

Santosh Sharma Poudel, Supun Dahal, Mallika Ojha, Suvexa Pradhan Tuladhar  
February 2026

# Nepal's Gen-Z Movement

*Youth's Views and Voices about  
Political Future*



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# Executive Summary

This report analyses Nepal's Gen-Z movement as a defining moment in the country's recent political history, examining its causes, dynamics, and implications for Nepal's political future. Triggered by the government's September 2025 decision to ban multiple social media platforms, the movement quickly evolved beyond a single policy dispute into a broader expression of public frustration with systemic corruption, weak governance, political instability, and elite capture. While Gen-Z youth were the most visible initiators and participants, the grievances articulated through the movement resonate widely across Nepali society and reflect long-standing structural challenges.

Survey findings show that Nepal's Gen-Z is politically aware, actively engaged with news, primarily through digital media, and prepared to participate in both protest and electoral politics. Their mobilisation was driven less by ideological agendas and more by demands for accountability, integrity, and leadership renewal. Although distrust of mainstream political parties and political establishment is high, Gen-Z does not reject democracy or the party system itself. Instead, the movement calls for regeneration: cleaner politics, internal party reform, and leaders capable of prioritising national interest over factional competition and personal power.

Electorally, Gen-Z preferences reveal a shift towards anti-establishment figures and emerging political forces, who are valued for their perceived decisiveness and independence from patronage networks. Strong support for a directly elected executive highlights frustration with coalition politics and unstable governments. In response, major parties have attempted to reframe parliamentary elections in quasi-presidential terms by declaring prime-ministerial candidates, creating the perception that voters are choosing a Prime Minister rather than electing representatives to a deliberative parliament.

Despite deep dissatisfaction with governance outcomes, the movement reaffirmed trust in electoral procedures. The rapid transition from street mobilisation to a constitutional roadmap, culminating in elections under an interim government, contrasts with more violent and prolonged transitions elsewhere in the region. However, the report identifies a key tension: while the structural problems highlighted by the movement require time to address, Gen-Z displays limited patience for incremental reform. The upcoming elections therefore represent a critical juncture, either enabling political renewal or risking further disillusionment should governance failures persist.

# 1. Introduction

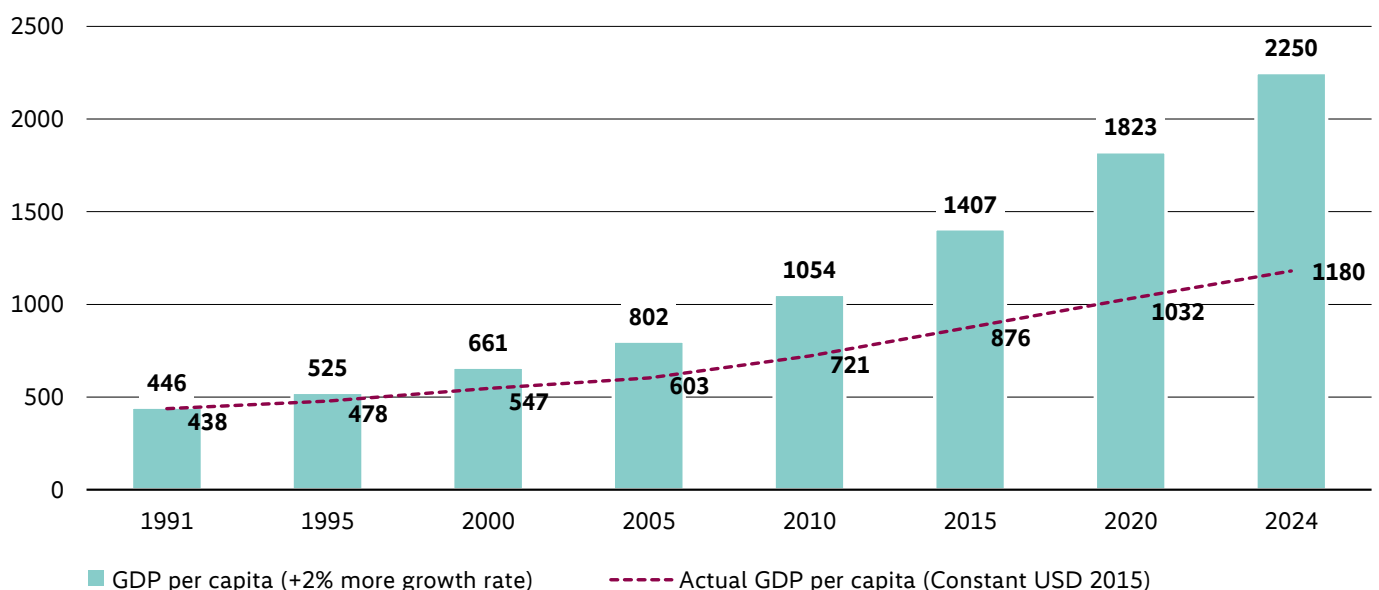
On 8 and 9 September 2025, Nepal experienced an unusually rapid, and nationwide wave of youth mobilisation that came to be known as the Gen-Z movement<sup>1</sup>. What began as a reaction to the government’s decision to block major social media platforms under restrictive new registration rules quickly evolved into a broader protest systemic corruption, weak governance, and a perceived unresponsive political class. On 8 September, thousands of young people demonstrated in Kathmandu and other major urban centres. Clashes with security forces resulted in at least 19 deaths and more than 100 injuries. On 9 September, unrest escalated further with targeted attacks on government institutions and the private residences of high-profile political figures. This pressure culminated in the resignation of Prime Minister, Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli. In the immediate aftermath, President Ram Chandra Paudel dissolved the House of Representatives and appointed former Chief Justice Sushila Karki to lead an interim council of ministers. The caretaker government is now tasked with conducting general elections on 5 March 2026.

## The Roots of Discontent: Political and Economic Stagnation

The movement emerged against a backdrop of deep-seated political decay, economic stagnation, and institutional corruption. Nepal’s contemporary politics has been shaped by cyclical pattern of intense political movements followed by profound disappointment in governance and service delivery. While the 1990 People’s Movement restored multiparty democracy, but the subsequent decades brought conflict, institutional contestation, and frequent government turnover. Even the Maoist insurgency (1996–2006) ended with a negotiated transition that culminated in the abolition of the monarchy in 2008. The adoption of a new 2015 Constitution and the post-2015 federal era did not produce the stability, accelerated development, and good governance that many young Nepalis had expected. Instead, coalition bargaining became the routine mechanism for government formation and survival, with executive authority consumed by alliance management rather than policy execution. Since

Actual GDP per capita vs. GDP per capita with +2 per cent growth

Fig. 1



Note: Hypothetical (+2 per cent calculation) by authors

Source: World Development Indicators, 2026

<sup>1</sup> On 11 December 2025, the interim government signed an agreement with various Gen-Z groups, which led the Gen-Z protests, and recognised the protests as Gen-Z movement.

the republic began in 2008, Nepal has seen 16 government changes, with not a single government administration completing a full five-year term (European Foundation for South Asian Studies, 2024).

The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Democracy Index explains why procedural democratic practice failed to translate into subsequent reform through normal democratic channels (EIU, 2025). Since 2015, Nepal has struggled to move beyond the classification of a “hybrid regime,” characterised by regular elections, but hampered by weak checks and balances, uneven civil liberties, and poor institutional performance. While Nepal scores relatively higher on political participation, it falters on the “functioning of government,” reflecting a gap between citizen engagement and the state’s ability to deliver services (EIU, 2025). By 2024, a decline in civil liberties, and an increasingly undemocratic political culture, shaped by patronage networks rather than programmatic competition, set the stage for the September 2025 social media ban, the final spark that ignited the movement (EIU, 2025).

### Economic Frustration and the “Opportunity Loss”

This political churn coincided with an economy unable to generate secure enough jobs for a large, growing young population, pushing many to seek opportunities abroad. Despite successive leaders and policy documents promising double-digit growth, actual growth has stagnated at around four per cent (WBG, 2026). The chart below shows the gaps visible in long-run income trends and how

decades of underperformance translate into everyday opportunity loss. If Nepal had grown just two percentage points faster annually since the early 1990s, GDP per capita by 2024 would be nearly double its current level (See Figure 1). This “opportunity loss” has pushed domestic workforce abroad. Remittances now account for roughly a quarter of Nepal’s GDP (WBG, 2023) and have become a defining feature of the national political economy. The World Bank estimates that a national economy relies on households’ survival through foreign employment rather than domestic productivity (WBG, 2023). The economic roots of this uprising underscore how Gen-Z’s political voice is intrinsically tied to their demand for a good future at home (Atlantic Council, 2025).

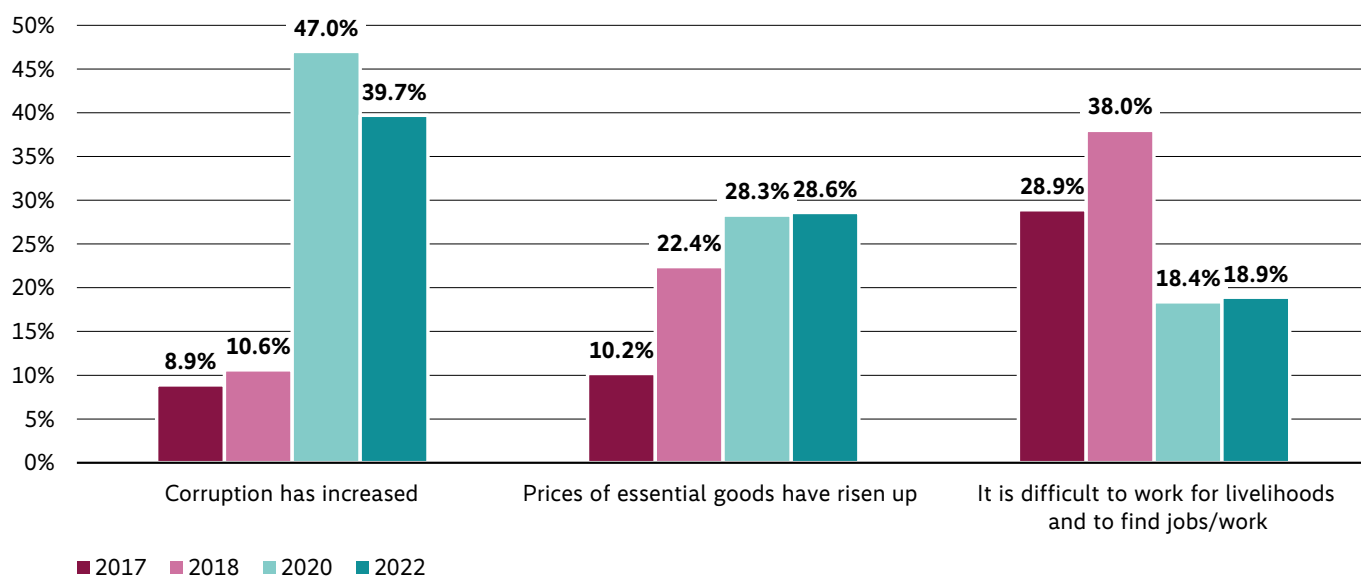
Youth unemployment has risen to 12.6 per cent, reinforcing the sentiment that the current system does not reward education and effort (NSO, 2023). This is reflected in the surge of education-related emigration; the number of students seeking No Objection Certificates (NOC) has risen from roughly 30,000 in the mid-2010s to over 110,000 by 2022/23 (MoEST, 2024). Hence, the growing share of the country’s better-educated and more upwardly mobile youths are interested in pursuing studies and careers abroad.

### Shifting Perceptions of the “Biggest Problem”

Public opinion data from the Survey of the Nepali People, 2022, shows a clear shift in what Nepalis saw as the country’s biggest problem. In 2017 and 2018, economic issues dominated, with job scarcity cited by roughly 28.9

Biggest problem in Nepal (top 3), by year

Fig. 2



Source: Survey of the Nepali People, 2022

per cent and 38 per cent, respectively. During the same period, only about 8.9 per cent to 10.6 per cent cited corruption as a primary concern (See Figure 2). However, by 2020, “corruption has increased” to about 47 per cent as the top perceived problem, remaining a dominant concern in 2022 at about 39.7 per cent, alongside rising concern over prices at about 28.6 per cent (TAF and KU, 2022). This aligns with Nepal’s broader governance context, where the country scores between the highly corrupt range of 27 and 35 (on a scale of 0 to 100, with 100 indicating no corruption) in Transparency International’s (TI), Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). TI’s annual reports have consistently flagged Nepal for policy corruption, where politicians legalise graft through policy changes to bypass the oversight of anti-corruption bodies (TI, 2025). This period is also defined by high-profile corruption scandals, such as the Bhutanese refugee scam, the Lalita Niwas land grab, the Omni Group medical procurement scandal, and the Pokhara International Airport construction cost inflation, among others (Kantipur Daily, 8 December 2025).

## Structural Triggers: Demographics and Digital Connectivity

Two structural shifts help explain why frustration could convert into fast collective action. First, Nepal is demographically young; the 2021 Census shows that youth (aged 15-24) comprise about one-fifth of the population, totalling 5.1 million [National Statistics Office (NSO), 2025]. Second, digital connectivity has expanded exponentially. Internet use rose from negligible levels in the mid-1990s to above half the population (about 55.8 per cent) by 2023 (WBG, 2023). This expansion effectively transformed digital space into a national arena where grievances, comparisons, and mobilisation cues spread quickly [World Bank Group (WBG), 2023]. Together, a young population, slow service delivery, persistent corruption concerns, and high digital connectivity created a context that consequently pushed legitimacy questions into open public debate rather than leaving them as private frustrations.

Against this backdrop, the September 2025 Gen-Z movement emerged to challenge the political status quo and an overhaul of politics for a delivery-driven mobilisation. The social media on 4 September 2025, acted as the catalytic trigger after media companies failed to register, as the issue intersected with a wider legitimacy crisis (Baral, 4 September 2025). It disrupted the primary channels through which young people shared evidence of building narratives of inequality and coordinated action.

Digital culture also shaped protest imaginaries by making elite privilege publicly visible and emotionally resonant. Viral “nepo kids” and “nepo babies” framing sharpened anger at patronage and impunity, casting them as systemic

rather than accidental. Local incident reinforced this perception. For example, the Harisiddhi hit-and-run involving a Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML) leader’s vehicle<sup>2</sup> ended without legal consequences for the leader (The Kathmandu Post, 6 September 2025), leading many youths to interpret it as another case of politically connected actors escaping accountability. Activists had already laid the groundwork for this movement. In 2020, they launched the online “enough is enough” campaign, and in 2023, Prem Acharya’s self-immolation publicly expressed deep frustration with state misconduct.

