

# Nepal's Gen-Z Revolt and Its Implications

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## Abstract

The Gen-Z revolt on September 8 and 9, 2025, in Nepal has not only shaken the *raison d'être* of the Nepali state but also changed the political landscape. The two-day revolt not only led to the death of 76 people, and burned down administrative buildings such as the central secretariat, parliament, presidential palace, supreme court, police booths, and local administrative offices throughout the country, but it also tore apart the confidence of Nepali citizens in the state and its institutions. Protestors selectively burned down houses of the political leaders and high-ranking officials. Top political leaders – who were in power for decades - were booted out. The then Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and his cabinet had to resign. The state institutions virtually collapsed. Billions of rupees' worth of property was gutted. In fact, Nepal lost around 5% of its total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) within less than 40 hours (RSS, 2025). Nepal's parliament was dissolved, and former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Sushila Karki, became the interim Prime Minister with the support of Gen-Z leaders. Karki's government was entrusted to hold the national election on March 5, 2026. With these changes, the constitution of Nepal, which was drafted through the constituent assembly, was put on a state of virtual abeyance. Although many constitutional experts argued that the interim government was constituted as per Article 61 of the current constitution, the nearest justification in that regard would have been the 'doctrine of necessity' that the President can exercise. This article aims to explore the factors that led to the Gen-Z revolt and its implications for Nepal in the future.

*Keywords:* Gen-Z revolt, political parties, geopolitics, governance, corruption.

## Introduction

The Gen-Z revolt has polarized Nepal's political spectrum. The dark politics (Nai & Maier, 2023) based on revenge and negation have taken center stage. The binary debates, centered around factors like good people versus bad people and young versus old, have dominated the political discourses in the country. We do not necessarily know to what extent new political forces/leaders are new and good, though. How are they different from others? What would be their take on democracy? They have come from varied backgrounds and professions, and few are from a full political background. How

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they would bring about changes in the life of the common people is not really spelled out. Without answering these questions, they were able to convince people in such a way that with their arrival, people should understand that change is already occurring, and more will come in the future. Today's Caesars don't make the sculptors, but they use social media, intellectuals, bloggers, pamphleteers, producers of television programs, and creators of memes who can sell his/her image to the public (Applebaum, 2020).

For now, however, the old political parties and their leaders have been projected as 'bad people', the new political parties and their leaders have emerged as messiahs or liberators of Nepali citizens. However, Nepal's old political parties and their leaders have immensely contributed to (re)installing democracy in the country. Many Nepali political leaders, academics, analysts, and even common people suspected the alleged involvement of the external actors in regime change. They are making such arguments primarily because in the past, these countries have shown keen interest in the formation of government in Kathmandu in one form or another. Nepal, located between two great powers, India and China, has had to face the brunt of geopolitical rivalry not only between them but also with its distant neighbor, the US. In their rivalry, Nepal has often been used as a launching pad in a broader geopolitical landscape.

### **Old State, New Problems**

The Nepali state is one of the oldest states in Asia, in the sense of the term. If we look back, the history of Nepal can be traced back to ancient times. The country used to be known as something different in a different time frame. For example, it used to be known as *Satyawati* in *Satya Yuga*, *Tapoban* in *Treta Yuga*, *Muktisopan* in *Dwapar Yuga*, and Nepal in *Kali Yuga* (Shrestha & Singh, 1972). Despite being an old state, Nepal has always remained new precisely because it has failed to make a political settlement to date. Certain contradictions contribute in that regard. While both the Nepali state and society are old, the political system it has implemented is completely new and does not align with societal values. Nepal's political leaders are not willing to strike a balance between new and old values and historical continuity. Conversely, this has led to the emergence of a unique type of uneasiness in the political governance of the state. Because of this, Nepal has to reinvent itself politically time and again. Among others, perhaps, this could be the reason why countries like Nepal also witness frequent movements of one sort or another. In that regard, it would be worthwhile to mention how the country has witnessed a series of upheavals during the last 75-plus years of its political history. The internal political unrest among the courtiers has existed even before the advent of modern politics (Uprety, 1992).

