



## Factors of Motivation and Demotivation for Youth Participation in Politics in Nepal: A Review-Based Study

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### Abstract

It is widely recognized that youth participation is one of the fundamental elements of democratic strength, political renewal, and inclusive governance. In Nepal, young people have traditionally played central roles in political mobilizations and regime change; however, their ongoing participation in institutional political processes remains limited and unreliable, with infrequent and inconsistent expressions. In this context, this paper synthesizes a review of scientific readings and argumentations that explores the incentives and disincentives that affect youth participation in Nepalese politics, combining theoretical and empirical findings. Following the IMRAD format, international and Nepalese scholarly surveys are used to outline the personal, institutional, and structural factors underlying youth political participation. Based on the age-based demarcation of the age of youth suggested by the Nepal National Youth Policy 2082 (BS) that defines youth as the age group between 16 and 40 years, the review concludes that political socialization, mobilization on the basis of issues, political aspirations based on democracy, and digital activism are promoters of participation among youths, and that hierarchical party structures, political violence, clientalism, corruption, and economic insecurity are de-motivators to prolonged participation. The article concludes with an identification of research gaps and policy implications to strengthen substantial youth participation in Nepalese democracy.

**Keywords:** Youth politics, motivation, demotivation, governance, Nepal

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## **Introduction**

Youth political involvement is widely recognized as a critical issue in modern political science, democratic theory, and development research. Youth are often seen as the sources of political novelty, social change, and democratic rebirth, especially in transitional and post-conflict states (Checkel, 2013; Cammaerts et al., 2014). Meanwhile, an increasing body of literature worldwide indicates a disengagement between young people and formal political structures, manifested in declining party membership, electoral instability, and a loss of political trust (Foa & Mounk, 2016).

In Nepal, the youth have traditionally been central to some of the most dramatic political changes in the country, including the 1990 People's Movement and the 2006 People's Movement. The movements made the youth the key political forces in struggles for democracy and institutional change. But even with this legacy, youth involvement in post-transition politics remains paradoxical. Being very visible in elections, protests, and other issue-based mobilizations, young people are structurally relegated to leadership roles and decision-making processes in political parties and state institutions (Hachhethu, 2025; Humagain, 2021). This paradox raises significant issues regarding the character, viability, and constraints on youth political participation in Nepal.

Nepal's National Youth Policy 2082 (BS) defines youth broadly, including people aged 18-35. This is much wider than international norms, like those of the United Nations. The Children Act stipulates that children are anyone under 18 years of age. In the former National Youth Policy-2072 BS, youth were defined as people aged between 16 and 40. According to the 2021 Census, the population aged between 16 and 40 constituted 42.56 percent of the Nepalese population (NSO, 2023). According to the United Nations, youth is used to describe individuals between the ages of 15 and 24. The broad age range reflects Nepal's socio-economic realities. Movement toward stable employment, self-dependence, and social adulthood is often delayed. This is due to lengthy education, low domestic employment, and widespread labor migration.

Many in their late twenties and thirties remain economically dependent, work precariously, or migrate temporarily. This situation supports their inclusion in national policy discussions on the youth category. Politically, access to leadership and the decision-making process in Nepalese politics is often delayed. Many cannot achieve influence until after long involvement in party structures. Since youth, as defined by this policy, form a large part of Nepal's population, their involvement in politics affects democratic consolidation, policy responsiveness, and political stability. Very recently, the Gen Z movement in Nepal, which occurred in September 2025, demonstrates a tendency of the young

citizens towards transparency, accountability, and inclusive governance as young citizens are gaining more and more influence in politics due to the use of digital platforms, civic activism, and public discussions. This trend is an indication of the turn towards participative politics that sees younger generations demand changes in the culture of leadership, responsiveness of policy, and democratic institutions in Nepal (Sapkota, 2026).