## Mobilisation and the Path to the 2026 Election

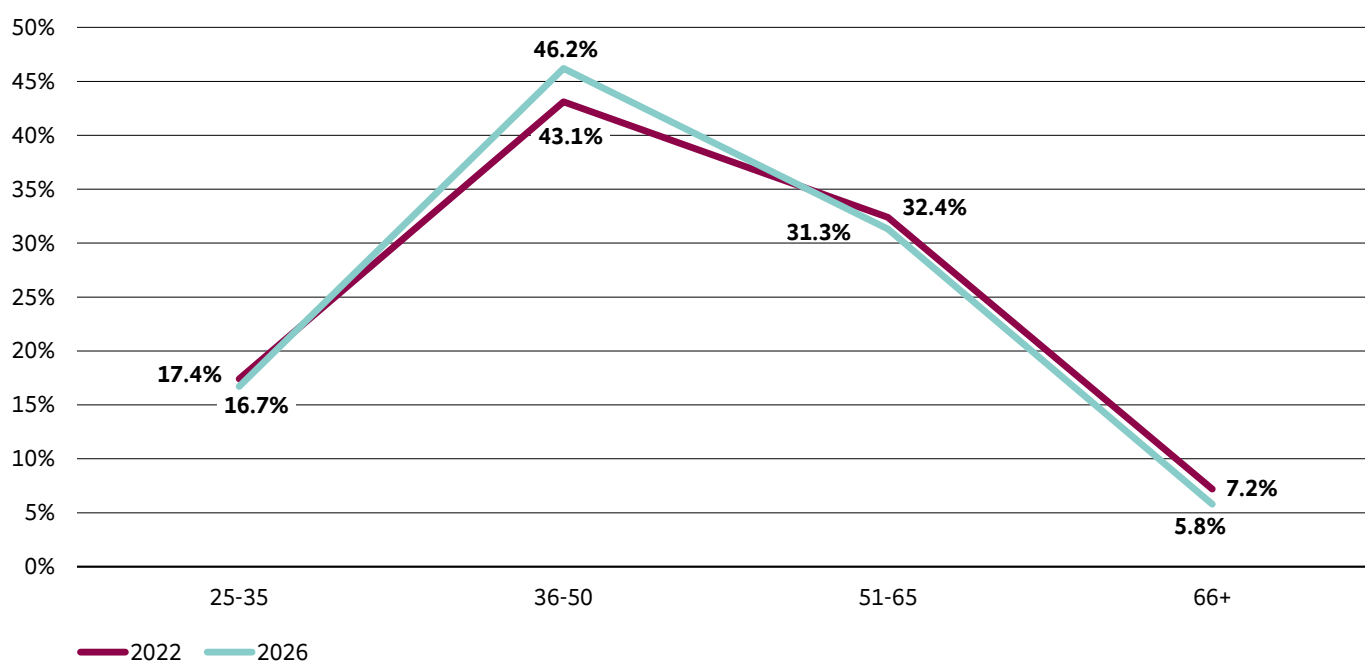
Organisers utilised social media as a rapid mobilisation infrastructure. Organisers produced shareable digital pamphlets, circulated them through national and local groups, coordinated with active youth in multiple districts, and managed multiple online pages for communication. They called protests for 8 September 2025, drawing large demonstrations in Kathmandu and other cities. Police then used lethal force against protesters, killing 19 young people and injuring hundreds. This crackdown transformed the political meaning of the mobilisation from a dispute over platform access into a broader accountability crisis centred on state violence, impunity, and institutional failure. The following day, 9 September 2025, rapid mobilisation escalated into arson and attacks on major political and state targets, and the crisis intensified into a full-blown regime legitimacy confrontation. The government soon lifted the social media ban, and Oli resigned on 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2025. By then, however, protestors had shifted agenda toward justice, accountability, and political renewal.

Post-protest, Nepal entered a rapid but fragmented transition. Authorities dissolved the House of Representatives and installed an interim arrangement under former Chief Justice Sushila Karki, scheduling early general elections for 5 March 2026 to elect a new House of Representatives. Although mobilisation generated nationwide momentum, organisers did not unify under a single structure. Instead, several Gen-Z formations, including the Gen-Z Movement Alliance, the Council of Gen-Z, and the Gen-Z Front, operated in parallel, alongside splinter groups. They often diverged on priorities, sequencing, and expectations of state “delivery.”

On 11 December 2025, the government and Gen-Z representatives signed a 10-point agreement that formally recognised the movement and committed to investigate the 8–9 September incidents, ensure accountability, provide victim support and compensation, and advance governance and political reforms. The cabinet later tied

<sup>2</sup> The vehicle was carrying Koshi Province Minister for Economic Affairs and Planning, Ram Bahadur Magar, and enroute to the CPN(UML) statute convention. The child suffered minor injuries.

## Age distribution of house of representatives candidates



Source: Election Commission Candidates List, 2022, 2026

decisions to implementing parts of the accord, including expanding the inquiry commission's mandate (Giri, 11 December 2025). However, some Gen-Z groups rejected the agreement (Giri, 11 December 2025).

The post-protest period quickly took shape around two overlapping dynamics. First, the state moved to restore order, manage accountability, and organise elections. Second, a crowded and competitive political field emerged as parties, new groups, and movement-aligned actors claimed the language of reform and “renewal” within a crisis-shaped timetable. More than 120 political parties applied to contest the 5 March election (Ghimire, 1 December 2025), which signals both fragmentation and opportunity. This surge reflects not just administrative volume but a broader legitimacy challenge facing established parties, as movement energy spilled into institutional politics.

As shown in Figure 3 below, the shift is visible in the candidate demographics; the 2026 candidate pool skews slightly younger than in 2022: the share aged 36–50 has increased (46.2 per cent vs 43.1 per cent), the share aged 66+ has declined (5.8 per cent vs 7.2 per cent), and the 25–35 and 51–65 cohorts remain broadly stable. This is the clear evidence of a generational shift in political momentum.

As of late January 2026, preparations for the 5 March vote remain on schedule. The Election Commission has affirmed its readiness despite logistical challenges posed by geography and harsh weather in high-altitude regions. This

progress shows how rapidly street contention has translated into a formal transitional process. It also shows that the Gen-Z movement's legacy now hinges in part on whether elections and ensuing governments can credibly address demands that emerged from a moment of deep public distrust.

### Global Pattern

Nepal's September 2025 mobilisation fits into a broader global pattern of youth-led, digitally enabled contention that has unfolded since the early 2010s. The Arab Spring, which began in Tunisia in late 2010, showed how youth frustration over corruption, exclusion, and state abuse could rapidly scale through networked mobilisation. In South Asia, India's 2011 anti-corruption mobilisation pushed institutional reform, culminating in the adoption of the Lokpal and Lokayukta Act in 2013, demonstrating how grievance-based street politics can seek accountability mechanisms rather than revolutionary rupture.

In a different register, the Fridays for Future, sparked by Greta Thunberg's 2018 school strike, illustrated the power of horizontal organising and moral framing without a conventional party structure (Watts, 2019). More recent regional cases show a similar “trigger plus accumulation” dynamic. For example, in Sri Lanka in 2022, Aragalaya unfolded amid severe economic collapse, with high inflation, and severe shortages that politicised everyday survival (Perera, 2024). In Bangladesh in 2024, student mobilisation began with renewed controversy over public

sector job quotas and escalated into a wider confrontation over state repression and political legitimacy (Ahmed and Kapur, 2025).

For Nepal, these cases matter not as templates, but as circulating reference points. Social media diffuses their narrative, shapes protest imaginaries, speed up diffusion, and sometimes intensify escalation scripts. The ultimate success of the Gen-Z Movement now depends on whether the 2026 elections can produce a government capable of responding to a generation that has lost all faith in the status quo.

## Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Analyse the perceptions, attitudes, and political aspirations of Nepal's Gen-Z youth following the 2025 Gen-Z Movement and also to assess how these factors shape their engagement with governance, democracy, and political participation in Nepal.
2. Examine political awareness, institutional trust, and level of civic engagement among Gen-Z youths across all seven provinces of Nepal.
3. Identify the major factors influencing Gen-Z participation in the recent movement and evaluate youth perceptions regarding the interim government and upcoming March 2026 elections.
4. Provide policy-relevant insights for government, political actors, and civil society on how to meaningfully engage and empower Gen-Z into governance and decision-making processes.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study, employs a mixed-methods research design to analyse the multifaceted nature of Nepal's Gen-Z movement. By combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, the mixed-method design enables a comprehensive exploration of how Gen-Z in Nepal perceives the country's political environment, their level of engagement, and their vision for the future.

The quantitative data identifies measurable trends and allow for demographic generalizations across the youth population. Complementing this, qualitative insights offer deeper understanding of the motivations, emotions, and interpretations that underpin these statistical trends. This dual approach ensures that the study captures both the scale of youth sentiment and the nuanced narratives driving the Gen-Z movement.

## Data Collection Methods

### Survey

The study targeted Nepal's Gen-Z population, defined as those aged 16 to 28 years. According to the 2021 National Census, the total estimated Gen-Z population in Nepal is 7,245,427 individuals (NSO, 2021).

Based on the population, the sample size of the survey was 848, at a 98 per cent confidence interval and a four per cent margin of error (See Annex I for detailed survey sample calculation methodology).

The sampling strategy employed stratification to ensure representative cross-section of the population based on: All Seven Provinces, Urban and Rural areas, Gender, and Ethnicity. The research applied population weights to distribute the sample proportionally across these strata.

Following data cleaning, the final dataset comprised of 865 respondents, which involved excluding incomplete submissions where the respondents answered less than half of the questions. The sample represents 78 municipalities (hereafter called palikas), with 47 of these units providing 10 or more respondents. Annex II provides a detailed comparison between the expected sample vis-à-vis the actual sample distributions across demographic categories. The research team administered digitally using survey Kobo Toolbox platform to ensure data integrity and real time monitoring.

### Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

To complement the quantitative findings, the research team conducted FGDs in 11 locations across the nation, with a particular focus on urban centers (See Annex III). Each FGD included 6-10 participants from the Gen-Z cohort, selected purposely to capture diversity in Gender, Educational Background, and Political Engagement. All discussions were recorded (with participant consent) and transcribed for analysis.

### Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

- To further contextualise the Gen-Z participants perspectives, 10 KIIs were conducted with range of stakeholders, including:
- Leaders and representatives of mainstream political parties
- Emerging Gen-Z political figures and youth activists
- Scholars, analysts, and media commentators
- Civil society representatives engaged in youth and democracy-related work

To ensure confidentiality and privacy, personal identifiers were removed from the datasets, except for KII participants who explicitly consented to being quoted by name (see Annex IV).

## Data Analysis

The study integrated findings from the three data collection methods to provide a holistic understanding of the Gen-Z movement in Nepal.

- *Quantitative Analysis:* The research team coded and analysed survey data using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). We applied descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, and mean) and inferential analysis, including cross-tabulations, chi-square tests, and correlation analyses, to identify key trends and associations between demographic characteristics and political perceptions. (See Annex V and Annex VI for detailed statistical outputs).
- *Qualitative Analysis:* The research team analysed data from FGDs and KIIs thematically using content analysis. This process categorised emerging themes under major conceptual dimensions, such as political engagement, generational identity, and perceptions of political reform.
- *Triangulation:* The integration of findings from quantitative and qualitative strands will enable triangulation, allowing the study to identify both the structural and subjective dimensions of the Gen-Z political phenomenon, including its causes, motivations, and implications for the future of Nepal's political landscape.

## Ethical Considerations

All participants received information regarding the study's purpose and their right to voluntary participation and withdrawal. The research team obtained verbal informed consent from survey and FGD participants and written consent from KII interviewees prior to data collection. To ensure confidentiality and privacy, we removed personal identifiers from the datasets, except for KII participants who explicitly consented to being quoted by name (see Annex IV).

## Limitations of the Study

- The survey was conducted in two phases (13 to 31 November 2025, and 2 to 18 January 2026) approximately four to two months prior to the elections. Given the fluid and rapidly evolving nature of Nepal's political environment, voter preferences may have shifted closer to election day, limiting the predictive strength of the findings.
- The ethnicity category classified respondents into Arya/Khas, Indigenous communities, Madheshi, and Dalit groups. The 'other' category, which constitutes about four per cent of the population according to the 2021 Census and includes religious minorities such as Muslims and Christians, was represented by only three respondents. Due to insufficient sample size, this group was excluded from disaggregated analysis.
- Data collection coincided with internal leadership contestation within the Nepali Congress (NC), notably Gagan Thapa's challenge to then-party president Sher Bahadur Deuba [Thapa later became the party President]. The survey indicates that some Gen-Z respondents are willing to reconsider mainstream parties under new leadership. As a result, support for the NC may be understated in the findings.
- During the survey period, Kulman Ghising registered a party, merged with the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), and later broke away. These rapid shifts may have created respondent uncertainty and potentially affects his recorded support.
- For most of the survey period, Shah was not affiliated with the RSP. Respondents were asked about a hypothetical scenario regarding their support if he were to register for a party. Following his eventual association with the RSP, it remains unclear whether expressed support would directly translate into party-level support. Similar was the case with hypothetical Gen-Z activists' party, who have largely coalesced with the RSP.
- This survey includes only aged 16 to 28 years, of whom some will not even qualify to vote. Meanwhile, it does not include voters above 28 years, which is about two-thirds of total registered voters. Thus, the report should NOT be read as a national preference of all voters.

Taken together, these limitations suggest that the results should be interpreted as indicative of broader attitudes and trends among Gen-Z voters rather than as precise forecasts of electoral outcomes.

## 2. Political Awareness and Activity of Gen-Z

Youth emigration remains a major concern and challenge for Nepal's development. Every day, nearly 3000 young people leave the country for foreign employment, and over 300 students apply for the NOC required for foreign studies (MoLESS, 2024/25; MoEST, 2023/24). This survey reflects the national trend, with one in four respondents reporting an intention to migrate abroad for employment or higher education. Despite this outward orientation, migration does not necessarily negate youth political engagement. Youth participation has historically been central to Nepal's political transformations, including the 1996 insurgency and the 2006 People's Movement. However, the 2025 Gen-Z movement represents a non-partisan anomaly, unlike youth involvement in previous movements, largely driven by politically affiliated student unions (Snellinger, 2018).

Against this backdrop, the 2025 Gen-Z movement emerged independently of traditional power structures, and the following findings on youth political awareness and activity provide an empirical lens to assess contemporary claims of disengagement.

### Perceptions of Political Awareness and Activity<sup>3</sup>

The survey reveals a gap between the perceived political awareness and actual participation. Half of the respondents believed they were unaware, while only 43 per cent considered themselves aware. Regarding political activeness, only 17 per cent of the respondents rated themselves as active, while a large majority, 82 per cent, were inactive. Delving deeper, only 11 per cent of the respondents consider themselves politically aware and active. Interestingly, five per cent of respondents identified themselves as politically unaware but nevertheless politically active. While a small proportion, this suggests that political participation may extend beyond formal political awareness, potentially operating through everyday social interactions rather than informed political engagement.

These numbers mirror NIPoRe's previous 2022 youth perception survey, which revealed that 42.7 per cent and 17.6 per cent of the youth (aged 18-30) considered themselves politically aware and politically active,

respectively (Poudel et al., 2024). The similarity between the pre-Gen-Z movement and post-Gen-Z movement survey findings suggest that youth political awareness and activity in Nepal remained largely unchanged. Hence, the Gen-Z movement was driven by long-standing frustrations rather than a sudden shift in political awareness.

