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REBOOTING DEMOCRACY IN NEPAL: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE TRANSITION FROM JAN ANDOLAN MOBILISATION TO GEN Z-LED DIGITAL POLITICAL REVOLUTION

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Keywords

Nepal Democracy; Jan Andolan; Gen Z Politics; Digital Activism; Youth Mobilisation; Democratic Transition; Social Media Politics

Abstract

The democratic evolution of Nepal has been characterized by recurring cycles of mobilisation, constitution-making and elite-centred governance which has drawn popular frustration. The transition from Jan Andolan-era street mobilization to a digital political revolution led by Gen Z, sparked in 2025 by social media restrictions, corruption, joblessness and distrust of established parties, is under the scanner in the present paper. The study, based on a mixed-method secondary-data design, employs a historical-comparative analysis and a trend analysis of internet penetration, social media user identities, selected electoral indicators, Freedom House scores and qualitative evidence from verified institutional and media sources. Nepal's democratic mobilization has undergone three broad phases, according to the paper: street-based democratic resistance, post-republican institutional consolidation and platform-



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	based democratic disruption. According to the findings, the internet penetration increased from 35.0% in 2020 to 55.8% in 2025. Furthermore, the identity of social media users increased from 10.0 million to 14.3 million during this period. However, the analysis warns us not to think that the growth of the digital is, in itself, a democratic deepening. Gen Z mobilization 2025 showcased rapid agenda-setting, decentralized coordination, and robust anti-corruption symbolism. However, it also revealed risks from misinformation, weak representation, state repression, and fragile negotiations with institutions. The study concludes that if we relate digital activism with constitutionalism, civil education, youth inclusion, accountable public institutions and platform governance respecting citizen rights, then digital activism can reboot democracy in Nepal.
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1. Introduction

The evolution of Nepal from a constitutional monarchy to a stable democracy

There has been a battle between protests and institutional blockages in the present updates. In 1990, the Jan Andolan challenged the partyless Panchayat order and reopened the space for constitutional multiparty politics. The events of 2006 marked the second Jan Andolan. It was a public uprising against autocratic monarchy. Moreover, it was special as it provided a political settlement. This settlement further shaped the 2015 Constitution. It greatly contributed to the emergence of a republican imagination. Most importantly, it greatly delegitimised direct royal rule.

The dense street mobilization in these movements involved pressure from civil society, participation from trade unions, student organizations, professional associations and party coalitions. The physical occupation of public space became the core repertoire with bodies in the streets and squares becoming visible evidence of democratic legitimacy.

The establishment of 2025 Gen Z causes of action is unlike the Jan Andolan protest in organisation, language and pace, though it is of the same broad democratic tradition. In contrast to earlier experience, this time the principal arena of mobilisation shifted from party offices, union media and street corner meetings to a hybrid system of TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Viber, Discord, hashtags, memes, VPN circulation and rapid online deliberation. As stated by Reuters, the immediate trigger of protests was Nepal's blocking of major social media platforms after registration disputes. However, protest narratives quickly expanded to include corruption, unemployment, privilege of elites and frustrations at older political leadership (G. Sharma, 2025a; S. Sharma & G. Sharma, 2025). Carnegie's 2025 assessment referred to the shift from street protests to Discord amongst the youth and the significance of



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online networks, not to mention the appointment of an interim leadership through digital deliberation following the downfall of the current government (Mulmi, 2025).

This paper deals with the phrase digital political revolution in an analytical way rather than a romantic one. A mobilization that is coordinated digitally can disrupt a regime, expand the public sphere and reduce participation costs. However, it can also speed up the spread of rumors, create ambiguous representations, favor urban groups who are experts in using these platforms, and make negotiations weaker with formal institutions. The analytical question, therefore, is not whether digital activism is good or bad. The more precise question is how Nepal's democratic mobilisation changed from party-centred mass protest to decentralised platform-based youth mobilisations, and what does this shift entail for democratic accountabilities, institutional reforms and political representations.

