituency¹⁹. The population of Nepalese in Australia constitutes approximately one percent of the nation's total population²⁰. The 12,000 Nepali students constitute the most rapidly expanding international student population in the United States²¹. India, in particular, has emerged as a primary destination, hosting between 2.5 and 5 million Nepalis. The majority of labor migration occurs outside of India, the Gulf and Malaysia. Within the geographical confines of East Asia, Japan stands as the sole nation where Nepali students constitute the second-largest international student demographic. A comparative analysis of the demographic data reveals that the Nepali diaspora is more sizable than the Indian diaspora²². Even in Portugal and South Korea, Nepalis have been able to maintain robust transnational connections.

According to recent demographic data, more than 56 percent of Nepali households include at least one family member who has relocated for professional or educational purpose²³. On average, over 2,000 Nepalis depart from Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu on a daily basis, seeking superior educational and employment prospects²⁴. This dispersion gives rise to critical

¹⁹ Amish Raj Mulmi. 2024.01.30. "Nepal's Youth Are Leaving the Country in Drove." ORF Online. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/nepals-youth-are-leaving-the-country-in-drove>

²⁰ Department of Home Affairs (Australia). n.d. "Nepal: Country Profile." <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-statistics/statistics/country-profiles/profiles/nepal>

²¹ Arun R. Joshi, Vibhav Pradhan, and Ruzel Shrestha. 2024.12. "Nepali Migrant Dreams in the American Landscape." Institute for Integrated Development Studies (IIDS). <https://iids.org.np/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/3db0ec190a628bf3e5d52daed49bfc1a.pdf>

²² *Nikkei Asia*. 2025.03.14. "Japan Foreign Population Grows Twice as Fast as Expected on Worker Influx." <https://asia.nikkei.com/spotlight/japan-immigration/japan-foreign-population-grows-twice-as-fast-as-expected-on-worker-influx>

²³ NRB Working Paper (Report 53). 2021. "Impact of Remittances on Rural Poverty in Nepal: Evidence from Cross-Section Data."

²⁴ Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation. 2025.02.24. "From Pre-Departure to Return: Understanding Labor Migration Dynamics in Nepal." <https://www.helvetas.org/en/switzerland/how-you-can-help/follow-us/blog/understanding-labor-migration-dynamics-in-nepal>

questions regarding the representation of the Nepali diaspora in the upcoming March elections. It is imperative to ascertain the mechanism that will empower this politically significant segment to exercise their right. The implications of this phenomenon are significant, as the diaspora contributes not only financially through remittances but also exerts an increasing influence on the public discourse and the expectations of governance in their countries of origin.

Nepal must also decide whether to hold elections under the current rules or first implement constitutional reforms, especially for diaspora voting. Given that over 40 percent of the electorate resides abroad, excluding them could potentially lead to a shift in governance that lacks legitimacy. Electoral reforms, on the one hand, may necessitate delays of up to one month or more in the scheduling of elections. However, they can also ensure a more expansive political representation, a crucial element in periods of political transition. There is a contentious debate within the Nepali community regarding the electoral participation of Nepali citizens residing abroad. Proponents of this position contend that a genuine democratic process must encompass all Nepalis, irrespective of their geographical location. In contrast, opponents of this stance argue that the electoral rights of Nepali citizens living overseas should not be granted.

The dilemma encapsulates the tension between urgency and legitimacy, between stabilizing governance and creating a system that genuinely reflects the national sentiment. The government could undoubtedly implement substantial measures to facilitate the registration and participation of Nepali citizens residing abroad in the electoral process for the first time. This would entail the translation of the initial commitments of the Gen Z revolution. These measures are poised to play a pivotal role in consolidating the institutional framework and ensuring the timely execution of an early election.■

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