### Pre Gen-Z Movement Engagement and Gender Gaps

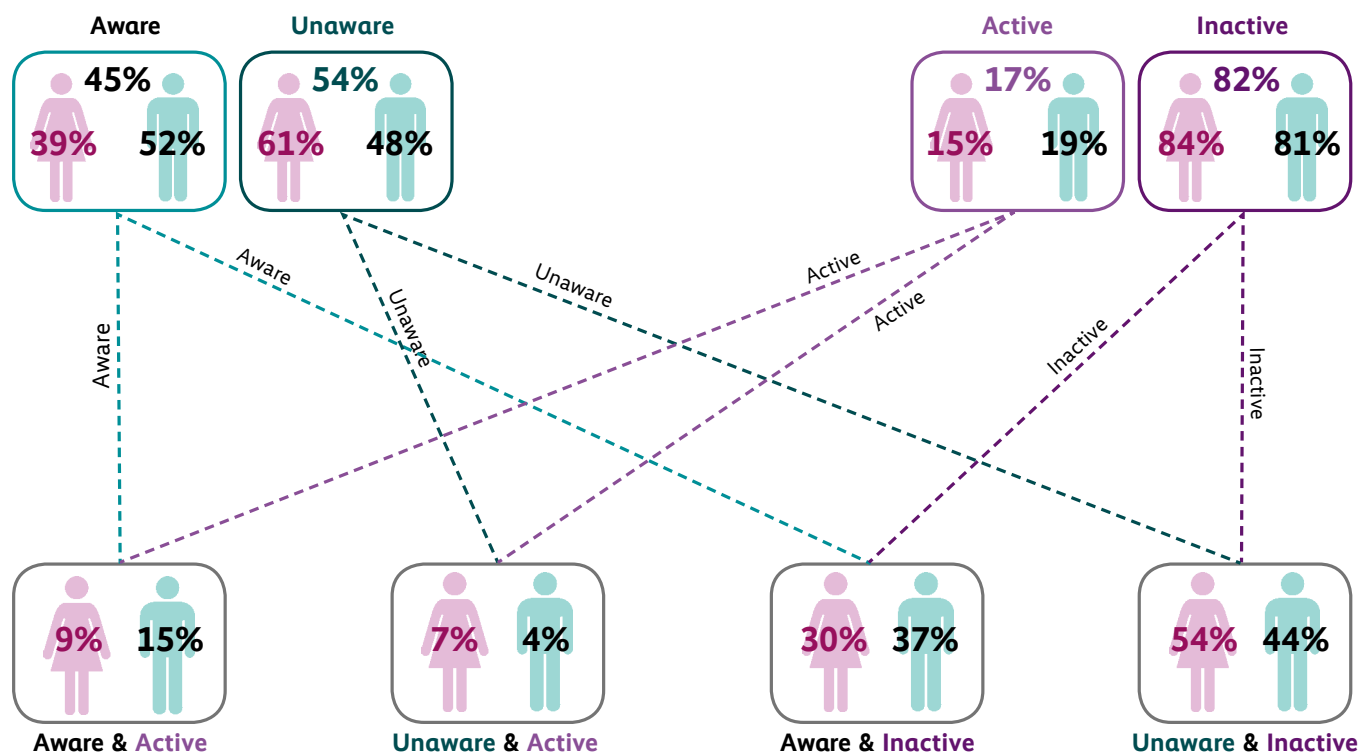
Respondents who intended to remain in Nepal for work or study were comparatively more politically active (19 per cent) than those planning to leave the country (13 per cent). However, intentions to stay or migrate did not vary significantly based on respondents' level of political awareness. Overall, while Gen-Z is often characterised as politically vocal in online spaces, the survey suggests that almost half of this demographic in Nepal remains disengaged or passive in relation to political processes.

A clear gender gap exists in perceived political awareness; 52 per cent of men considered themselves aware compared to 39 per cent of women (See Figure 4 above). However, this gap narrows in actual participation, with 16 per cent of women and 19 per cent of men identifying as politically active. Notably, low perceived political awareness did not significantly constrain women's participation, as seven per cent of female respondents reported being politically active despite being politically "unaware." This disconnect may be partly explained by differences in news consumption: only 17 per cent of women reported daily news engagement, compared to 45 per cent of men, shaping perceptions of awareness rather than actual participation.

Due to preexisting patriarchal structures, women are either discouraged from engaging in politics or given little access to political updates through news and platforms/spaces where contemporary socio-political issues are discussed (UN Women, 10 September 2024; The Ace Project 2026). This lack of opportunities for women's political participation was also evident in FGDs and KIIs. For instance, Aakriti Ghimire described the isolation she felt while organising the only all-women and queer Gen-Z group, noting that she had to "fight for both recognition and space" during post-movement negotiations (KII 8, 2025).

<sup>3</sup> Based on respondents' self-assessment

## Politically aware and active Gen-Zs, by gender



Source: NIPoRe Gen-Z Survey, 2026

### Sources of Political News

Despite more than half of respondents assessing themselves as politically unaware, the survey reveals a notable engagement with news/social media. Nearly one-third reported daily news consumption, and most respondents checked the news at least occasionally, with only just under one in ten saying they do not read any news. These results represent a notable improvement compared to 2022, when only roughly one-quarter of youth aged 18–30 reported daily engagement with news sources, and about one in five reported no engagement (Poudel et al., 2024). While self-perceived political awareness may not have substantially increased, young people post-Gen-Z movements are more curious about political development. Interviews also identified a heightened curiosity about political affairs among young Nepalis as a key turning point catalysed by the Gen-Z movement (KII 2, 3, and 7, 2025). However, some interviewees expressed caution about whether this heightened political curiosity would translate into sustained youth political engagement (KII 8, 2025).

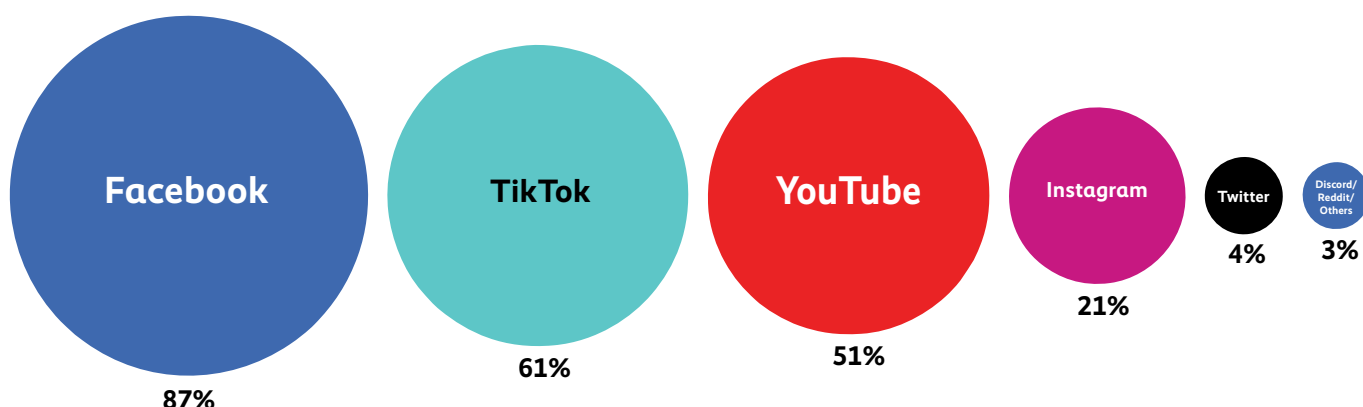
A majority of respondents relied on social media as their primary source of news. This is comparable to findings by the Center for Media Research, which reported 92 per cent of users used social media for information and news (Acharya, 2021). One-third of the youths supplemented social media with traditional media (Online news portals,

television, and radio) for news. Only six per cent of the respondents relied solely on traditional media, with television and radio ranking lowest (14 per cent) among youth as sources of news. Hence, this finding indicates a declining reliance on traditional news sources. While this trend is seen globally (Purdy, 2024), a decline in traditional news media sources could lead to media houses compromising quality and fact-checking for virality. Biken Dawadi from The Kathmandu Post noted, “Public anger toward media houses during the protests was partly a reaction to the perceived decline in quality journalism as outlets chase virality” (KII 5, 2025). This raises concerns about the quality of political information shaping youth political attitudes and mobilization.

Figure 5 below presents respondents’ reported use of different social media platforms for accessing news. Facebook (87 per cent) emerged as the most widely used social media platform for news consumption, followed by TikTok (61 per cent) and YouTube (51 per cent). Tiktok was more popular among rural youth, with 67 per cent utilising it for news compared to 57 per cent in urban areas. In contrast, more urban youths got their news from Instagram at a higher rate of 26 per cent compared to 13 per cent in rural palikas. FGDs reinforced these figures, with participants across the nation noting that they followed the September 8 protests through TikTok, which was one of the few social media platforms accessible at that time.

## Choice of social media for news

Multiple selections



Note: The respondents could provide multiple answers. Thus, the total exceeds 100 per cent.

Source: NIPoRe Gen-Z Survey, 2026

Although only three per cent of respondents use Discord for news, it served as a vital infrastructure for political deliberation during the Gen-Z movement. The “Youth Against Corruption” Discord channel, moderated by Hami Nepal, with over 160,000 members, became a central platform not only for coordinating the movement but also for the political deliberations and decision-making of Nepal’s interim government (Ray, 29 September 2025). One of the participants (Ghimire) from the Discord channel noted she “joined and supported fellow organisers via Discord groups created to coordinate the movement ahead of September 8, 2025” (KII 8, 2025).

Despite its use for political organising, meagre respondents (less than three per cent) used Discord as a news source. This reveals a troubling disparity between social media used for political organising and decision-making and those used by general youth for daily information. Nevertheless, the findings underscore social media’s role as a potent infrastructure for mobilising and shaping contemporary youth movements. However, this shift also carries substantial risks; an increasing reliance on social platforms for news, often characterised by a lack of institutional checks and balances, accelerates the spread of misinformation and disinformation at an unprecedented scale.

### 3. Gen-Z Movement and the Interim Government

This section examines how Gen-Z respondents interpret the 2025 movement, focusing on their participation, perceived causes, and expectations of the interim government. By analysing province-level patterns alongside qualitative insights from FGDs and KIIs, this chapter explains how grievances and political expectations varied across demographic groups. It further explores themes of governance legitimacy and the extent to which youth view the movement as a grassroots phenomenon versus a politically influenced one.

#### Perceived Causes of the Gen-Z Movement

The Gen-Z movement was rooted in a broad diagnosis of governance and political failure rather than a single event. Corruption is the most cited cause, mentioned by 79 per cent of respondents, surpassing economic hardship and other social grievances. While 57 per cent cite a weak economy and the rising cost of living as central factors, the

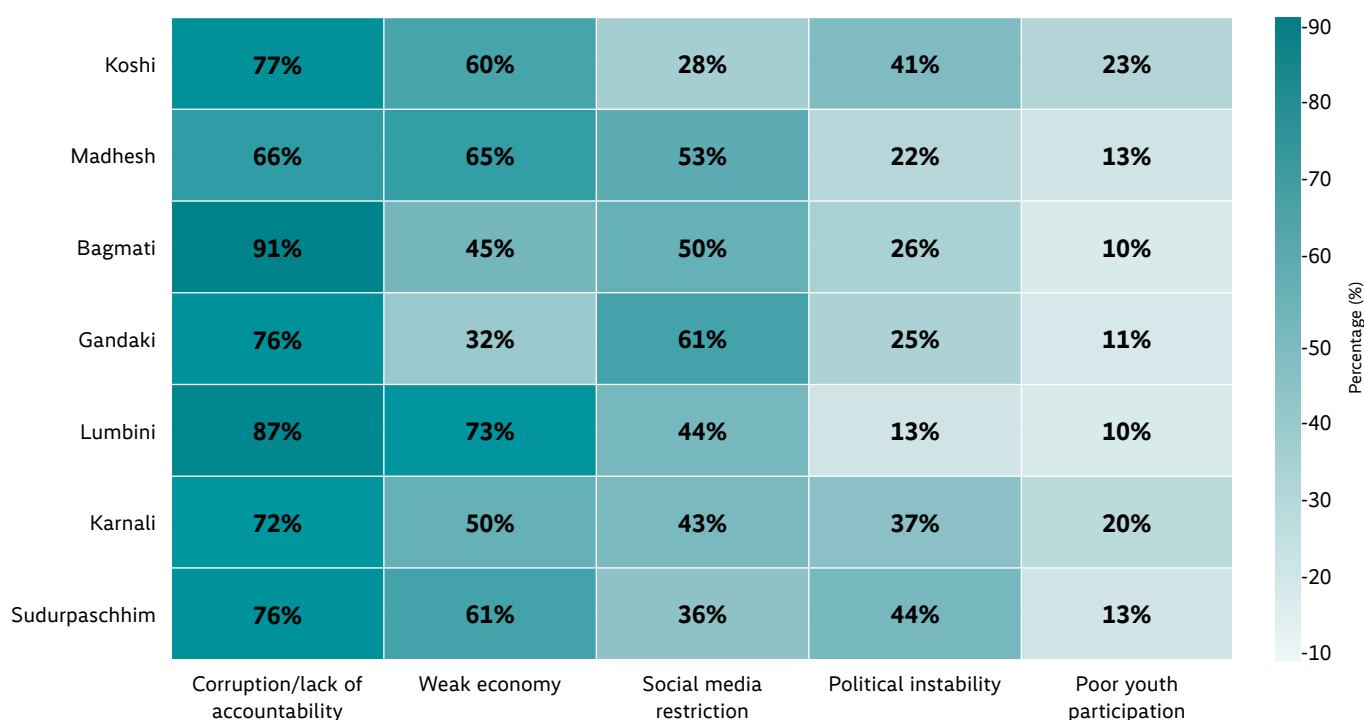
dominant framing is not merely material deprivation. Instead, the findings suggest a legitimacy crisis driven by perceived institutional dysfunction and a lack of accountability.

These perceptions are reinforced by respondents' everyday experiences with government service: 45 per cent report that government services are slow, and 21 per cent say they had to bribe or use connections to get their work done. This frustration reinforces the view that corruption is structural. As one FGD participant noted, "The normalisation of graft is so deep that some youth believe future "delivery" might still involve "acceptable" levels of corruption if it results in better services" (FGD 8).

Social media restriction acted as a trigger, with 45 per cent believing social media ban pushed youth into the streets, but it ranks below governance and economic causes. This supports the interpretation that social media acted as an enabler that accelerated information flow and coordination

Cause of Gen-Z movement, by province

Fig. 6



Note: The respondents could provide multiple answers. Thus, the total exceeds 100 per cent.

Source: NIPoRe Gen-Z Survey, 2026

rather than primary source of grievance. As one participant explained, “When they shut down social media, it felt like they were shutting down our only way to speak, organise, and show what was happening. Even people who had not planned to protest felt compelled to come out” (FGD 1).

Thus, the movement was therefore issue-driven and spontaneous. It operated through horizontal networks rooted in shared grievances about political decay and corruption, rather than through formal, party-led resistance.

Provincial analysis (see Figure 6 above) largely reinforces the same trend, but it also shows that people interpret the movement through distinct local “entry points.” In Bagmati, the framing is overwhelmingly governance-led, with 91 per cent citing corruption as the primary cause, while economic factors are lower at 45 per cent. Frustrations in this province, centres on state performance, accountability failures, and poor political leadership rather than immediate livelihood stress. Lumbini, Madhesh, Sudurpaschim, and Koshi lean comparatively heavily towards economic factors. Looking outside the urban centres, the livelihood stress and governance failures are experienced as a single, intertwined crisis.

The social media restriction appears more salient in rural areas (56 per cent) than in urban areas (38 per cent). In rural areas, social media serves not only as a source of news and entertainment but also as a livelihood tool, particularly for families of migrant workers who rely on it to communicate with relatives abroad. Overall, Gen-Z respondents identify rampant corruption, poor governance,

social media bans, and political party decay as the primary drivers of their movement.

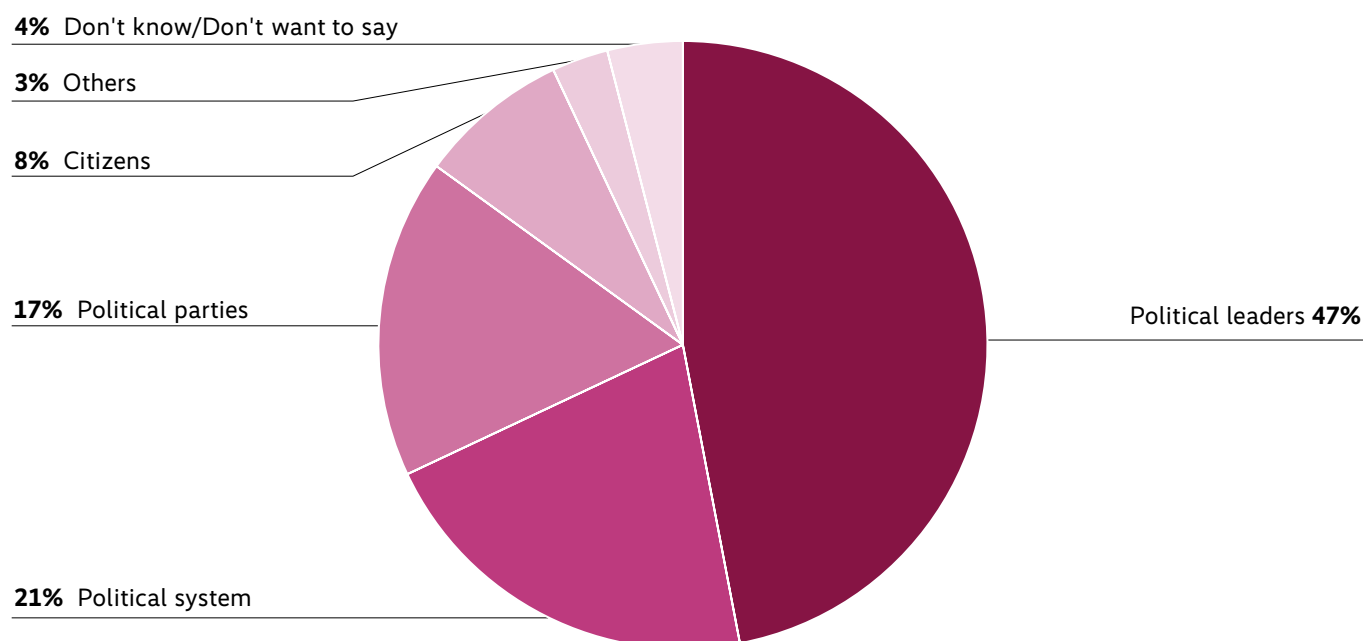
### Root of the Problem: Political Leadership

Respondents overwhelmingly locate Nepal’s governance problems within the political sphere. Nearly half identify political leaders as the main source of the problem, while 21 per cent point to the political system, and 17 per cent to political parties (See Figure 7). In total, 85 per cent attribute the root cause to politics. Moreover, 87 per cent agree that grassroots party cadres share responsibility for the governance crisis (47 per cent strongly agree; 40 per cent agree). By contrast, only eight per cent assign primary responsibility to citizens.