The empirical relevance of this study is bolstered by Nepal's fast growing digitalisation. According to the country reports of DataReportal, the internet penetration that stood at 35.0% of the population in 2020 will reach 55.8% in 2025. Social media user identities increased from 10.0 million in 2020 to 14.3 million in 2025 (Kemp, 2020, 2025). According to 2024 World Bank country data, internet use at 46% of the population confirms the same broad trend of connectivity growth even where data methods differ (World Bank, 2025). Similarly, Freedom House's 2020-2025 country assessments classify Nepal as Partly Free suggesting an electoral and competitive democracy which is nevertheless held back by corruption, institutional weakness, party fragmentation and rights concerns (Freedom House, 2020, 2025).

There exists a two-fold gap in research. Primarily studies of Nepal's democratic transition tend to favour constitutional history and party competition as well as federal restructuring, post-conflict peacebuilding, and digital mobilisation as secondary communicative layer. Also, it is noted in recent commentary that the Gen Z activism is not new as generations before have done it. This paper links the two problems by analysing digital mobilization as a historically situated transformation of protest infrastructure. It argues that the activism of Gen Z did not displace the democratic memory of Jan Andolan; rather, it repurposed that memory through platform logics, anti-corruption discourse and digitized civic identity.

1.1 Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to analyse the transition in Nepal's democratic mobilisation from Jan Andolan-era street-based collective action to Gen Z-led platform-based political disruption, with particular attention to digital connectivity, youth dissatisfaction, anti-corruption politics and democratic accountability.



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2. Research Objectives

To examine the historical role of Jan Andolan mobilisation in Nepal's democratic transformation.

To analyse the rise of Gen Z-led digital political mobilisation in Nepal.

To compare traditional street-based mobilisation with platform-based digital activism.

To assess the relationship between internet and social media growth and youth political participation.

To evaluate whether digital political activism strengthens or destabilises democratic institutions in Nepal.

To identify policy implications for youth inclusion, digital rights and democratic institutional reform.

3. Research Questions

How did Jan Andolan mobilisation shape Nepal's democratic transition?

What factors contributed to the emergence of Gen Z-led digital political activism in Nepal?

How do digital platforms transform protest organisation, political messaging and civic participation?

What is the relationship between digital connectivity and youth political mobilisation?

Can Gen Z-led digital movements reboot democratic accountability in Nepal?

4. Literature Review

4.1 Democratic Transition and Mass Mobilisation in Nepal

The best way to understand Nepal's democratic transition is through the recurrent contestation of speech-makers for the political community. The legitimacy shifted away from monarchical authority and towards popular sovereignty due to Jan Andolan movements widening this community. When compared with similar situations, such mobilisations can be seen to fit a larger pattern in which elite fragmentation, civic pressure and political opportunity create vulnerability in authoritarian or semi- authoritarian arrangements. What is interesting about the Nepali case is that the promotion of democracy through popular mobilisations has repeatedly produced institutional change.

Freedom House country assessments from 2020 to 2025 ranked Nepal Partly Free, with some improvement in the aggregate score from 56 to 62, even when core concerns over corruption, media pressure and institutional weakness persisted (Freedom House, 2020, 2025). Nepal's democracy cannot simply be described as in a state of collapse. It keeps competitive elections, parliamentary institutions and a relatively open civil society. However,



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the repeated changes of government, uneven rule of law and the distrust of the public create the conditions under which extra parliamentary mobilisation continues to function as an accountability mechanism.

4.2 Jan Andolan A Case Study of Street-Based Democratic Resistance

Mobilisation for Jan Andolan revolved around coalition-building between parties, students, civil society actors and professional groups. The visible scale of participation on the streets and the ability of protest leaders to translate popular demands into institutional negotiation gave legitimacy to the protests. The repertoire was slower than digital mobilisation but more organisationally anchored: messages moved through party structures, print media, radio, public meetings, local committees and everyday networks of trust. The power of the protest was located not just in numbers but also in identifiable leadership, and negotiated constitutional goals.