Nevertheless, the current literature on youth politics in Nepal remains largely descriptive, despite growing scholarly and policy interest in this field. Much of the literature focuses on individual acts of protest, student politics, or electoral participation, without systematically considering the factors that drive young people to act or to become politically apathetic. In addition, little effort has been made to incorporate both motivational and demotivational aspects within a single analysis. Responding to this analytical gap, this article synthesizes theoretical and empirical literature to identify and explain the factors that drive or suppress youth involvement in Nepalese politics. By moving beyond event-driven accounts, the study aims to sharpen the central argument and generate a nuanced understanding of youth political participation—addressing its motivations and constraints at individual, institutional, and structural levels.

## **Methods**

This paper is based on a narrative and thematic literature review. Peer-reviewed journal articles, monographs, policy documents, and reports published by authentic sources have been consulted. The use of both the global literature and literature on Nepal in particular places Nepali youth political participation within broader theoretical frameworks of democracy, political agency, and social movements. As social movement and youth mobilization is a philosophical and theoretical debate, this paper engages with a critical paradigm along with issues of power, politics, negotiations and transformation from the worldview of youths in Nepal (Sapkota, 2025)

Source selection considered factors relevant to youth political participation, including motivational and discouraging aspects, as well as relevance to Nepal or similar South Asian contexts. Studies were thematically coded and organized into two analytic levels: determinants promoting (motivational factors) and those discouraging (demotivating factors) youth engagement in mainstream politics. Using interpretive synthesis methodology, conceptual patterns, convergences, and contradictions in the corpus were identified (Bryman, 2016; Snyder, 2019).

## **Results**

### **Motivations for the Youth's Participation in Politics**

Youth political participation involves personal traits, the sociocultural environment, and access to meaningful arenas. Motivation arises when young people view politics as relevant to their lives and see it as a way to drive change. These motivations grow stronger during times of political upheaval, issue-based activism, and collective action. Such periods make participatory practices more significant.

### **Political Socialization and Civic Awareness**

Political socialization is a vital factor in shaping youth involvement because it influences how people perceive politics, power, and civic responsibility. Political attitudes and propensities to participate in politics are highly influenced by family heritage, schooling, peer associations, and exposure to political discourse (Verba et al., 1995; Sapiro, 2004). Young people brought up in politically active families are more likely to internalize democratic values, develop an interest in political activity, and gain the confidence to take an active part. This is often reflected in measurable behaviors, such as higher voter turnout at age 18, frequent petition signing, and active online activism. Initial exposure to political discourse and group decision-making activities fosters a sense of political effectiveness, which is essential to continued participation (Lamichhane & Dhakal, 2024).

Nepal has a troubled history of movements, including student protests, that shape political socialization. Political awareness often starts early as youths join student unions, campus groups, or civic meetings. Colleges and universities foster ideological debate and train leaders, giving youth skills, organization, and networks for future participation. These environments build civic identity and support the view that politics is necessary and legitimate.

Education is also what enhances political consciousness and reasoning. Empirical evidence shows that young people with higher levels of education are more likely to engage in deliberation, advocacy, and issue-oriented activism, even when they report ambivalence toward traditional party politics (Acharya, 2024). Specific classroom practices, such as debate clubs, service learning, and media literacy units, are particularly effective in developing critical agency among youth. Debate clubs promote critical thinking and effective communication; service learning connects classroom lessons with community service, fostering civic responsibility; while media-literacy units equip students with the skills to critically assess political information. These educational experiences can provide analytical tools that help youth evaluate political information, challenge authority, and make

demands, thereby enhancing their ability to actively engage in democratic processes rather than be passive observers.

### **Issue-based Mobilization and Reformation-oriented Agendas**

Youth participation now relies more on immediate, practical issues than on long-term party ideologies. Corruption, unemployment, social exclusion, inequality, and calls for governance reform often spur youth into action (Dalton, 2008; Norris, 2012). These issues directly impact youth by limiting opportunities, finances, and mobility. In Nepal, youth unemployment is high, access to state services is low, and systemic injustice is common. In this regard, this paper synthesizes four types of main challenges, which challenges intensify issue-based mobilization and prompt youth involvement. They include: a) Corruption (persistent corruption undermines trust in institutions); b) Unemployment (high rates restrict economic progress and personal growth); c) Social exclusion (marginalized groups face barriers to participation); d) Inequality (Disparities inhibit equal opportunities and justice; and, e) Governance Reform (calls for transparency and accountability shape demands for change).