This distribution points to a political system crisis of “legitimacy and accountability.” As one participant in FGD 2 observed, “Ever since I was born, I have seen the same three faces in power...they hardly talk about development and the welfare of the citizens but fight among themselves for power. They have become so invincible that they have weakened the practice of democracy inside the party and across the nation.” At the same time, the substantial shares attributing blame to the political system, parties, and cadres view that dissatisfaction is not merely personal but institutional. Respondents see governance failure as embedded in the system itself, not confined to a few “bad actors.” Accordingly, about half believe the current legal framework cannot effectively address entrenched corruption (see Section V for more details).

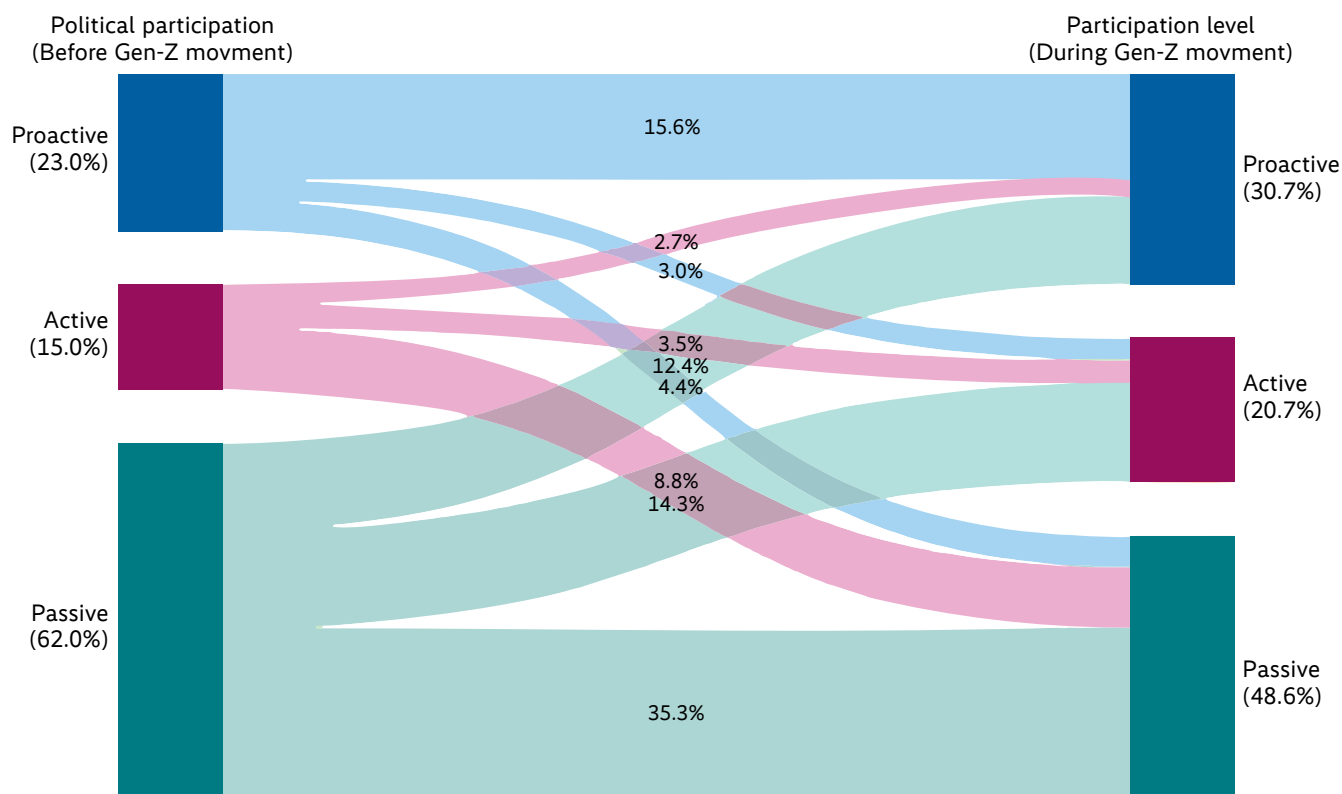
### Main cause of Nepal’s poor governance/corruption

Fig. 7



Source: NIPoRe Gen-Z Survey, 2026

## Political activeness of Gen-Zs before and during Gen-Z movement<sup>4</sup>



Source: NIPoRe Gen-Z Survey, 2026

### Engagement Pattern and Mobilisation Shifts

These frustrations manifested into real engagement patterns. Overall, 51 per cent of respondents reported some form of involvement during the Gen-Z movement, 26 per cent participated in street protests, five per cent participated in protest management or leadership roles, and 20 per cent supported or promoted the movement online. Conversely, a significant portion remained on the sidelines, with 29 per cent reporting they were aware but did not participate, and nine per cent remaining unaware of the mobilization entirely. Non-participation was driven primarily by practical barriers, such as time constraints, work obligations, and safety concerns, rather than ideological opposition. Indeed, online engagement served as a vital, lower-risk channel for many to express dissent. Notably, only five per cent of respondents cited a lack of support for the cause as their reason for remaining uninvolved.

Compared to their prior political engagement, the Gen-Z cohort became significantly more proactive during the movement. The survey data captures a notable “awakening” of previously disengaged youth: 26 per cent of those who were formerly passive transitioned into proactive or active roles. Specifically, 12 per cent of the

previously passive group moved into proactive engagement, while 14 per cent moved into active roles. Conversely, a small segment of previously proactive youth—four per cent of those formerly proactive and nine per cent of those formerly active, became passive during the movement.

Ultimately, while the movement inspired a significant portion of passive Gen-Zs to engage, statistical analysis confirms that previous political engagement remains a robust predictor of an individual’s role in the movement [Chi-square(4)=154.6,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $N=848$ ].

### The Narrative of “Political Capture” of the Movement

Almost nine in ten respondents believe the movement started at the grassroots level. However, 65 per cent contend that it was subsequently seized: primarily by political parties (60 per cent) and foreign elements (five per cent). Consequently, the dominant public narrative is one of domestic political capture rather than external orchestration, despite “foreign intervention” conspiracies proliferating on social media in the movement’s aftermath.

<sup>4</sup> Proactive = participated in protests/demonstrations/political party membership/student politics; active: participated in voting (prior to Gen-Z movement)/online activism; passive: neither participated in any direct political activity nor voted (prior to Gen-Z movement).

The protest on 8 and 9 September, and subsequent police firing, led to 77 deaths and massive material losses. The Nepal Planning Commission's (NPC, 2025) damage assessment recorded Rs 84.45 billion in total losses across public and private sectors, including Rs 44.93 billion in government losses and damage to 2,671 buildings valued at Rs 39.31 billion that affected a total of 262 palikas across 54 districts of Nepal (NPC, 2025). Political scientist Chandra Dev Bhatta argues, "They [the protesters] torched the parliament building, which they thought was the symbol of power abuse. Likewise, they torched the offices of the executive, as they were seen as a symbol of corruption. In the same vein, they torched the Supreme Court, which they saw as the centre of injustice" (Dawadi, 29 September 2025). Yet a debate persists regarding the actual perpetrators of this arson.

However, Gen-Z respondents overwhelmingly attribute arson to the political actors rather than the protesters. A clear majority, 62 per cent, believe political party infiltrators were responsible for the destruction of public institutions, while only 17 per cent blame Gen-Z protesters, six per cent blame government/security agencies, seven per cent blame criminal groups, and three per cent blame foreign infiltrators. This aligns closely with the earlier finding that 85 per cent of respondents locate the root of governance failures within the political sphere and the 60 per cent who believe the grassroots movement was later co-opted by parties.

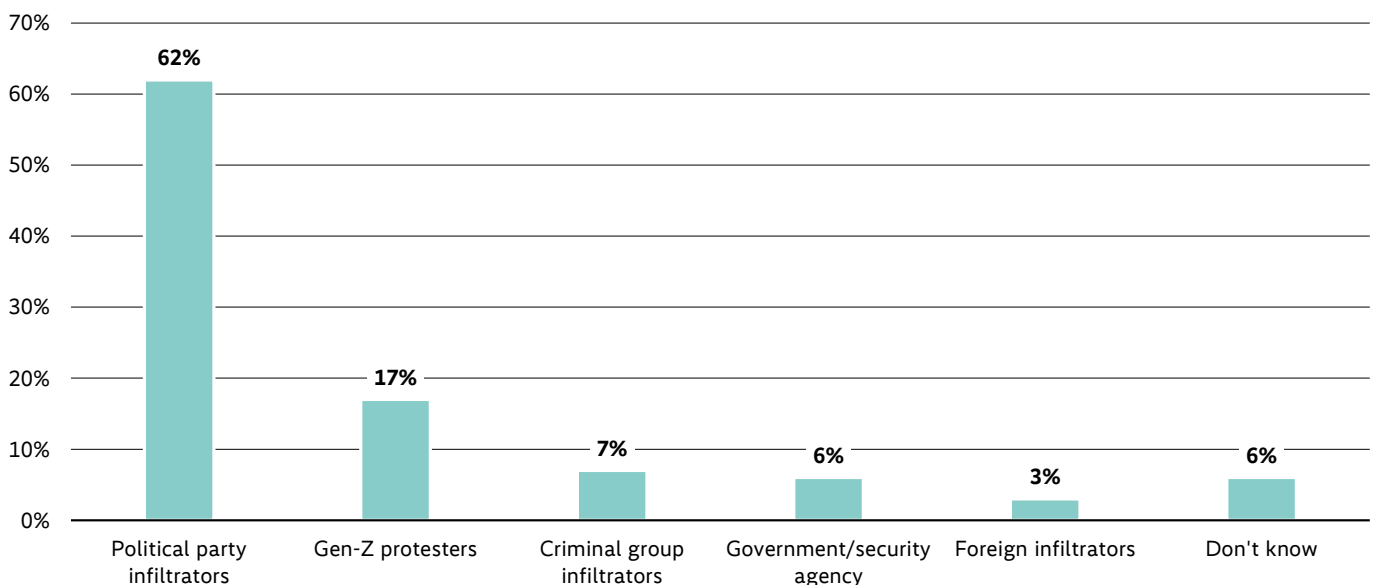
Gen-Zs overwhelmingly believe that political actors are responsible for arson rather than the protesters themselves. A clear majority, 62 per cent, believe political party infiltrators were responsible for the destruction of public

institutions during the protests, compared to 17 per cent who blame Gen-Z protesters. This aligns closely with the earlier finding that respondents locate the root cause of governance problems in politics overall (85 per cent when leaders, the political system, and parties are combined) and with the way they characterise the movement as grassroots in origin but later influenced by political parties (60 per cent). These figures reinforce a consistent narrative: respondents distinguish between legitimate, issue-based youth mobilisation and subsequent hijacking of the movement by political establishment elements for their vested interest, though the parties deny they were involved. Conversely, an FGD 11 participant and cadre of the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML) denied formal involvement, arguing that, "There was no formal or informal communication from anyone within the party instructing members to participate in the movement, let alone to engage in arson or the destruction of public property. This claim is also difficult to sustain given that CPN-UML and the NC were already part of the government at the time; it would be illogical for parties in power to participate in a movement aimed at removing their own government."

While a nationwide consensus suggests that the movement was infiltrated, there is no single conclusion on the specific group involved. Oli publicly argued, "The demands were hijacked, the movement was hijacked, and it was taken over by infiltrating elements, even what you could call 'alien' elements" (Nagarik News, 26 November 2025). Given that most Gen-Zs believe the arson was committed by infiltrators, the idea that these buildings were torched for symbolic reasons requires critical re-evaluation.

## Responsibility for arson during the movement

Fig. 9



Source: NIPoRe Gen-Z Survey, 2026

## Formation of Interim Government

Following the movement and the resignation of the Council of Ministers, and the dissolution of the second Federal Parliament, President Paudel appointed Karki as interim Prime Minister on 12 September 2025. The interim Council of Ministers was tasked with the primary responsibility of conducting parliamentary elections on 5 March 2026. The early cabinet featured prominent figures with strong public reputations for delivery and reform: Finance Minister Rameshwor Prasad Khanal, a former Finance Secretary noted for public finance and procurement reforms; Energy Minister Kulman Ghising, credited with ending Nepal’s chronic power outages; and Education, Science, and Technology Minister Mahabir Pun, a social innovator and founder of the National Innovation Center.

Consistent with earlier findings, respondents’ “top three expectations” (see Figure 10) for the current government are overwhelmingly performance oriented. Corruption control dominates the list at 73 per cent, followed by timely elections at 50 per cent and job creation at 47 per cent (See Figure 10). This ordering reinforces the interpretation that the Gen-Z movement in Nepal was diagnostic rather than ideological. The focus remains on governance; respondents recognise that restoring the integrity and credibility of the state and political process is a prerequisite for economic opportunity and renewal (FGD 6).

Provincial patterns broadly mirror the national trend but suggest different local “entry points” into this same reform narrative. Respondents in Karnali place the highest

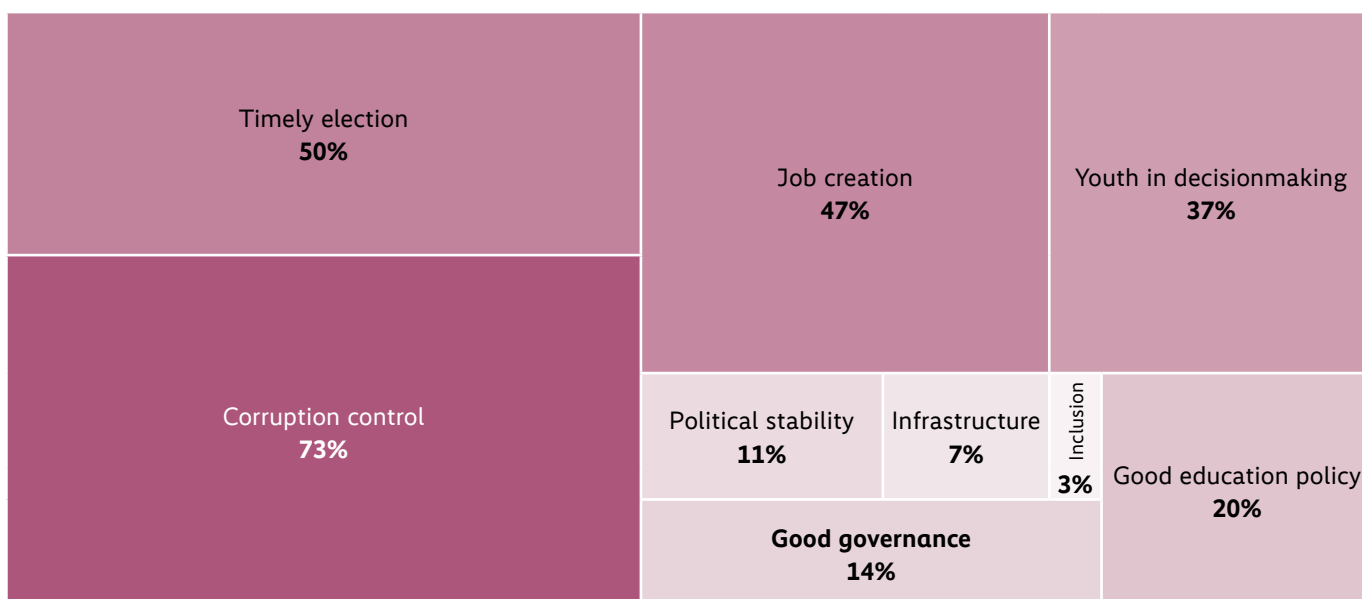
emphasis on corruption control at 85 per cent, pointing to a strong integrity-first framing. While in Gandaki, Koshi, and Madhesh, respondents place a relatively high weight on timely elections (around 59 per cent to 64 per cent) and view electoral credibility as a key pathway to political reset.