The upheavals that took place on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of September, 2025, however, are unique in the sense that they both shook the *raison d'être* of the Nepali state, as mentioned in the beginning, and the foundations of the old political parties, which have termed

themselves as the mainstream. At least, for now, the mainstreams have moved to the margins and new political actors have become the new mainstream. It would also be worthwhile to mention that during a decade-long violent rural insurgency launched by the then Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-Maoist), the state did not collapse. What certainly had happened, then, was systemic erosion of the state's Weberian power in more than one way. Whilst the overarching aim of the Maoist insurgency was to bring about fundamental changes in Nepal's governance system, Gen-Z revolt, a kind of urban insurgency, for its part, was to improve the quality of democracy, reform governance, and demand an end to corruption. This could also have been changed through the electoral process, but, among others, Nepal's political leaders were exercising pre-electoral alliances so that they could be elected frequently, which they did. This was only recycling the same number of political leaders, and it has led to the rise of some sort of disenchantment towards democracy itself.

Additionally, the politics of self-aggrandizement (Joshi & Rose, 1966) has always remained deeply rooted in the psyche of Nepali political leaders. To achieve the very objectives of self-aggrandizement, one can argue that they have floated various types of political ideologies, such as liberalism, socialism, Marxism, Maoism, conservatism, identity-based politics, regionalism-based politics, programmatic parties, B. P. Koirala's socialism, and Madan Bhandari's people's multiparty democracy. Strategic use, or rather misuse of ideologies, has certainly polluted their basic premises. Moreover, regardless of ideological differences between Marxist-Maoist-Leninist and Social Democrats, they always remained comrades in arms and always helped each other to cling to power. Neither did they come up with policies and programs that align with their respective ideologies, nor could we see ideological differences between them.

Apart from ideologies, Nepali political parties/leaders, too, have also exercised various types of political systems and models of governance over the years. Only model which is yet to be exercised is the directly elected executive (Prime Minister/President), and if the post Gen-Z politics succeeds or fails – in either case – it will remain on the menu. For Nepal's political leaders, it is the system per se which has been repeatedly projected as a major problem(s), not necessarily the political culture or behavior. Sadly, they blame the system, not themselves, for the failure of politics. Hence, one may still ask a question: if the political culture does not change, would the system alone provide political stability? The answer is definite 'no' because it is the people who drive the system.

### **Amorphous Mass, Polymorphous Power**

Earlier in July 2024, when the two largest political parties – Nepali Congress and Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) – along with other

smaller parties, formed a government, many were of the view that it would not only bring political stability but also put Nepal's failing economy back on track (Srinivasan & Jahan, 2026). However, neither Nepal became politically stable, nor did the economy return to track. But in practice, a nearly two-thirds majority government dashed people's aspirations and deeply cultivated nepotism and corruption, and ushered in bad governance. On the whole, people's resentment towards political parties and their leaders reached the point that ultimately spilled into the streets of Kathmandu in September, 2025. Nepali Congress and CPN (UML) – along with others – who prided themselves on their role in Nepal's democratization process – have been pushed back. Repercussions of Gen-Z revolt jolted the political scene in Kathmandu and installed new actors at the helm of governance.

Whatever transpired in Kathmandu on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2025, did not happen just overnight. For a long period of time, the people have been expressing their dissatisfaction towards the 'regime of political parties'. Unhappiness of different types was piling up. At the same time, others were waiting to wage urban insurgency, yet Nepal's political class, to the dismay of many, did not pay much attention or was unaware of the situation. In contrast, they have chosen to adopt the mantra of 'business as usual' and came up with their own justification for being in power.

The post-constitutional period (after 2015) did not really bring the type of politics that the Nepali people deserved. The elections were merely used to hijack the political process. When elections have also failed to yield change, there were very few options left for the citizens other than to group. Among others, these factors brought Gen-Z together, who ultimately rebelled against the 'business as usual' of political parties. Indeed, the background to this was already building up. Earlier, youths came up with initiatives/strategies like 'enough is enough' in June 2020 when the then government failed to address the Covid-19 crisis (Poudel, 2020). In the midst of the Covid-19 crisis, corruption skyrocketed to the extent that it became seemingly difficult for the common people to get lifesaving medicines.

These factors worked as a kind of trigger to mobilize Nepal's apolitical youths who, since then, began exploring possibilities of alternative politics in the country. Remarkably, this also coincided with the debate of alternative politics, which was sweeping across the world in one form or another. Some of them have launched new political parties to reshape Nepal's political sphere. The formation of the Rastriya Swatantra Party is a classic example in that regard. In the 2022 elections, the 'not again' campaign was floated (The Kathmandu Post, 2022). This time around, voters began electing leaders either from alternative political parties or independent candidates. The rise of non-ideological but programmatic political parties has emerged as a strong alternative to the established ideological/regional/identity-based politics of traditional parties. Today, they began challenging the kakistocracy of political parties.

