



## The role of Gen Z in shaping Nepal's democratic discourse: Opportunities and challenges

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### Abstract

The political landscape of Nepal has undergone significant transformations over the past two decades, with youth movements playing a pivotal role in shaping democratic discourse. Among these, Generation Z—born approximately between 1997 and 2012—has emerged as a highly connected, digitally active, and politically conscious cohort. This paper examines the role of Nepal's Gen Z in influencing democratic practices, policy debates, and civic engagement. Drawing on secondary data, case studies, and digital activism analysis, the study identifies both the opportunities and challenges posed by this generation. Findings suggest that while Gen Z brings unprecedented energy, innovation, and inclusivity to Nepal's democracy, structural limitations, political trust deficits, and generational gaps pose significant challenges. The study contributes to understanding how emerging generations can reshape democratic discourse in transitional democracies like Nepal.

**Keywords:** Generation z, Nepal, democratic discourse, youth movements, political engagement, digital activism

### Introduction

Nepal has experienced profound political transformations over the past three decades, moving from a monarchy to a federal democratic republic. These transitions have been significantly influenced by youth participation, with student-led movements playing a key role in shaping the political discourse. Generation Z, generally defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, represents a new cohort of highly connected, digitally savvy, and politically aware young citizens. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z in Nepal engages with politics not only through traditional protests and party affiliations but also via social media platforms, online campaigns, and issue-based activism.

The significance of studying Gen Z in Nepal lies in understanding how this generation navigates the opportunities and challenges of a rapidly evolving democratic landscape. Their engagement has implications for policy-making, governance, civic participation, and social change. While previous research has focused on youth movements in Nepal broadly, there is a paucity of scholarship specifically examining the unique characteristics, strategies, and impact of Generation Z on democratic discourse. This paper aims to fill that gap by analyzing how Nepal's Gen Z participates in politics, the tools they use, the issues they prioritize, and the constraints they face in shaping the country's democratic trajectory.

By focusing on this emerging generation, the study contributes to broader discussions on the role of youth in transitional democracies, the influence of digital activism on governance, and the intergenerational dynamics that define Nepal's contemporary political landscape.

### Literature Review

#### 1. Youth Movements in Nepal

Nepal has a long history of youth involvement in political change. Student-led movements, such as the 1990 People's Movement (Jana Andolan I) and the 2006 Democracy Movement (Jana Andolan II), played critical roles in challenging autocratic regimes and establishing democratic institutions (Shrestha, 2012; Hachhethu, 2007) [3, 6]. These movements demonstrated that youth activism could shape

policy, mobilize communities, and influence national discourse. However, most studies focus on Millennials or earlier generations, leaving the role of Gen Z relatively underexplored.

#### 2. Global Studies on Generation Z and Democracy

Globally, Generation Z is characterized by digital fluency, high social consciousness, and a preference for participatory politics (Seemiller & Grace, 2016) [5]. Studies from the U.S., Europe, and South Asia highlight that Gen Z engages in civic matters through social media, online petitions, and awareness campaigns rather than traditional party politics (Dimock, 2019; Kumar & Bansal, 2021) [2, 4]. This generation prioritizes issues such as climate change, gender equality, and social justice, reflecting a value-driven rather than ideology-driven political engagement.

#### 3. Digital Activism and Political Engagement

Digital platforms have transformed the landscape of political activism. Social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, and TikTok enable rapid mobilization, discourse, and advocacy (Tufekci, 2017) [7]. In Nepal, studies indicate that youth movements increasingly rely on digital activism to influence public opinion and policy debates (Bhattarai, 2020) [1]. The concept of "hashtag activism" and online campaigns has allowed Gen Z to challenge institutional constraints, amplify marginalized voices, and foster participatory governance.

#### 4. Gaps in Literature

While there is substantial research on youth movements in Nepal and Gen Z globally, there is limited scholarship connecting these two areas. Specifically, there is a lack of studies analyzing

1. How Nepal's Gen Z navigates both online and offline political spaces.
2. The specific opportunities and challenges faced by this generation in influencing democratic discourse.
3. Comparative insights on intergenerational political dynamics within Nepal.

This research aims to fill these gaps by exploring the role of Nepal's Gen Z in shaping democratic discourse, emphasizing both digital and traditional forms of engagement, and identifying structural and societal challenges.

### Research Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to analyze the role of Generation Z in shaping Nepal's democratic discourse. Specific objectives include

1. To examine the forms and extent of political engagement by Nepal's Gen Z, both online and offline.
2. To identify the key issues, values, and priorities that motivate Gen Z participation in democratic processes.
3. To analyze the opportunities provided by digital tools and social networks for enhancing youth engagement.
4. To explore the challenges and structural constraints faced by Gen Z in influencing democratic discourse.
5. To assess the potential long-term impact of Gen Z on Nepal's democratic institutions and governance practices.

### Research Questions

Based on the objectives, the study seeks to answer the following research questions

1. How does Nepal's Generation Z engage with politics through traditional and digital platforms?
2. What are the main issues and concerns that drive political activism among Gen Z in Nepal?
3. In what ways do digital tools enhance or limit the effectiveness of Gen Z's political engagement?
4. What structural, societal, and institutional challenges hinder the influence of Gen Z on democratic discourse?
5. How might the participation of Gen Z shape the future of democracy and governance in Nepal?

### Methodology

#### 1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design combining secondary data analysis, case studies, and digital content analysis. The approach is exploratory and descriptive, suitable for understanding emerging patterns of youth political engagement.