These high expectations explain why perceptions of the interim government are shaped by perceived performance, integrity, and reform intent. Many respondents appear to conflate interim authority with an elected executive, expecting not only electoral management but also long-term structural reform, corruption control, and governance improvements. Miraj Dhungana, a popular Gen-Z leader, criticised the Karki administration for being “fixated on elections,” arguing that the movement’s goal was not merely to expedite and conduct 2027 elections a year earlier (Online Khabar, 22 December 2025). This mismatch reflects a heightened political awareness and an accumulated frustration with entrenched elite politics. Furthermore, it underlines the risk that current conditional trust in the interim government (see Figure 11) may quickly erode if visible progress in integrity and rule-based administration does not follow.

Although the Prime Minister and several members of the Council of Ministers were selected following consultations with various Gen-Z groups, respondents remain evenly split between cautious and conditional trust in the interim government. Among respondents who express trust, the primary driver is the belief that the government is committed to addressing the Gen-Z movement’s demands (38 per cent), followed by perceptions that it has generated new hope (21 per cent) and offers neutral, capable, or honest leadership (18 per cent). Essentially, trust is

## Expectations from the interim government

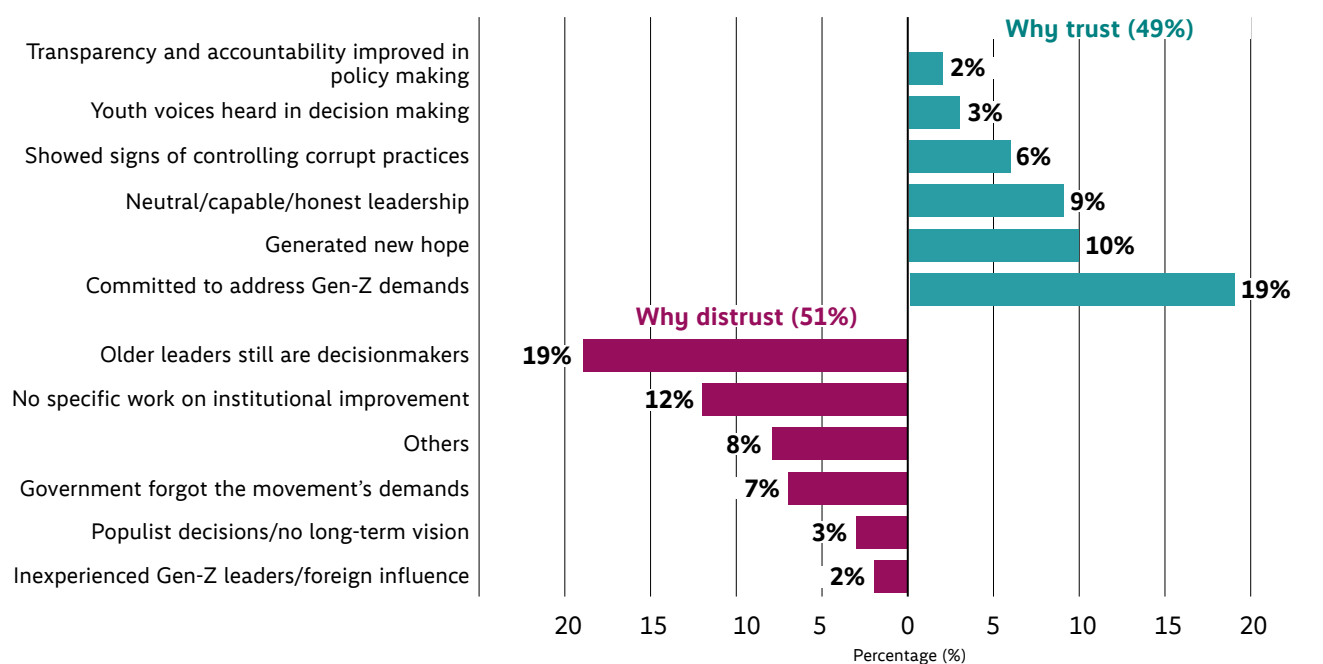
Fig. 10



Note: The respondents could provide multiple answers. Thus, the total exceeds 100 per cent.

Source: NIPoRe Gen-Z Survey, 2026

## Why do Gen-Z trust/distrust the interim government?



Source: NIPoRe Gen-Z Survey, 2026

anchored in the perceived competence and honesty of the individuals in charge.

Conversely, for those who distrust the interim government, the leading concern is the belief that the political establishment remains the true decision-makers (37 per cent). Other significant factors include concerns over a lack of institutional improvement (23 per cent) and the perception that the government has abandoned the movement's demands (13 per cent). A small margin (two per cent) of respondents also expressed concern that inexperienced Gen-Z ministers are being influenced by foreign elements. While Gen-Z has high expectations, they also possess low patience for traditional political maneuvering. This scepticism is met with equal caution from the establishment; Prime Minister Karki notably referred to some Gen-Z figures as "immature" (*ketaketi*), meaning that they are not yet ready for the responsibilities of the Council of Ministers (Nagarik News, 20 November 2025).

Trust in the interim government is not uniform across the Gen-Z sample, and it varies by province, gender, education, and ethnicity (see Annex V). For instance, trust ranges from a low of 33 per cent in Sudurpashchim to a high of 63 per cent in Madhesh. Women report substantially higher trust than men (59 per cent versus 37 per cent). By ethnicity, trust is higher among Arya Khas (54 per cent) and Madheshi (56 per cent) respondents but notably lower among Dalit (35 per cent) and Indigenous (38 per cent) respondents. Interestingly, urban/rural location, political activeness, and news consumption frequency showed no statistically significant association with trust levels.

The challenge for the interim government is compounded by its contested legitimacy. Oli, ousted by the movement, has characterised the administration as a government established "on the ashes of his home" (Nagarik News, 26 November 2025). Similarly, NC President Gagan Thapa described the government as "unconstitutional in a literal way," albeit borne out of the "doctrine of necessity," with elections serving as the viable path forward (Dawadi and Poudel, 9 November 2025).

This section shows that Gen-Z respondents interpret the September 2025 movement as a reaction to accumulated governance failure, with corruption and a lack of accountability at the core. While systemic frustrations provided the foundation, economic stress and social media restrictions shaped the speed and scale of mobilisation. Respondents place the responsibility for Nepal's governance crisis squarely on the political establishment.

While Gen-Z are credited for leading this historic grassroots movement, their participation patterns indicate a mix of street protest and online mobilisation that successfully activated many previously passive youths. Furthermore, there is a strong perception that the protests were later co-opted by political establishment party actors, particularly regarding the incidents of arson. Consequently, their support for the interim government remains cautious and conditional. Expectations extend beyond electoral duties to include structural reforms; failure to deliver visible progress in this unforgiving political context risks deepening the same scepticism that fuelled the Gen-Z movement.

## 4. Gen-Z and the Upcoming Elections

The Gen-Z movement, fueled by generational frustration with the political system, poor governance, and corruption, took a hopeful turn with the formation of the new interim government. With elections established as one of its major priorities, Gen-Z has developed high expectations for structural and governance reforms agendas that will undoubtedly define the mandate of the next elected government. With so much at stake, this section explores Gen-Z's preference for political actors and parties, as well as their anticipated role in the upcoming elections scheduled on 5 March 2026.

### Major Issues of Upcoming Elections

As elections are approaching, it is important to identify the key issues that condition voters' choices and decisions. These priorities not only shape immediate decisions at the ballot box but also capture the long-term expectations for post-election and governance.

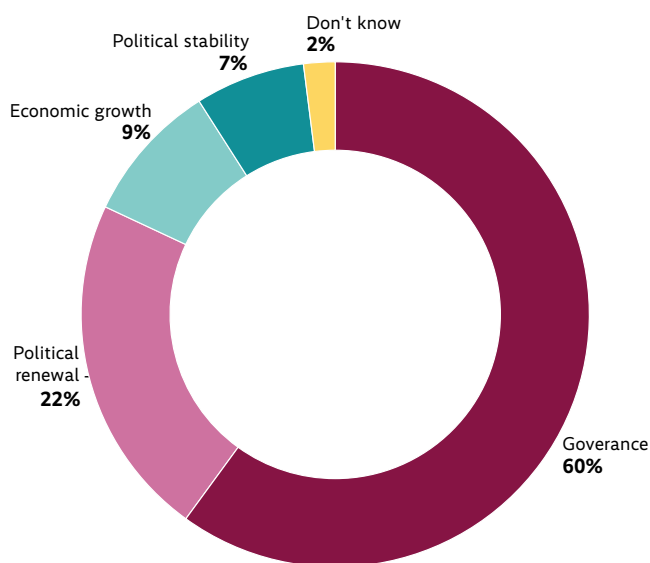
The electoral choices of the Gen-Z population are primarily driven by governance, with 59 per cent of them citing it as

the most important issue in upcoming elections (See Figure 12). The “end of the political establishment,” - represented by end of the long-standing leadership of former Prime Ministers Oli, Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda,’ and Sher Bahadur Deuba, and the subsequent regeneration of mainstream parties rank second, cited by 22 per cent of respondents. Gen-Z raised four main agendas through the movement: anti-corruption, good governance, regeneration of the political parties, and freedom of expression (specifically against social media bans). Their four prioritised agendas in the upcoming election perfectly align with their demands. Gen-Z expects an accountable, transparent, and responsive government capable of resolving chronic issues like political instability and economic underperformance. There is a strong belief that alternative political forces are better positioned to deliver these results.

Ultimately, the simultaneous demand for improved governance and ouster of old leadership and mainstream parties suggests that Gen-Z views long-standing corruption and poor governance as a symptom of political establishment and its entrenched political structures.

### Major issue/agenda of upcoming election

Fig. 12



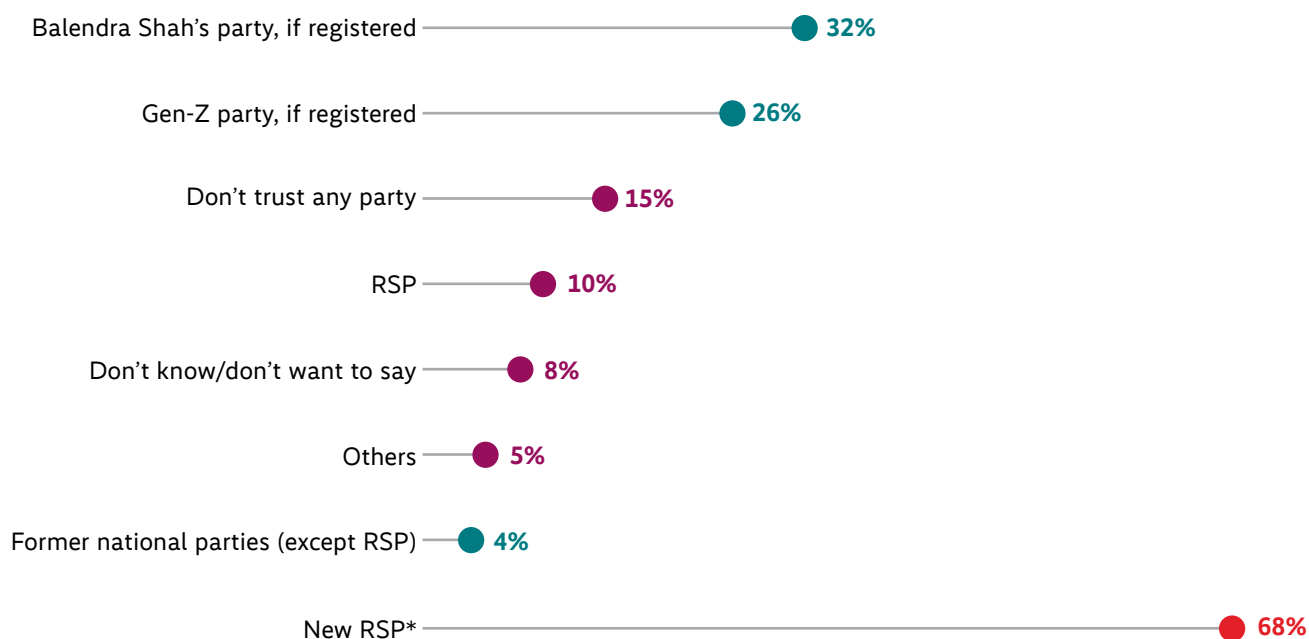
Source: NIPoRe Gen-Z Survey, 2026

### Party/Leadership Preference

Gen-Z respondents have almost lost complete hope in the mainstream parties<sup>5</sup> and pinned their hopes on alternative forces, some of which did not even exist at the time of the survey. The political establishment parties are being perceived as being driven by a pursuit of power that has led to frequent changes in government and coalition partners. Nepal has seen 16 governments since 2008, and each administration lasted barely a year on average (European Foundation for South Asian Studies, 2024). The frequent alliances and counter-alliances among the traditional leaders, reinforced by entrenched patronage networks, are viewed as primary contributors to this political instability. Respondents in FGD 7 noted that the political establishment parties in Nepal have prioritised personal interests instead of national interests. However, Gen-Z perceived the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) as an alternative political party. Gen-Z, thus, places greater hopes in alternative parties and figures whom they think are better positioned to challenge the existing power structure.

<sup>5</sup> In this report, mainstream parties include all national parties from 2022 elections except the RSP. The latter was perceived by many Gen-Zs as an alternative force in all the FGDs.

## Political party preference



Note: New RSP represents the theoretical combination of Balendra Shah's party, Gen-Z's party, and RSP.

Source: NIPoRe Gen-Z Survey, 2026

With just four per cent of respondents showing confidence in the “political establishment” parties, the Figure 13 above also establishes a clear fixation on alternative parties. Around one in six Gen-Zs had lost complete faith in any political party. One in ten respondents supported the RSP. Many of the rest (58 per cent) have gravitated towards alternative political forces that did not even exist at the point of survey (such as Shah's party or Gen-Z activists' party). Later, Shah, instead of starting his own party, joined the RSP. RSP was also able to bring together most of the Gen-Z activists and some alternative forces from earlier periods under its fold, which might have brightened its prospects. Alternative forces share common agenda and antagonists: removal of traditional or political establishment and the elimination of systemic corruption (Dawadi, 13 October 2025). If the combined support for Shah and the Gen-Z movements transfers to the RSP, the party could emerge as a formidable force with 68 per cent support in the upcoming elections.