The rise of new political parties and victories of independent candidates in the last elections had already signaled that, at some point in time, old political parties will be forced to vacate the place. It was not merely the rise of the new actors but a kind of regime change. The regime of political parties, as mentioned earlier, was replaced by the regime of ‘non-political’ actors. What may be interesting to reflect here, however, is the way ‘non-state actors’, through street protests as well as protests over social media, played a crucial role in steering regime change. These protests have been shaped and amplified by social media, digital devices, and platforms like Discord (Harsh, 2026). A similar methodology was applied across South Asia, including Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, to overthrow the governments.

### **Eros Effects in the Gen-Z Revolt**

There are two strands of argument(s) about Gen-Z revolt in Nepal. While the first strand argues that the revolt was a consequence of deeper frustration amplified by what scholars call Eros effects (Hirschman, 1977) that brought people together and threw the regime of political parties out of gear due to their misdeeds. The second strand, for its part, rather sees the role of the deep state backed up by geopolitical forces. The first factor is actually in tune with the reality Nepal has faced over the years. Interestingly, despite Nepal witnessing such a high voltage protest situation immediately became normal in such a way that as if nothing had happened in the country. What happened, then, can be equated with what Lenin said, “there are decades where nothing happens, but there are weeks where decades happen” (Shrestha, 2026).

That being said, all these factors, however, raise some fundamental questions as to what led to such a state of affairs in the midst of democratic consolidation. Many thought that after the promulgation of the constitution and the new political dispensation in place, Nepal would enter into an era of ‘milk and honey’ which would provide peace and stability as promised by none other than the dream merchants coming mainly from Nepal’s political classes. But that did not really happen. In contrast, Nepal witnessed more than ten governments (2015-2025) in ten years (EFSAS, 2024). Such changes in the government were very cosmetic because the same people were rotating on the helm of power – it was a kind of musical chair. Three to four people were able to capture the state power for nearly 35 years. There are examples where a handful of persons have become ministers more than a dozen times. This has blocked the circulation of new elites not only in politics but also in other sectors. When the same elites are recycled again and again, both in politics and other sectors, this cannot really bring about newness into the life of the state. It also does not provide intergenerational justice.

Why it has happened is the moot question here. Over a period of time, Nepal’s politics or democracy, for that reason, has led to the rise of a situation to such an extent that

only those who are affiliated with political parties or power centers could have access to opportunities. Appointment of judges in the courts, diplomatic appointments, appointments of academics in the universities and other public institutions were distributed among political parties not by factoring meritocracy and need, but merely based on loyalty and political affiliation (Joshi, 2026). Moreover, political parties and leaders have also captured other sectors, including the economic sector. They, altogether, blocked opportunities for the youths in the country. One may argue that they formed a kind of glass ceiling wherein only those would become entrepreneurs who had connections with political parties in one way or another. Paradoxical as it may be, while children of most of the political leaders who came into politics after the political change of the 1990s became either medical doctors or engineers, in the same manner, a child of the political leaders who came into politics after the political change of 2005/06 has entered/or would, henceforth, become an entrepreneur. Likewise, the children of bureaucrats are mostly abroad. Therefore, in Nepal, the elites never felt the need to make changes through policy interventions in the country. Whatever policies and programs have come into force have merely served the interests of elites and their 'nepokids'. In the long run, this has only led to the rise of what Douglas North calls a limited access order (North, 2009).

The state has been used for their benefit by certain groups only. Those who were not affiliated with political parties were left in the lurch. Their last resort for survival then was 'foreign employment' in the West Asian countries, India, and other parts of the world. All taken together, this has led to the spectacular rise of 'mass resignation' of youths from the state and society. For the majority, the situation of this kind can be equated with what can be referred to as the 'tragedy of the commons. This has been happening right after the 1990s political change. In fact, today, three generations of Nepali people are living outside, and we have reached the point where children are growing up without parents, and spouses are living away from each other. People who are affiliated with the political parties always want to maintain the status quo because it benefits them, and those who are not are looking for change. So, the Gen-Z uprising was the consequence of Nepal's deep-rooted political/economic practices/approaches, which influenced policies very badly.