Issue-based mobilization lets youth engage without party ties or authority lines. This engagement is practical, results-focused, and not tied to ideology. In Nepal, youth mobilize around causes like anti-corruption, employment rights, transparent governance, and inclusion. This is often driven by dissatisfaction with mainstream political players. For example, a recent non-partisan social media campaign against corruption attracted many young Nepalese. It shows the appeal and reach of online platforms for fast, wide engagement. In contrast, traditional youth rallies need more commitment and focus on supporting party agendas. This explains why many young people prefer cause-focused activism that offers clear, tangible results and matches their values and needs.

This trend shows a global shift: younger generations prefer adaptive, cause-based political participation (Inglehart, 2018; Dalton, 2008). Rather than committing to a party, young people join when issues matter to them, and participation is brief. They use tools like crowdfunding protests, Google Docs manifestos, and social media campaigns as 'connective action' to engage with specific goals. This involvement is often intense and visible during crises or widespread outrage, but it rarely lasts within institutions.

### **The Desires of Change and Democratic Responsibility in Politics**

Desires for political change strongly motivate youth, especially during times of transition, crisis, or unfair treatment. Nepal's major constitutional shift in 2015 makes this context important. Such moments highlight youth belief that their action can reshape structures and support democratic, inclusive, and accountable

governance. Nepal's political history shows that, when action means structural change, youth play a larger role. Democratic, inclusion, and accountability movements have drawn many young people who see politics as a tool for social change.

Youth engage because they think their actions can change political outcomes. Their belief in political efficacy increases when they see their efforts—like voting, protesting, or advocating—making a difference (Tarrow, 2011; Johnston, 2011). This motivation is strongest when old institutions seem weak and new ideas gain ground. For this, the society should welcome alternative politics, new political parties and social reformist agenda-based campaigns.

As such, the engagement of young people is closely bound up with the democratic desires and accountability requirements. The youths often express demands for openness in governance, sensitivity in institutions, and moral leadership. When political regimes appear receptive to change, young people's participation is likely to increase (McAdam, 1982). On the other hand, repeated frustration with such ambitions may undermine motivation, highlighting the contingency of youth involvement in politics. For instance, consider a scenario where youth activism initially flourishes in response to government promises of transparency and reform. If these commitments remain unfulfilled, the enthusiasm for political engagement can wane, leading to a cycle of motivation-fuelled engagement followed by fatigue-induced withdrawal. This pattern serves as a warning to stakeholders about the potential costs of broken promises: disengagement and disillusionment among youth, which can jeopardize their future involvement and contributions to democratic processes.

### **Digital Media, Peer Networks and New Participation**

Digital media growth has changed the nature and scale of youth political participation. Social media platforms, such as Facebook and TikTok, lower barriers and enable fast mobilization. They allow political expression without joining organizations (Bennett & Segerberg, 2023; Theocharis et al., 2015). Online spaces are now key places for discussion, information sharing, and mobilization, especially among educated, urban youth.

Online activities enable young people to bypass conventional political gatekeepers, such as the elites in political parties and the mainstream media. A shift is noticeable from traditional forms of influence, like newspaper editorials and televised debates, to modern counterparts such as viral memes and trending hashtags. This transformation highlights how digital advocacy enables youth to express opposition, challenge the prevailing discourse, and engage supporters across geographic lines. It is this enlargement of the canon of political engagement

to include online debate, digital demonstrations, and civic surveillance that makes this development significant.

Peer networks also strengthen youth participation by socializing political activity and reducing perceived risks. Social networks and participation with friends make politicking more socially acceptable and emotionally satisfying, as confidence and group identity are strengthened. Studies on social proof have shown that adolescents often look to their peers when deciding to engage in activities, which reinforces the impact of peer networks on reducing participation risks. Collective participation solidifies the formation of political identity and maintains participation, specifically in situations where individual participation is considered risky or ineffective.