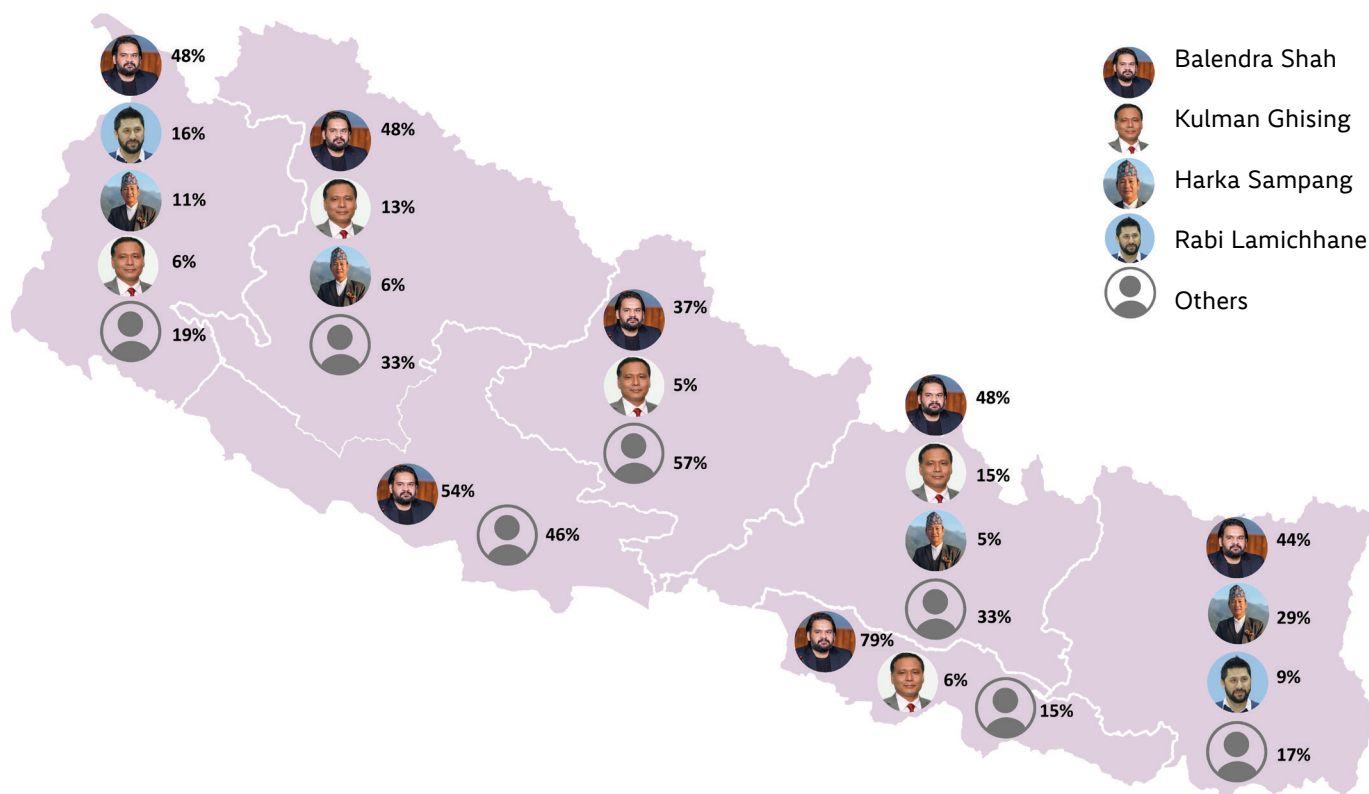
However, this consolidation remains tenuous. Some youth remain sceptical of the alliance between Shah and RSP Chair Rabi Lamichhane. During FGDs, participants expressed support for Shah while remaining wary of Lamichhane's previous political history (FGD 7, 8). Amit Khanal of the Gen-Z Movement Alliance has criticised the deal as a continuation of the political establishment power-sharing approach, specifically citing the arrangement for Shah to be the Prime Ministerial candidate while Lamichhane remains Party Chair as evidence of a “business-as-usual” strategy (Dudraj and Shree, 30 December 2025).

Gen-Z has placed high hopes in a new generation of leaders. The graph (Figure 14) above is a clear representation of decisive generational shift toward figures with non-traditional backgrounds, such as Balendra Shah (54 per cent), Harka Sampang (eight per cent), Kulman Ghising (seven per cent), and Rabi Lamichhane (five per cent), compared to a negligible two per cent for the “political establishment.” Gen-Z are leaning towards alternative political parties as well as non-traditional leaders. This data suggest that Nepal is entering a phase of personalised, post-party politics. Trust is increasingly concentrated in individual leaders rather than established political institutions, with Gen-Z expecting these figures to drive systemic and governance reforms.

Notably, while leaning toward alternative leaders, Gen-Z has largely distanced itself from both anarchist forces, such as Durga Prasai, and monarchist movements, such as those led by former King Gyanendra Shah. This suggests that the youth demand for change remains rooted in democratic renewal rather than returning to traditional authoritarian or disruptive structures.

Leadership preferences are influenced by regional and ethnic factors, though with important nuances. While Shah dominates across all demographics, his appeal is highest in Madhesh Province (79 per cent) and among the Madheshi population (73 per cent). Similarly, Harka Sampang maintains a strong regional base in Koshi (29 per cent), particularly among indigenous communities, where he serves as the primary competitor to Shah's popularity.

## Province-wise leadership preference



Source: NIPoRe Gen-Z Survey, 2026

Although ethnicity shows a statistically significant association with leader choice, respondents consistently denied identity politics as their primary motivator. FGD participants in Madhesh, for example, asserted that their support for Shah is not based on his Madheshi identity, but on his track record. They cited social media accounts of his transformation of Kathmandu during his mayoral tenure as the primary evidence of his leadership capability (FGD 8 and 9). This indicates that for Gen-Z, performance and perceived results have superseded ethnic loyalty as the primary currency of political trust.

### Gen-Z Wants the Old Leadership Gone

Their aversion towards the mainstream leaders is revelatory. Gen-Z respondents do not merely prefer a political future without these leaders; they also want punitive actions against them.

The survey responses on the fate of established leaders cluster into 3 broad measures: (i) Punitive measures, which include jail on corruption charges and removal or ban from politics and candidacy; (ii) Institutional measures, which include peaceful retirement and party decision; and (iii) Democratic measures, which consist of voters' decisions.

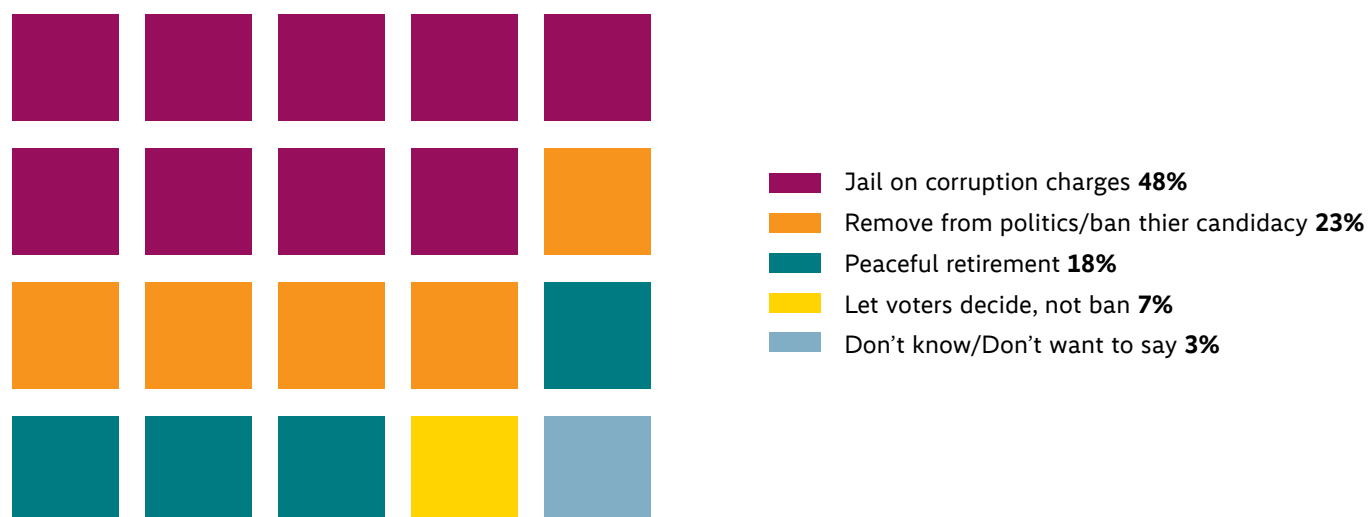
In the below graph (Figure 15), punitive measures correspond to a combined total of 71 per cent. Gen-Z, while generally supportive of democratic processes, is so disillusioned by the institutionalisation of corruption that they are increasingly unwilling to leave the fate of the political establishment solely to party processes or elections. Even “younger” establishment leaders acknowledge this friction. Importantly, the ‘young’ leaders of mainstream parties recognise the need for a change of the political establishment. Yogesh Bhattarai, of CPN-UML believes that it would be a great achievement if the party were able to replace Oli (Dawadi, 7 December 2025). Thapa noted significant “lapses” within the political establishment (Dawadi and Poudel, 9 November 2025). Conversely, KP Sharma Oli’s recent re-election as CPN-UML Chair suggests a deepening divide between internal party dynamics and youth sentiment. In the upcoming election, voters will have the opportunity to seal the fate of this dominant leadership.

### Not all Hopes are Lost for the Mainstream Parties

Although Gen-Z has put high hopes on alternate forces to articulate the long-standing governance grievances, not all

Fig. 15

## Future of old leadership of mainstream parties



Source: NIPoRe Gen-Z Survey, 2026

hope is lost for the mainstream parties. Respondents are still willing to consider voting for the mainstream parties if certain conditions are met.

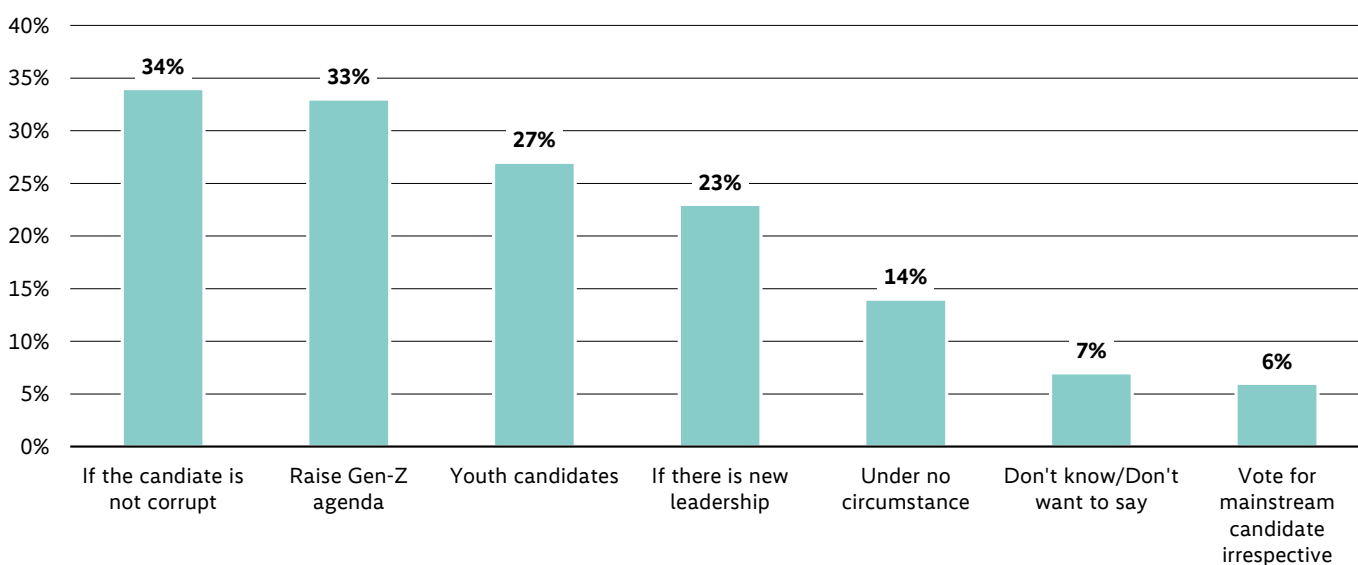
About 6 per cent of the respondents offer unconditional support for mainstream parties (See Figure 16). On the other extreme, 14 per cent of the Gen-Zs will refuse to vote for any of the mainstream parties under any circumstance. Meanwhile, a significant portion of respondents would consider voting for mainstream if certain conditions are met: if the party nominates young candidates (27 per cent),

if the candidates are not corrupt (34 per cent), if the parties change leadership (23 per cent), or if the parties raise the Gen-Z agenda (33 per cent). This does not mean that they would vote if the conditions were met, but a mainstream party fulfilling those criteria would increase their chances with Gen-Z voters.

The results show that the aversion is directed toward the party elites rather than the parties themselves. Should these organizations regenerate, a segment of the youth remains willing to re-engage.

Fig. 16

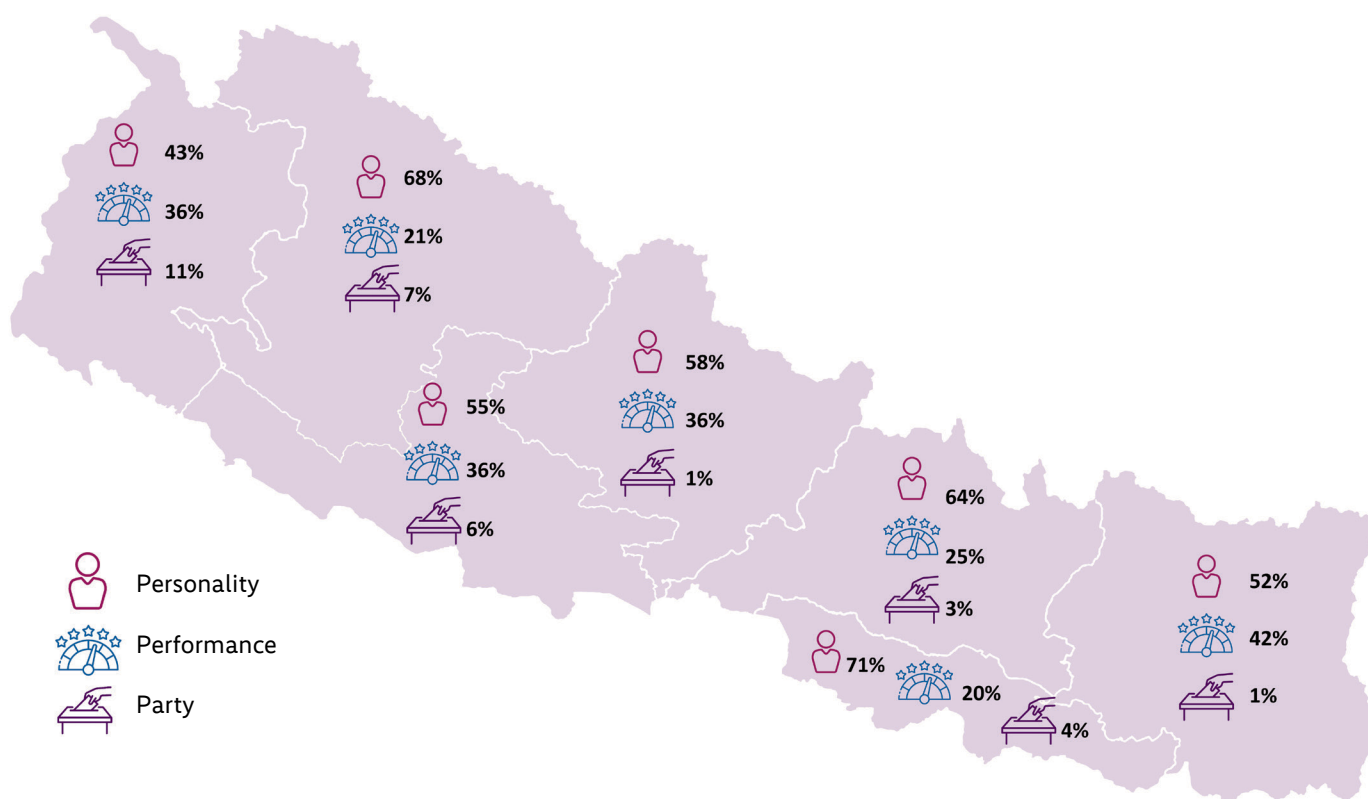
## When will Gen-Zs consider voting for mainstream parties?