Consequently, Jan Andolan model blended disruption with institutionalisation. Although there was pressure generated through protests, it was party leaders and civil-society intermediaries who turned this pressure into constitutional and governmental outcomes. This is an important distinction while comparing Jan Andolan with the Gen Z mobilization of 2025. Digital mobilization can gather speed faster than party-led protest. However, it lacks agreement on leadership, coherence of programme, and deliberative continuity after the immediate moment of rupture.

Nepal's Youth Participation and Political Dissatisfaction.

Nepal youths are more disappointed than just spending time on social media. It indicates the presence of a structural gap between a young demographic and an older political class. According to the demographic profile estimated by DataReportal (2025), the median age was 25.3 years, with a large share of the population in 18-34 age group. Carnegie's analysis of the protest wave of 2025 reminded us that more than half of Nepal's population is under 30 years of age. Hence, youth frustration is associated with unemployment, out-migration and corruption (Mulmi, 2025). It is not that all young citizens think the same thing. On the contrary, digital platforms recognised several common ones across class, location and everyday experience for many youths.

There is also a problem with representation in electoral data. IFES (2022) noted that in the 2022 federal and provincial elections, more than two million Nepali youth were eligible to vote for the first time. According to the ElectionGuide turnout series, we have witnessed a drop in turnout in the House of Representatives election from 78.24% in 2017 to 61.85% in 2022 (IFES ElectionGuide, 2025) Although age-disaggregated turnout data are not available strongly to claim causality, the presence of a large youth electorate alongside a declining



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turnout overall may indicate a disconnect between demographic presence and political confidence.

Digital activism: Social Media and networked protest.

As per the worldwide studies, digital media can enlarge civic participation. But such effects are not automatic or homogeneous. Boulianne found the relationship between digital media use and civic-political participation to be positive in a large number of studies. According to researchers Zhuravskaya, Petrova and Enikolopov, digital media can affect voting, protest, political attitudes and state strategies of censorship or surveillance. (Zhuravskaya, Petrova and Enikolopov, 2020) In a similar vein, Lorenz-Spreen and colleagues discovered that while media content can be a source of misinformation, it has also become a primary channel through which citizens participate in politics (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2023).

As for Nepal, these results indicate that digital activism needs to be studied as a political mix infrastructure. Politics is more than just a layer over the existing communication tools. It alters the price, pace, and emotional character of mobilization. The platform empowers regular individuals to express dissent against corruption by sharing visual evidence, memes, and personal accounts. It facilitates coordination of street presence through messaging app groups and allows protest demands to transcend party channels. Simultaneously, it possesses the capacity for rapid escalation before on-the-ground representation structures are prepared to engage with the state.

Generation Z Political Identity and Mobilization Based on their Pads.

The political identity of Gen Z in Nepal isn't about age. It is a civic style shaped by mobile internet, visual culture, humour, anti-elite discourse and distrust of conventional party mediation. The 2025 mobilization similarly employed slogans such as youth against corruption and urban social media, fusing digital-rights claims with anger over nepotism, inequality (G. Sharma, 2025b; S. Sharma & G. Sharma, 2025). Carnegie's account of the mobilisation identified Viber, Discord, TikTok and anti-nepotism campaigns as key components of the movement's communication infrastructure (Mulmi, 2025).

At this juncture, the idea of rebooting democracy becomes analytically useful. Protesters from the Gen Z generation did not demand the end of democracy. Rather, they demand that it come to answer for them, having gone through state failure due to joblessness, migration, corruption and blocked expression. Digital platforms gave visibility to a widely shared mood of frustration. Nonetheless, visibility on a platform is distinct from durable representation. The extent to which youth networks can turn protest energy into institutional reform, party renewal and civic education will affect the longer-term democratic effect of protests.