### **Factors Demotivating Youth Participation in Politics**

Although Nepali youth are interested in politics, most do not participate because of structural and institutional barriers. These barriers lower their sense of efficacy and trust in government. Youth are discouraged from participating when political regimes exclude them, use violence, engage in corruption, or ignore their concerns. When political systems seem unresponsive, youth see greater risks and costs in getting involved. These factors lead to sporadic youth engagement or lasting withdrawal from formal politics, rather than true apathy.

### **Gerontocratic Party Structure and Hierarchy**

The structural nature of political parties, in that there is a gerontocratic and hierarchical nature of political party structures, is one of the most long-standing obstacles to youth political participation. The power to make decisions remains with senior leadership, and therefore, the young are not allowed to contribute meaningfully to policy-making and leadership development. Despite their numerical importance, youth wings are limited in their areas of operation to mobilization, campaign logistics, and other supportive actions, which do not provide them with opportunities to make significant decisions, thereby compromising the feeling of ownership and political effectiveness (Hachhethu, 2025; Humagain, 2021).

Such party structures promote seniority over merit. Advancement depends on loyalty, connections, or patronage, not ability or new ideas. This discourages talented young people from staying involved. These structures block innovation and limit diverse perspectives, hindering progress. In contrast, some democracies allow youth-led groups to introduce new policies. In Nepal, young people often see formal politics as a closed system with no path to leadership.

Over time, persistent exclusion frustrates youth and leads to disengagement. Young people join to make change, but repeated marginalization

discourages them. Many then either quit or move to informal civic activities. Parties lose the chance for renewal by failing to harness youth energy, resulting in only temporary mobilization instead of lasting change.

### **Political Violence, Intimidation and Coercive Practices**

Coercive practices and political violence are a major discouraging factor among the youth. The desensitization to vandalism, intimidation, threats, and confrontational politics in the realm of political competition is slowly undermining the attractiveness of democratic participation, especially among youth who cherish peaceful and deliberative forms of political participation (Gurr, 2000; Kalyvas, 2006). Such violence breeds fear and insecurity, thereby deterring politically dangerous or ethically controversial activities.

Where the political violence is condoned or even instrumentalized, it becomes selective and exclusionary. People who do not receive support from organizations or physical security are inclined to check out, furthering unequal patterns of participation. This is disproportionate to women, marginalized groups, and first-time participants, who face an increased level of vulnerability in violent political environments.

In addition, political violence systematically undermines trust in democratic institutions and processes. If the electoral, protest, or negotiation exercise is coupled with coercion rather than dialogue, youths might doubt the importance of politics as a tool for solving societal issues. This disappointment reduces long-term commitment to democratic participation and may lead to apathy or withdrawal. Drawing upon Easton's concept of "diffuse support," this erosion of trust also threatens the perceived legitimacy of democratic institutions. When such foundational trust is weakened, the moral authority of these institutions is compromised, potentially destabilizing the democratic fabric itself.

### **Politics of Clientelism, Corruption and Patronage**

Youthful motivation is eroded substantially by clientelism and corruption, as the normative bases of democratic participation are corrupted. Youth political efficacy suffers when an individual perceives influence as dependent on personal networks, financial capital, or patronage rather than on ideological commitment or on providing services to society (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007). Younger, better-educated people often perceive such practices as contrary to democratic ideals.

In Nepal, these standard cases of corruption and elite control reinforce skepticism toward mainstream politics. The political institutions are seen as instruments of unethical interests, with the larger interests of the populace taking a back seat, a lack of trust that makes youths unwilling to engage in the process. This antagonistic feeling is further fueled by the lack of alignment between reformist

discourse and actual policy delivery, which increases distrust towards the actors and institutions. Clientelistic systems are unfriendly to young people without contacts in influential networks. A lack of economic or social capital impedes their competitiveness in patronage-sensitive settings, thereby encouraging competent youth to withdraw completely from formal politics and instead engage in other forms of civic participation or focus on their own economic growth.

### **Economic Insecurity, Precarity and Labor Migration**

Economic insecurity is also a major structural obstacle to youth political participation. High unemployment, underemployment, and informal employment further limit the time, resources, and psychological capacity to sustain active participation (Standing, 2011; ILO, 2020). For many youths, financial survival and family responsibilities outweigh civic and political participation.