Note: The respondents could provide multiple answers. Thus, the total exceeds 100 per cent.

Source: NIPoRe Gen-Z Survey, 2026

## Personality, performance, or party: What do Gen-Zs vote on?



Source: NIPoRe Gen-Z Survey, 2026

### Gen-Z Voting Decision Factors

Gen-Z political culture is distinctly ‘leader’ centric rather than ‘party’ centric. Voter choice is dominated by a candidate’s personality, followed by performance<sup>6</sup> (or promise of performance),<sup>7</sup> with traditional party affiliation having minimal bearing on the final decision.

Figure 17 reveals the intriguing pattern in personality vs. performance factor across the provinces. In Madhesh and Karnali, 70 per cent of respondents prioritise personality, compared to only 20 per cent who focus on performance. This implies that there exists a subtle charismatic leadership tradition in rural or peripheral provinces of Nepal.

In contrast, 64 per cent of respondents in Bagmati and Gandaki prioritise performance, while only 35 per cent prioritise personality as determining factor. This data suggests that the voters from central provinces like Bagmati and Gandaki demand competence. Furthermore, the fact that Ghising is the second most preferred leader in both Bagmati and Gandaki provinces, where performance

factors are valued more than personality factors, indicates a niche but growing constituency that values institutional competence and bureaucratic reform, especially among urban youth.

Gen-Z has pinned some hopes on charismatic leaders like Shah, Sampang, Lamichhane, and Ghising. A common thread that binds them is that they have some performance to sell—Shah and Sampang as mayors of Kathmandu and Dharan, and Ghising as a former Executive Director of the Nepal Electricity Authority. Additionally, most of them are avid users of social media, through which they have been able to set their own narrative.

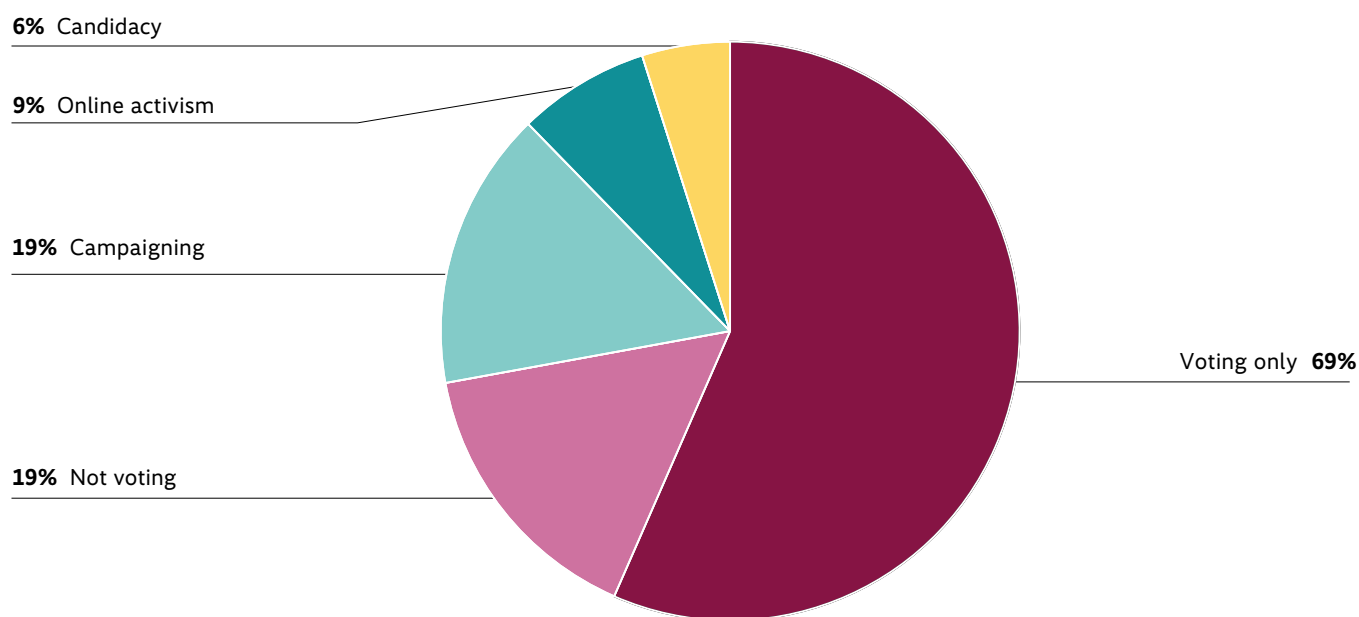
### The Role of Gen-Z in the Upcoming Elections

With the movement concluded and the election approaching, the central question is how Gen-Z will engage with the formal political process. Will the generation that catalysed a government’s collapse compete for parliamentary seats, turn out to vote, or remain on the sidelines of elite political power?

<sup>6</sup> The personality factor includes new/young face of the candidate and education/technical knowledge of the candidate.

<sup>7</sup> The performance factor includes past works of the candidate and issues and agendas raised by the candidate.

## Role of Gen-Zs in upcoming elections



Note: The respondents could provide multiple answers. Thus, the total exceeds 100 per cent.

Source: NIPoRe Gen-Z Survey, 2026

Gen-Z respondents show high political enthusiasm when asked about their role in upcoming elections. Almost 70 per cent of respondents intend to vote, and six per cent of the respondents said they would stand as candidates in the upcoming elections (the election commission’s record is underwhelming, though [see Figure 18 above]). Beyond direct candidacy, 20 per cent are willing to campaign on behalf of their preferred candidates, while 10 per cent intend to engage in online activism. Most notably, 70 per cent of respondents plan to cast their ballots.

However, 19 per cent of respondents intend to abstain from voting. Within this group, the reasons for non-participation are evenly split; one-third respondents below the voting age of 18, another one-third had not registered to vote despite qualifying to vote, and most concerning of all, another third said they had lost complete trust in politics and thus will not be voting at all. FGDs and the KIIs suggest that the loss of confidence in the party system politics by Gen-Z is deeply rooted in political mismanagement and bad-governance.

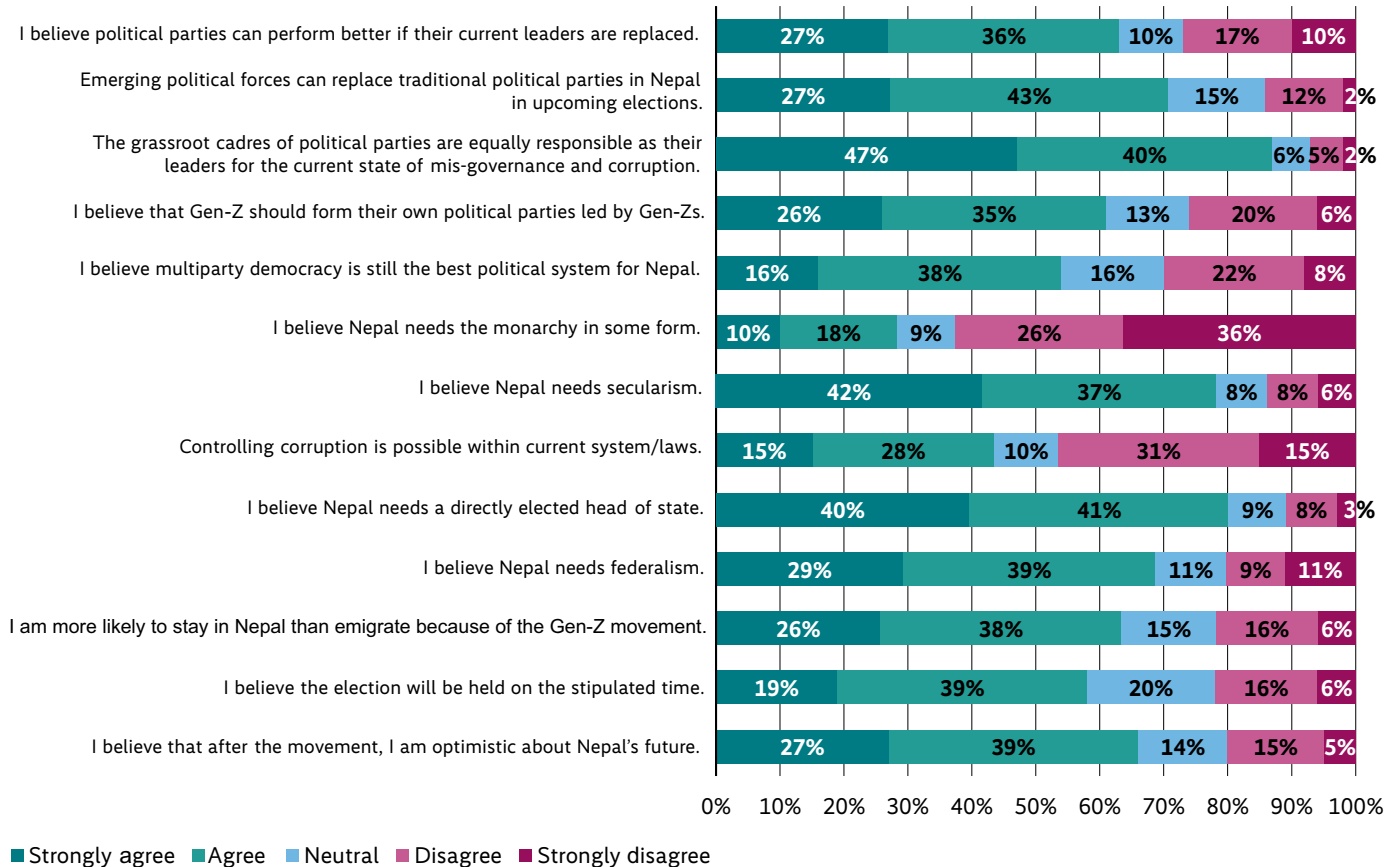
# 5. Gen-Z's Political Attitudes and Position on Governance

The upcoming elections are widely perceived by Nepal's Gen-Z population as a political inflection point. As demonstrated earlier, the primary agenda of the Gen-Z movement are anti-corruption, good governance, regeneration of political parties, and freedom of expression (against social media bans). This has translated into strong support for anti-establishment figures such as Shah and Sampang. Conversely, confidence in mainstream political parties and the "political establishment" remains strikingly low. Importantly, this shift is not driven by ideological commitments or programmatic agendas. Instead, it reflects a broader rejection of "politics-as-usual" and a demand for visible change in leadership, accountability, and governance.

This section examines Gen-Z political attitudes using Likert-scale responses across three interrelated themes: optimism about Nepal's future, views on political and governance structures, and evaluation of existing political actors. Together, these attitudes offer insight into how the Gen-Z movement has reshaped political expectations and how those expectations are likely to influence electoral behavior in March 2026.

Figure 19 presents respondents' views on levels of optimism as well as their political and institutional preferences, capturing how Gen-Z evaluates prospects and governance choices. The data points to a generation that is cautiously hopeful. Two-thirds of respondents are optimistic about

*Gen-Z's optimism, political and institutional preference* Fig. 19



Source: NIPoRe Gen-Z Survey, 2026

Nepal's future after the Gen-Z movement, a notable finding in a political environment long characterised by cynicism and disengagement. Yet this optimism is clearly conditional. About a fifth of respondents remain pessimistic, and 14 per cent are neutral, producing a cautious rather than overwhelming consensus.

Confidence declines when optimism is tied to institutions. While a majority (58 per cent) believe elections will be held on time, this belief is weaker than general optimism about the country's trajectory. One in five respondents is uncertain, and another 25 per cent expresses outright doubt, despite repeated government assertions that the election will be held on time. While some party leaders have expressed doubts, most have embraced elections. Even the doubtful have been preparing for the elections, though reluctantly.

Crucially, the movement's impact extends beyond abstract political attitudes into concrete life choices. Nearly 63 per cent of respondents report being more inclined to stay in Nepal rather than emigrate because of the Gen-Z movement. In a context of widespread youth out-migration, this represents a meaningful—if potentially temporary—shift even when political mobilisation has temporarily strengthened civic attachment.

### **Governance and Political Structures: Reformist but Selective**

Gen-Z respondents display clear preferences on some governance questions and notable ambivalence on others. Federalism continues to enjoy broad legitimacy, with 69 per cent agreeing that Nepal needs it despite implementation flaws (FGD 9). This suggests dissatisfaction with practice rather than principle. Federalism, for Gen-Z, remains part of the solution rather than the problem.

Support for secularism is even stronger, nearly 78 per cent of respondents agree that Nepal should remain secular, with minor opposition. Core post-2006 constitutional principles have been deeply internalised by younger citizens, even as trust in political actors erodes.

However, a slim majority (54 per cent) still agree that multiparty democracy is the best system for Nepal, this support is noticeably weaker than for specific governance principles such as federalism or secularism. While not rejected, democracy is increasingly viewed as underperforming.

Respondents show strikingly strong support for a directly elected head of government at 80 per cent. This reflects dissatisfaction with the game of musical chairs, dominated by the triumvirate of political establishment, based on opaque dealings behind the scenes. It is not an anti-democratic impulse but a demand for more direct

responsibility. Gen-Zs believe it will bring political stability at the top and a magical wand that will deliver stability. However, many of them have given little thought about the risks or limits of a directly elected head of government (FGD 9). Having said that, major parties such as the RSP, NC and CPN-UML have declared prime-ministerial candidates to woo their supporters.

In contrast, support for the monarchy is decisively low. Only 28 per cent believe Nepal needs monarchy in any form, while nearly two-thirds explicitly reject the idea. This imbalance underscores that restorationist narratives resonate weakly with this generation and are unlikely to garner broad Gen-Z support.

Perhaps the most consequential finding in this cluster concerns corruption. Only 43 per cent believe corruption can be controlled within the current system and laws, while 46 per cent explicitly disagree. This near-even split, tilted toward pessimism, helps explain the appeal of anti-establishment leaders. The issue is not merely corruption itself but a widespread belief that existing institutions are structurally incapable of reform.

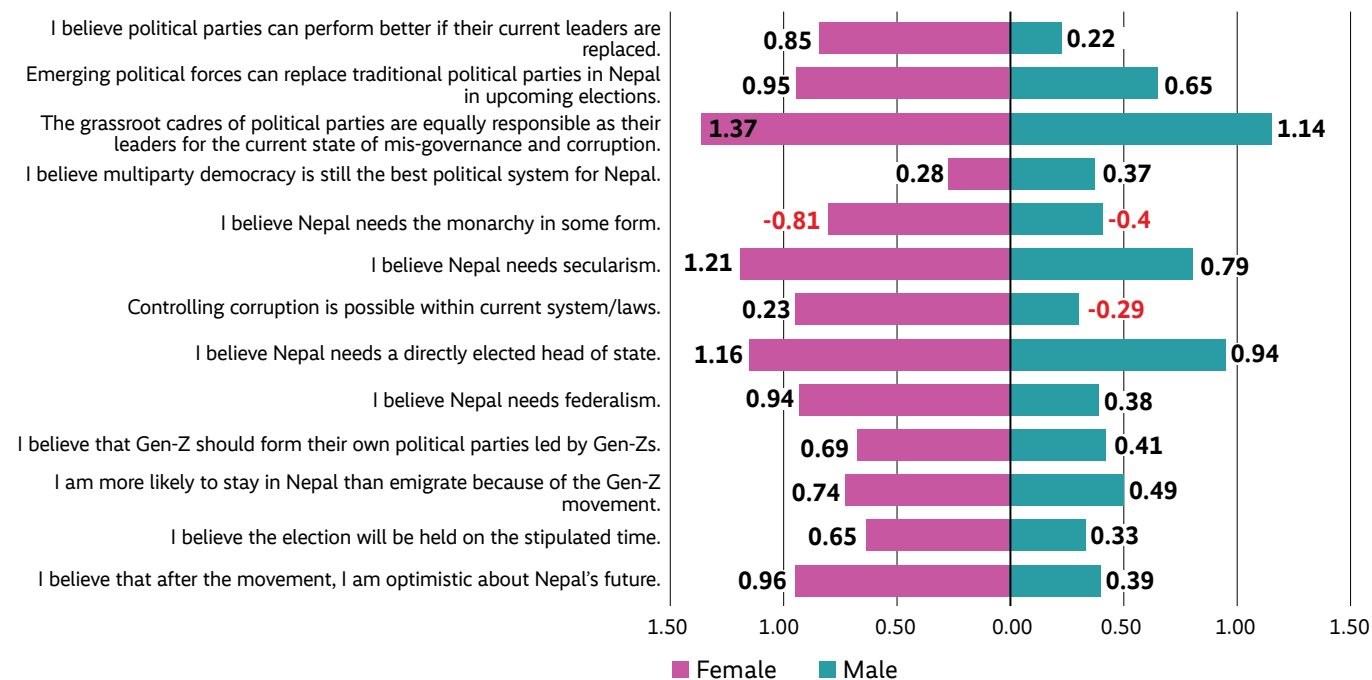
### **Accountability, Not Allegiance**

Gen-Z attitudes toward existing political actors are marked by clarity and severity. An overwhelming 87 per cent agree that grassroots party cadres are as responsible as party leaders for Nepal's current political condition. Responsibility, in other words, is seen as deep-rooted and from top to bottom, rather than elite specific. This reflects a deep rejection of the conduct of mainstream parties from top to bottom yet trust in the democratic system.