Apart from that, the politics of negation is another reason. Every political change alienated certain groups/section of people from the state and society because there are winners as well as losers. No attempt has been made to bring both parties together. This cycle has been recurring as early as the 1950s when Nepal ushered in the Western model of democracy for the first time (Chamlagain, 2025). Likewise, corruption became rampant, and it has been socialized and reached the point where Nepal was in danger of

being blacklisted by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), but is currently in the grey list (FATF, 2026). Nepal's economy, too, failed to produce employment for its bulging youth population. Today, more than 25 percent of the national GDP is dependent on remittances (Nepal Rastra Bank, 2026). Yet the political class was defending itself, and they always found everything hunky-dory.

By and large, old political parties have failed to read societal dynamics, let alone fulfil the aspirations of the people. Such a state of affairs was sufficient for the type of protest that occurred on Sept 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> in Nepal last year. The protestors carried out indiscriminate vandalism of public and private properties to express their frustration. There might be other motives, but one important factor is that they targeted specific and selected institutions. For example, they torched the parliament building, which they thought was the symbol of power abuse. Likewise, they arsoned the offices of the executive (Singha Durbar), as they saw it as a symbol of corruption. In the same vein, they torched the Supreme Court, which they saw as the center of injustice. They targeted multiple businesses, the symbols of crony capitalism, which have been generating inequality. Parties and their leaders were attacked primarily because they have been a big source of political instability and the mother of all the problems for a long time (Bhatta, 2025).

### **Factors of Gen-Z Revolt**

Many people see the role of external actors or that of the deep state in Nepal's Gen-Z revolt, even though Nepal's internal political situation was sufficient enough to have a rebellion, as discussed in the earlier chapter. That being said, there are three schools of thought as to why people perceive in the way they do. While the first school is built around affiliation with those who, in one way or another, were in the forefront of the Gen-Z revolt. Many of them had engaged with Youth Councils (YCs) run by Western countries and their agencies, while many others might have been funded to run their organizations. Many might have studied in Western universities (Journal of Political Science, 2026). Paradoxical as it may be, all of them were put into one basket and were alleged to have their share of role in the youth revolt. We should not just draw conclusions based on perceptions alone in today's highly interdependent and globalized world.

What may still be worth pondering upon would be the type of support Nepal has been receiving after the political change of 2005/06 from multiple agencies in its peace process. Nepal needed external support during that time to take the peace process toward a logical conclusion. The country even invited UNMIN (United Nations Mission to Nepal) to facilitate it and its other paraphernalia. As part of democracy promotion and leadership building, Nepal has been receiving substantial

international support during the last two decades. In that regard, substantial support was also provided to the youths coming from different backgrounds. Paradoxically, many people are of the view that it is this architecture developed by the donors that ultimately overthrew the regime of the old political parties under the pretext of Gen-Z revolt. Earlier, these youths championed the idea of alternative politics, which Nepal's mainstream political parties have projected as externally injected ones. That being said, the current situation, however, would not have arrived had the old political parties really practiced democracy based on justice for all, not merely in theory but also in practice as well. This led to the rise of the highest level of frustration in society. This irked not only the people at large in Nepal but also Nepal's well-wishers.

The second school of thought is related to the manner that led to the formation of the post-Gen-Z government and subsequent removal of old guards from power. A sizable number of people opine that the government was installed by the Western powers, mainly the US. Their suspicion increased when there was news of a congratulatory message coming from the Dalai Lama's office to newly appointed Prime Minister Sushila Karki, which hit the Nepali media (*The Himalayan Times*, September 13, 2025). Neither was there any comment from the Chinese side. The Dalai Lama's office never sent such congratulatory notes to any Prime Minister of Nepal in the past. Similarly, some international media outlets also came up with stories linking Nepal's Gen-Z revolt as externally funded (Harsh, 2026). Perhaps, earlier incidents in the region (Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) where regime change was said to have occurred with outside involvement (Bhatta, 2013) might have forced people to believe in that way as well.

The third factor is related to broader geopolitical questions, which entail factors related to: (i) Nepal's geographical location, (ii) regional stability, and (iii) promoting democracy as a global good. These three factors are worth looking into primarily because in today's globalized world, there is a very thin line between global and local. A politically unstable country, like Nepal, can easily steal political limelight not only in the neighborhood but beyond that. Yet they all can have their own understanding/concern with instability as well. Likewise, if democracy slides back, that becomes a concern for the broader international community. The international community has significantly contributed to Nepal's democratization process, and they certainly do not want it to be hijacked by certain groups alone.