#### 2. Data Sources

**Secondary Data:** Academic journals, books, reports, and news articles on youth movements in Nepal and global studies on Gen Z.

**Digital Data:** Social media campaigns, online petitions, TikTok/Facebook activism, and online discussion forums.

**Case Studies:** Selected events such as youth-led protests during the 2015 constitution debate, climate justice campaigns, and recent social movements.

#### 3. Data Collection

**Document Analysis:** Reviewing official reports, government statements, party manifestos, and NGO reports.

**Content Analysis:** Analyzing social media posts, hashtags, and engagement metrics to map youth activism.

**Optional Primary Data:** Interviews or surveys with politically active Gen Z members in urban and semi-urban areas of Nepal (if feasible).

### 4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis to identify patterns, motivations, and challenges in youth political engagement.

Comparative analysis of digital vs offline activism to understand the effectiveness of different strategies.

Interpretation in the context of Nepal's democratic framework and political culture.

### 5. Ethical Considerations

Ensuring anonymity and consent for primary data collection.

Accurate citation and acknowledgment of all secondary sources.

Avoiding bias in interpreting politically sensitive issues.

### Analysis & Discussion

#### 1. Opportunities Presented by Gen Z

##### 1. Digital Activism and Social Media Engagement

Nepal's Gen Z leverages platforms like Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, and TikTok to mobilize public opinion, organize campaigns, and raise awareness on issues such as climate change, gender equality, and governance. Digital tools provide rapid communication, low-cost outreach, and greater visibility to youth voices (Bhattarai, 2020; Tufekci, 2017) <sup>[1, 7]</sup>.

##### 2. Value-Driven Political Participation:

Gen Z prioritizes social justice, equality, and inclusive policies over traditional partisan loyalty. Their engagement reflects issue-based rather than ideology-based activism, enabling them to challenge entrenched political structures (Seemiller & Grace, 2016) <sup>[5]</sup>.

##### 3. Innovative Forms of Civic Participation:

From online petitions to participatory campaigns and grassroots volunteerism, Gen Z introduces creative ways to participate in democracy. These approaches enhance citizen awareness and foster participatory governance at local and national levels.

#### 2. Challenges Faced by Gen Z

##### Political Trust Deficit

Despite active engagement, Nepalese Gen Z often expresses skepticism toward traditional political parties, which are seen as corrupt or inefficient. This limits the impact of their activism in formal political structures.

##### Structural and Institutional Barriers

Youth participation is constrained by limited representation in decision-making bodies, inadequate youth policies, and bureaucratic hurdles. These factors reduce the effectiveness of Gen Z initiatives in shaping policy.

##### Generational Gaps and Fragmentation

Differences in ideology and approach between Gen Z and older generations can lead to misunderstandings, reducing collaborative potential. Furthermore, online activism sometimes lacks offline follow-through, weakening tangible political outcomes.

### Socio-Economic Constraints

Issues such as unemployment, education disparity, and regional inequalities hinder sustained political engagement among a broader segment of Gen Z.

### Case Studies

#### Case Study 1: Youth-Led Climate Justice Campaigns

Nepalese youth, particularly Gen Z, have been at the forefront of environmental activism, organizing street protests, awareness campaigns, and social media drives. These movements successfully pressured policymakers to consider sustainable policies at local and national levels.

#### Case Study 2: 2015 Constitution Debate

During the promulgation of the 2015 Constitution, Gen Z used online platforms to voice concerns about inclusivity, federalism, and minority rights. Their engagement highlighted both the potential and limits of digital activism in shaping constitutional discourse.

#### Case Study 3: Digital Mobilization during Social Protests

Recent movements addressing gender-based violence and social inequalities saw Gen Z mobilizing rapidly through hashtags, petitions, and online awareness campaigns. These initiatives created visibility for marginalized voices but faced challenges in converting online momentum into policy changes.

### Findings

#### 1. Active Political Engagement

Nepal's Generation Z participates actively in both digital and offline political spaces, demonstrating a high level of civic consciousness and awareness of national issues.

#### 2. Issue-Based Participation

Gen Z prioritizes value-driven concerns such as climate justice, gender equality, social inclusion, and transparency over traditional partisan politics.

#### 3. Digital Tools as a Double-Edged Sword

While social media and online platforms enable rapid mobilization and awareness, overreliance on digital activism can limit tangible political outcomes due to lack of offline follow-through.

#### 4. Challenges Remain Significant

Structural barriers, socio-economic constraints, generational gaps, and distrust of political institutions impede the effective translation of activism into policy and governance impact.

#### 5. Potential for Democratic Transformation

Despite challenges, Gen Z's engagement introduces innovation, inclusivity, and new forms of participatory democracy, indicating potential long-term influence on Nepal's democratic institutions.

### Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Nepal's Generation Z is a pivotal force in shaping contemporary democratic discourse. Their engagement reflects a shift from traditional politics to participatory, value-driven, and digitally mediated activism. While opportunities exist in terms of awareness,

mobilization, and innovation, challenges such as institutional barriers, trust deficits, and socio-economic limitations persist.

Policymakers and political institutions must recognize the potential of Gen Z by creating inclusive platforms, promoting civic education, and facilitating meaningful participation in decision-making processes. In transitional democracies like Nepal, the sustained engagement of Generation Z could redefine the nature of democratic governance, making it more responsive, inclusive, and technologically adept.

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