Precarious jobs also limit political freedom. Young people who are dependent on employers, patrons, or their families may avoid political activities to reduce risk, especially when political affiliation may lead to the loss of employment opportunities. This economic susceptibility is a limitation on political decision-making and discourages overt involvement, particularly by marginalized youth.

Labor migration is a global phenomenon that should not be treated negatively (Khatiwada & Basyal, 2022). However, it exacerbates these problems by physically isolating young people from the country's political life. Long-term disenfranchisement weakens civic relationships, exposes civic participants to less political dialogue, and curtails chances of long-term participation. Even though migrant youth might not lose their political consciousness, their ability to impact local performance is significantly limited. However, there is a nuanced aspect to consider: remittances sent by migrant workers often finance hometown political campaigns, providing a counter-trend to complete disengagement. For instance, diaspora funds can enable hometown political movements to thrive, demonstrating that the link between migration and political engagement is complex and not entirely one of withdrawal.

### **Disillusionment, Apathy and Falling Institutional Trust**

Chronic failures in follow-through on promises, poor policy enforcement, and governance create political disappointment among the youth. The lack of tangible gains in governance or even living conditions leads to a decrease in motivation. This can trigger a spectrum of reactions, from 'active cynicism,' where youth remain engaged but critically skeptical, to 'true apathy,' characterized by disengagement and indifference to political processes. These thresholds define the gradations of motivational reactions within the youth population (Ahmad Iqbal et

al., 2025). Such a trend is more evident in the case of young people who made first acquaintances with high hopes of change.

Loss of faith in political institutions contributes to even greater disengagement. The youth might regard elections, party politics, and representative bodies as unrelated to societal needs, leading to skepticism about the value of participation. This kind of attitude may not be an indicator of indifference, but of dissatisfaction with the current political set-up. Such disengagement is often not total but discriminatory. Although the youth might disengage from official institutions, they might still do so in less formal, issue-oriented, or digital forums. However, the lack of sustained institutional engagement undermines the democratic consolidation and limits the youth's power in relation to the long-term policy consequences.

## **Discussion**

Why do Nepalese youths choose episodic protest over party membership? This question frames our exploration of the current dynamics of youth political participation in Nepal. The available literature suggests that the process of youth political participation in Nepal is conditioned by a complex interaction between motivation and alienation, which can be best identified in the context of social-movement theory. Youth engagement is triggered by motivational antecedents, such as democratic ideals, reformist agendas, issue-based mobilization, and collective identity formation, especially during episodes of perceived injustice or political crisis (Damon, 2008). In comparison, sustained involvement in formal political institutions is deterred by demotivational power sources such as hierarchical party systems, political malfeasance, violence, corruption, and economic insecurity. This dualist model explains why Nepalese young people are likely to engage in episodic mobilization rather than institutionalized forms of political participation (Norris, 2012; Tarrow, 2011).

From a political effectiveness perspective, youth engagement intensifies, as people believe collective action can influence political outcomes. Nepalese youth political efficacy is often high and is promoted by educational attainment, digital literacy, peer networks, and exposure to political discourse (Shrestha & Subedi, 2022). Outside political effectiveness, however, remains weak due to a lack of institutional responsiveness, gerontocratic leadership, and patronage-driven party systems (Hachhethu, 2025). As different studies in the international context suggest, the imbalance pushes the youth into other fields of participation beyond party politics, especially protests, campaigns, and social movements (Sapiro, 2004; Verba et al., 1995).

Youth civic culture theory further explains such change by anticipating the generational differences in political values and repertoires of action. Modern

generations use participatory, open-ended, horizontal forms of engagement rather than hierarchical, ideology-oriented politics (Dalton, 2008; Inglehart, 2018). Such orientation is reflected in a burgeoning preference towards issue-based activism, digital mobilization, and movement without leaders or loosely formed organized movements in Nepal. The involvement of the youth is often articulative and prescriptive because it is based on the needs of accountability, dignity, and social justice, and not loyalty to the long-term organizational commitment.