Geopolitical maneuvering in Nepal is well known. Nepal took American assistance for the infrastructure development through the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact, and it also became a part of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). While China projected Nepal as part of its Global Security Initiative (GSI)

despite Nepal's clarification on it. Earlier, the US wanted Nepal to be a part of the State Partnership Program (SPP) (Adhikari & Acharya, 2025). By and large, Nepal has failed to strike a fine balance between three powers – India, China, and the US – and created a geopolitical space wherein these three powers are competing with each other in the country. Nepal's traditional political parties, despite having significant experience in navigating difficult geopolitics, could not navigate Nepal's foreign policy pragmatically.

The historical geopolitical rivalry between Nepal's two neighbors, India and China, along with the entry of Western actors in recent years, has made Nepal's domestic politics highly unstable (Sharma, 2024). But one cannot simply blame external actors alone. While external factors could have had an impact on domestic politics, it becomes only possible when domestic actors align with external actors for political benefits. Similarly, when domestic politics completely fails to function, or there is perpetual political instability, it also invites external actors. In Nepal, the subservient nature of political leadership has paved the way for geopolitics to be played out (Sharma, 2024).

After the abolition of the monarchy in 2008, Nepal's political center became weak. The political parties largely failed to fill the space occupied by the monarchy while dealing with external powers, primarily because many of them are geopolitically divided (Bhatta, 2013). There is no doubt that Nepal has always remained geopolitically vulnerable because of its geographical location and economic dependency caught between the two reemerging but also competing and conflicting global powers – China and India – and more so with the arrival of Western powers, mainly, the US. Nevertheless, the severity of the vulnerability was not fully realized by the domestic leaders.

Gen-Z revolt, among others, was also to reform the politics, at least in principle, apart from their initial demand to lift the ban on social media. Nevertheless, the way it unfolded, or rather turned violent, ensuing regime change, and modus operandi raises more questions than the answers it may offer. How did the government of one of the oldest states in Asia crumble down so quickly? How come the state institutions collapsed in less than thirty hours? To answer these questions, one has to look into the way the state has been perceived by the successive rulers as well as the elites of this country. The perpetual decline of the state institutions is not natural but inherently designed. At a time when the state, undeniably, has been taken as an object or matter of social, economic, and political exploitation by the politicians and elites of various natures, one cannot really expect its institutions to be strengthened as they ought to be. Such perceptions towards the state, in tandem with forces of globalization, ideologically-laden political parties, civil society groups, and the market, in the long run, could further systematically weaken the institutional mechanism of the state.

## Conclusion

How do we explain Nepal's Gen-Z revolt: is it merely an urban insurgency, a war against the old, geopolitical game, or an attempt at democratic reform? These four questions are important, but they truly cannot be answered immediately. As of now, one can argue that Nepal witnessed one of the most violent political movements in its history. The elected government was removed from the street protests. Although Nepal was able to avoid a complete state collapse, the kakistocracy of political parties has assaulted the democratic system and resulted in the public's resentment towards democracy in general and the regime of the political parties in particular. The way the Nepali state has been challenged, and unelected entities were entrusted to define democratic norms and values from their own perspectives, and plans could set a dangerous precedent for the future. They will not only create internal contradictions but also expand space for geopolitical adventurism. Ultimately, the phenomenon of this kind may have consequences not only for Nepal's democratization process but also weaken the pillars of the Nepali state. To further emphasize, the manner in which the government was overthrown from the streets may encourage others to do the same in the future, if their demands are not fulfilled. This will, in turn, give rise to 'warlordism' in politics.

If the Gen-Z revolt does not usher in positive outcomes, people surely will equate it with a kind of urban insurgency or merely a war against the old. Consequently, the sacredness that Gen-Z revolt enjoys, so far, will fade away. And the 'saints' of Gen-Z revolt, would then definitely be termed as 'sinners'. Likewise, the binary debates in Nepali society (anchored around biology - old vs young, men vs. women, and others) and the complete absence of civic virtues are something we have to worry about. They, together, would invite obstacles for the smooth functioning of society. When the state is weak and societal fabrics also become weaker, no power can save that country. Perhaps, it is high time for Nepal not only to strengthen the capacity of the state institutions but also to strengthen its civic virtues. When the domestic political spectrum is polarized along biological and geopolitical lines, apart from other factors of polarization, this has the potential to hinder navigating the country from the complex geopolitical situation. We also live in an era of transactional geopolitics and geoeconomics where national interests define the values and not the values defining national interests. Nepal should pay greater attention to managing its own house in the first place, which alone can provide the necessary strength to deal with geopolitical undercurrents.

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