At the same time, there is strong openness and hope for the replacement of the political establishment. Seventy per cent of respondents believe emerging political forces can replace traditional parties in upcoming elections, and nearly two-thirds believe mainstream parties could perform better in upcoming elections if their current leaders were replaced. Leadership renewal, rather than party abolition, emerges as the dominant demand.

Support for Gen-Z forming their own political parties is more measured. While 61 per cent express agreement, a sizable minority remains neutral or opposed. This suggests cautious realism: respondents' value generational representation but are uncertain about the organisational capacity and political sustainability of Gen-Z political groups. It is no wonder most Gen-Z activists coalesced around the RSP.

Disaggregated analysis shows that gender is the most influential social variable shaping Gen-Z political attitudes, far outweighing ethnicity, education, political awareness, career plans, and the urban–rural divide (see Annex VI). Notably, the urban–rural divide has virtually vanished, as



Note: Red indicates a negative score.

Source: Calculation from NIPoRe's Gen-Z Survey, 2026

Gen-Z political attitudes have converged across spatial lines.

Confidence in structural reform is similarly distributed. Support for federalism, secularism, and a directly elected executive is positive across categories, but it is clearest among the politically aware. In this group, scores on governance reform items cluster between 0.60–1.10, while “Don’t Know” responses remain markedly flatter. This indicates that political dissatisfaction has not translated into wholesale rejection of the constitutional order but rather into a driver of selective reformism.

Crucially, scepticism persists around corruption control and party performance. Aggregate scores on the possibility of corruption control within the existing institutional framework hover near zero or dip negative among less educated and less aware groups, signaling a credibility gap between reform rhetoric and expected delivery. Conversely, views on the monarchy are distinctly negative overall, with educated respondents (bachelor’s or higher) showing the strongest rejection. It reinforces the finding that nostalgia-based politics resonates least with educated Gen-Zs.

Finally, career plans matter. Those intending to stay in Nepal consistently show higher institutional confidence than those planning to go abroad, suggesting that political belief and life-trajectory decisions are tightly linked. Overall, the data portray a generation that seeks reform within the system but has lost hope in reform from the

political establishment. Thus, they are pinning their hopes on a new generation of leaders and alternative forces.

Across nearly all opinion measures, female Gen-Zs are more optimistic about Nepal’s future, more institutionally confident, and more future-oriented than their male counterparts (See Figure 20). Specifically, women express stronger optimism about Nepal’s post-movement trajectory, greater confidence that elections will proceed on schedule, and a higher likelihood of choosing to remain in Nepal rather than emigrating. This pattern points to deeper civic attachment and a more forward-looking political outlook among Gen-Z women.

On governance questions, women display a preference for reform over rupture. They are more supportive of federalism, secularism, and multiparty democracy, while showing lower receptivity to monarchical restoration. Compared to men, they are less dismissive of existing institutions and more inclined to believe that structural improvements, particularly in areas like corruption control, are possible within the current system.

At the same time, Gen-Z women are not mere defenders of the status quo. They are also more open than men to political renewal through emerging political forces and leadership change. Taken together, the findings suggest that women constitute a reformist yet stabilising political constituency: they are and change oriented yet maintain a high degree of trust in existing institutions.

<sup>8</sup> The score is a weighted average of Gen-Zs preference score, with strongly agree-2, agree-1, neutral-0, disagree- -1, and strongly disagree- -2. Higher positive score indicates stronger agreement, and a negative score indicates disagreement with the statement.

## 6. Conclusion

This report has examined Nepal's Gen-Z movement as both a political rupture and a diagnostic moment, revealing the depth of public frustration with corruption and poor governance while reaffirming the continued legitimacy of electoral democracy. Although triggered by the government's decision in September 2025 to ban multiple social media platforms, the movement quickly transcended its immediate cause. Survey evidence and attitudinal data demonstrate that the protests were fundamentally rooted in long-standing grievances over endemic corruption, political instability, elite capture, and the persistent failure of successive governments to deliver accountable and effective governance. While Gen-Z youths were at the forefront of mobilisation, the issues they raised were neither generationally exclusive nor novel; rather, they articulated frustrations widely shared across Nepali society.

The survey data portray Nepal's Gen-Z as politically aware, selectively active, and deeply engaged with public affairs. Respondents report regular news consumption, primarily through digital and social media, and display a clear capacity to connect policy decisions with broader structural problems. Participation in the Gen-Z movement took varied forms, ranging from direct protest involvement to symbolic and moral support, but was underpinned by a shared demand for integrity, responsiveness, and leadership renewal. Expectations from the movement were correspondingly high: respondents viewed it as a vehicle to compel accountability and disrupt entrenched political practices, rather than merely expressive or symbolic act.

Electoral preferences emerging from the survey reveal a marked shift away from traditional party loyalty. Support for mainstream political parties and the political establishment remain weak, while anti-establishment figures and emerging political forces attract disproportionate attention. Leaders such as Balendra Shah and Harka Sampang are valued less for articulated policy agendas than for what they represent—a perceived break from patronage politics, decisiveness in action, and personal integrity. This preference reflects a broader rejection of “business as usual” governance, rather than a coherent ideological realignment.

At the same time, these findings clarify that Gen-Z does not seek to dismantle the party system or abandon democratic institutions. On the contrary, respondents express continued support for multiparty democracy, federalism, and secularism, even as they criticise their

current functioning. What Gen-Z demands is regeneration rather than abolition: cleaner politics, leadership renewal, internal party reform, and decision-making guided by national interest rather than factional bargaining and personal power. This scrutiny extends beyond senior leaders to encompass party organisations, grassroots cadres, and politically affiliated institutions such as student unions, all of which are viewed as complicit in sustaining patronage networks.

One of the most striking findings concerns leadership and institutional design. A large majority of respondents support the idea of a directly elected head of government, reflecting frustration with the “musical chairs” of opaque coalition politics. In response, major political parties have sought to reframe the upcoming elections by declaring prime-ministerial candidates, effectively presenting parliamentary elections in quasi-presidential terms to maintain electoral relevance. This strategy creates the illusion that voters are directly choosing a Prime Minister rather than electing representatives to parliament, highlighting both the appeal of personalised leadership and the adaptive strategies of parties seeking to remain electorally relevant.

Despite deep dissatisfaction with political outcomes, the movement ultimately reinforced trust in electoral procedures. The swift transition from street mobilisation to a constitutional settlement—culminating in an interim government and a clear electoral timetable—stands in contrast to youth-led upheavals elsewhere in the region. For example, in Bangladesh, transitions have been more protracted, violent, unstable, and ongoing. The Nepali case suggests a continued belief among Gen-Z that elections remain the legitimate mechanism for resolving political crises. This is further reflected in the finding that a significant share of Gen-Z respondents report being more inclined to remain in Nepal rather than emigrate because of the movement, indicating a renewed, though conditional, civic attachment.

Nevertheless, the report identifies a fundamental tension shaping Nepal's political future. The problems diagnosed by the Gen-Z movement are deeply embedded and do not lend itself to rapid solutions. Structural reform requires time, institutional capacity, and political compromise. Yet Gen-Z respondents display limited patience for incremental change, shaped by economic precarity, high unemployment, and the lived reality of mass youth

migration. This mismatch between expectations and institutional tempo poses a risk of renewed disillusionment.

The March elections thus constitute a critical juncture. They represent a moment of reckoning for the dominant parties, particularly the Nepali Congress, CPN-UML, and NCP as well as regional parties from Madhesh, whose long-standing dominance and “business as usual” approach increasingly appear misaligned with public expectations. A clear electoral mandate could open space for reform and stabilisation. However, a fragmented verdict producing another cycle of unstable coalition government risks reproducing the very conditions that gave rise to the movement, potentially relegating it to a footnote rather than a turning point in Nepal’s political evolution.

Finally, the report raises an open question that extends beyond electoral outcomes. If establishment parties return to power without meaningful reform or alternative forces gain power but fail to institutionalise reforms, how will Gen-Z respond? Will disappointment translate into acceptance of institutional limits, or will it fuel renewed mobilisation and deeper challenges to political authority? The answer will shape not only the legacy of the Gen-Z movement, but also the trajectory of Nepal’s democratic politics in the years to come.

# Annexes

## Annex I: Survey Sample Calculation

To determine the sample size (n) for the survey, the following standard formula for estimating a sample proportion was used:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \times p \times (1 - p)}{e^2}$$

Where:

→Z= Z-value corresponding to the desired confidence level (for 98 per cent confidence, Z=2.33)

→p= estimated proportion of the population (set at 0.5 for maximum variability)

→e= margin of error (0.04)

Substituting the values:

$$n = \frac{(2.33)^2 \times 0.5 \times (1-0.5)}{(0.04)^2} n = \frac{5.4289 \times 0.25}{0.0016} = \frac{1.3572}{0.0016} = 848.25$$

To adjust for a finite population (N = 7,245,427), the corrected sample size is calculated as:

$$n_{adj} = \frac{n}{1 + \frac{(n-1)}{N}} n_{adj} = \frac{848.25}{1 + \frac{847.25}{7,245,427}} \approx 848$$

Thus, the final sample size (N) = 848 respondents.

## Annex II: Survey Sample Distribution by Demographic Categories

Province	Expected	Actual
Koshi	138.7328	141
Madhesh	175.96	179
Bagmati	182.9136	186
Gandaki	68.0944	71
Lumbini	152.216	153
Karnali	51.304	54
Sudurpaschim	78.864	81
Total	848	865

Gender	Expected Sample	Actual sample
Male	403.648	439
Female	444.352	426
Total	848	865

Rural urban	Expected	Final Sample
Rural	279.84	340
Urban	568.16	525
Total	848	865

Ethnic Group	Expected Sample	Final Sample
Arya/Khas	249.2272	297
Adivasi/Janajati	220.48	247
Madhesi	254.4	246
Dalit	84.0368	72
Others	41.2128	3
Total	848	865

Age Group	Expected Sample	Final Sample
19-16	267.968	269
23-20	271.36	313
28-24	308.672	283
Total	848	865

### Annex III: FGD Locations

FGD Number	FGD Location	Province	Date Conducted
1	Laljhadi Rural Municipality	Sudurpaschim	16 November 2025
2	Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan City	Sudurpaschim	16 November 2025
3	Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan City	Lumbini	17 November 2025
4	Rapti Sonari Rural Municipality	Lumbini	18 November 2025
5	Bharatpur Metropolitan City	Bagmati	22 November 2025
6	Annapurna Rural Municipality	Gandaki	23 November 2025
7	Pokhara Metropolitan City	Gandaki	23 November 2025
8	Agni-Sair Rural Municipality	Madhesh	6 January 2026
9	Kanchanrup Municipality	Madhesh	7 January 2026
10	Biratnagar Metropolitan City	Koshi	8 January 2026
11	Lalitpur Metropolitan City	Bagmati	26 January 2026

## Annex IV: List of KII

S.N.	Participant	Date	Profile
KII 1	N/A (request to remain anonymous)	8 December 2025	Gen-Z movement organizer
KII 2	N/A (request to remain anonymous)	8 December 2025	Gen-Z activist
KII 3	Arnab Chaudhary	9 December 2025	Member of Gen-Z Movement Alliance
KII 4	Dheeraj Joshi	17 December 2025	Personal Secretary of Home Minister Om Prakash Aryal
KII 5	Biken Dawadi	22 December 2025	Journalist
KII 6	Rastra Bimochan Timalisina	22 December 2025	Legal Professional/ Content Creator
KII 7	N/A (request to remain anonymous)	23 December 2025	CPN (UML) Youth Leader
KII 8	Aakriti Ghimire	29 December 2025	Gen-Z activist and initiator of <i>How To Desh Bikash</i>
KII 9	N/A (request to remain anonymous)	7 January 2026	NC party member/Youth activist
KII 10	N/A (request to remain anonymous)	27 January 2026	Maj. General (retd), Nepal Army

## Annex V: Multinomial Regression (Dependent variable: Trust in interim government)

Likelihood Ratio Tests				
	-2 Log Likelihood of Reduced Model	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Province	942.118	30.675	12	0.002
Rural/Ruban	911.571	0.129	2	0.938
Age-group	915.363	3.920	4	0.417
Gender	941.045	29.602	2	0.000
Occupation	918.541	7.098	6	0.312
Education level	928.744	17.302	6	0.008
Ethnicity	927.362	15.919	8	0.044
Future plan	931.010	19.568	10	0.034
Awareness	913.150	1.707	4	0.789
Politically active	913.623	2.181	4	0.703
News frequency	921.773	10.330	8	0.243
Social media (for news)	915.195	3.753	2	0.153

## Annex VI: One Way ANOVA Calculations (Dependent variable: Average agreement score)

Theme	Categories	F (df <sub>1</sub> , df <sub>2</sub> )	p-value	η <sup>2</sup> (eta squared)	Effect level
Gender	Male; Female	F(1, 24) = 2.217	0.15	0.085	Medium
Age group	16–19; 20–23; 24–28	F(2, 36) = 1.023	0.37	0.054	Small–medium
Urban / Rural	Urban; Rural	F(1, 24) = 0.001	0.976	0	Essentially identical
Ethnicity	Four ethnic categories	F(3, 48) = 0.222	0.881	0.014	Small
Province	Seven provinces	F(6, 84) = 0.981	0.444	0.065	Medium
Education level	Five education levels	F(4, 60) = 0.588	0.673	0.038	Small
Awareness level	Aware; Don't know; Unaware	F(2, 36) = 0.371	0.693	0.02	Small
Future plan	Stay in Nepal; Go abroad; Undecided	F(2, 36) = 0.869	0.428	0.046	Small–medium

Effect level based on η<sup>2</sup> (eta squared): (Negligible < .01 | Small ≥ .01 | Medium ≥ .06 | Large ≥ .14)

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### *Youth's Views and Voices about Political Future*

Nepal went through an unprecedented youth uprising in September 2025, commonly known as Gen-Z movement. What were the hopes and goals that motivated these young people to participate in the protests? Triggered by the government's decision to ban multiple social media platforms, the Gen-Z movement quickly evolved into a broader expression of public frustration. Earlier, similar movements were observed across South Asia, highlighting some sort of regional trend of digitally mediated youth activism to reform the governance. There is, however, limited systematic knowledge about the scale and diversity of such movements. In that regard, the study explains the nature of the movement in Nepal and its procedures. The study also points out that there is a firm commitment to democracy and its proven norms and values.

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