These theoretical lessons are particularly relevant when explaining the occurrence of the recent Gen Z movement in Nepal. The Gen Z mobilization embodies the main qualities identified in the modern social-movement literature, including a decentralized structure, a digital-first approach, symbolic protest, and cynicism toward traditional political actors (Bennett & Segerberg, 2023; Castells, 2015; Norris, 2003). Instead of being fuelled by official ideology, the movement is mainly driven by collective complaints about governance failures, corruption, insecurity, and the sense that neither political elites nor ordinary people resonate with the government. This form of mobilization shows how the youth are responding to political exclusion, not by withdrawing, but by engaging in controversial collective action.

However, the Gen Z movement also shows the structural constraints of the youth-led mobilization in Nepal. Although the movement demonstrated high mobilizing capacity, its work, sustainability, and political effects were limited by a lack of institutional connections, internal coordination systems, and access to policy-making (Magar, 2025). The theory of social movements posits that in the absence of organizational consolidation or institutional access, movements are prone to disorganization and decline following their peak mobilization (Sapkota, 2021; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). This dynamic would explain the witnessed increase in youth involvement in protest periods and the resulting challenge of converting such mobilization into lasting political change.

Rational-choice theories also explain why young people are not engaged in formal politics. Participation incurs time, financial, and safety risks that are compounded in situations where unemployment, labor migration, and political violence are likely (Standing, 2011; Kalyvas, 2006). Sustained political participation in party formations has little short-term payoff for most youth, particularly those facing vulnerable lives. Otherwise, social movements and digital activism reduce the cost of participation and offer symbolic and psychological gains, making them more desirable channels of activity.

The mismatch between youth's expectations and institutional realities thus emerges as a key explanatory theme. On the same ground, gender discrimination and androcentric worldview in party politics are equally critical issues in Nepal that enhance fear and illusions of gender mainstreaming in Nepal (Dahal, 2025).

As young people hope for a participatory, responsible, and meritocratic politics, Nepal's political institutions remain hierarchical, exclusionary, and patronage-based. The Gen Z movement is an example of this disjuncture: it is not indifference, but the deep dissatisfaction with the current political order. In this regard, disengagement of young people from formal politics must be understood as selective and strategic, rather than a priori (Pharr & Putnam 2000; Foa et al. 2020). All in all, the literature indicates that social movements are taking over political parties in mediating the youth participation in Nepal. Although these kinds of movements may jump-start talk of democracy and upset elite control, their role in democratic consolidation depends on their ability to connect controversial action with institutional change. Without meaningful avenues for youth involvement in formal politics, Nepal will remain in a cycle of protest, disillusionment, and disengagement rather than a sustainable form of democratic participation.

### **Conclusion**

The current review-based research shows that the influence on the youth participation in Nepalese politics is a complex interaction of motivational and demotivational forces at the individual, institutional, and structural levels. On the one hand, political socialization, issue-oriented activism, the desire to become democratic, and the growth of online interaction promote youth involvement in political life. Conversely, deeply rooted hierarchical party systems, political violence, clientelism, corruption, and economic insecurity are significant setbacks to long-term engagement. This duality can be used to justify why youth involvement in Nepal is usually acute but intermittent, with levels of mobilization high during periods of political conflict but low institutional persistence in normal democratic activities.

Through the youth age definition of between 16-40 years as stipulated by Nepal among its National Youth Policy 2082 (BS), the current study would place youth political participation within the socio-economic and political context that is unique to Nepal. The results highlight the need to urgently reform institutions to create substantive opportunities for youth inclusion beyond symbolic representation. Internal party democracy, merit-based leadership opportunities, reducing political coercion, and addressing socio-economic precarity are steps toward transforming youths from short-term mobilizers into long-term democratic stakeholders. In the absence of such reforms, there is a high probability of a continuation of a youth expectation-political reality gap, which would in turn secure the disengagement-protest cycles.

In summary, this paper argues that advancing research on youth politics in Nepal is essential to consolidating democratic institutions, fostering stability, and promoting inclusive governance. Moving forward, comparative and longitudinal research should explore shifting patterns of youth political attitudes

and participation. Additionally, policy-focused studies must evaluate the effectiveness of youth political reforms and engagement systems across all levels of government. Together, these directions will help inform strategies to enhance youth influence on Nepal's evolving democratic landscape.

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