Digital Democracy, Misinformation and Governance Risks



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The risk of digital mobilization that is democratic works in both ways. To begin with, states may respond to online dissent with restrictive legislation platform blocking or surveillance. In 2025, UNESCO remarked on Nepal's Social Media Bill 2081 calling for the need for safeguards for freedom of expression, access to information and digital rights (UNESCO, 2025). Access Now and CIVICUS Monitor expressed concerns regarding the Telegram restriction and social media regulation proposal, arguing that broad regulatory powers could have a chilling effect on online speech (Access Now, 2025; CIVICUS Monitor, 2025). Risks can emerge through misinformation, quick emotional contagion, and ambiguous leadership from online mobilization itself. To alleviate both unregulated platform power and arbitrary state control, democratic design therefore needs.

The literature on digital media and democracy bolsters this balanced stance. Freelon, Marwick and Kreiss state that online activism is politically consequential but varies from actor to ideology to media strategy (Freelon et al., 2020). Per UNESCO's platform-governance notes, regulation should protect freedom of expression, while addressing online harms, through necessity, proportionality and multistakeholder oversight (UNESCO, 2023) It is necessary for Nepal to design a digital governance that does not equate criticizing power with disorder and, at the same time, ensure that platforms do not become unaccountable sites of manipulation.

Research Gap 4.7

Previous scholarship frequently sets apart both the historical democratic movements in Nepal and the modern-day digital activism. This rupture obscures continuity between Jan Andolan's democratic memory and the anti-corruption digital repertoire of Gen Z. The current research attempts to close this gap by examining digital mobilization as a historical change in the infrastructure of democratic protest. It synthesises comparative interpretation, secondary quantitative indicators and thematic reading of the 2025 mobilisation narratives.

5. Theoretical Framework.

Political Chance Framework

The theory of Political Opportunity Structure accounts for the expansion of protests when institutional arrangements seem vulnerable, divided or unresponsive. In Nepal, political fragmentation and a lack of trust in governance has been conducive for mobilisation among the youth. The social media restriction of 2025 was a catalyst as it turned dormant discontent into a public rights issue. Because platforms existed, that didn't mean that digital mobilisation emerged. It emerged because political conditions made online expression feel necessary and under threat.

Mobilization of Resources.



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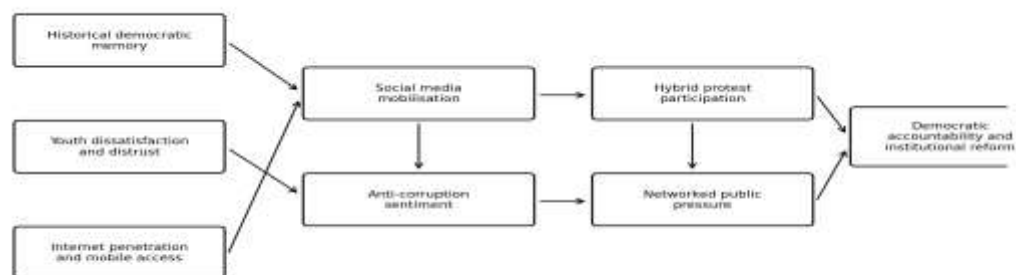
Resource Mobilisation Theory assists in contrasting Jan Andolan and Gen Z activism. Jan Andolan was a widespread mobilisation of civil society groups, organisations of all kinds and parties. The Gen Z revolution was activated via the mobile phone, hashtag, messaging group, visual, peer-to-peer circulation. The resources transitioned from organizational membership to network access. This reduced barriers to entry for youth participants but weakened lasting organisational accountability.

Networked Public Sphere and Political Socialisation of Generations

Networked public sphere theory shows how disjunctured actors can engender visibility in digital spaces without depending on conventional gatekeepers. Generational political socialisation illustrates how younger citizens might experience politics through immediacy, interactivity and a public performance on mobile platforms. The above perspectives clarify why Gen Z mobilization worked through fast-paced narrative circulation, meme-based anti-elite critique and hybrid online-offline protest. When no institutional plan follows the protest-oriented moment, networked publics risk fragmentation as well, according to the thesis.

6. Academic Framework Structure

According to the conceptual framework, digital mobilisation serves as a mediating mechanism that links historical democratic memory and contemporary youth discontent with protest participation and demands to reform institutions. Historical democratic memory could establish legitimacy by linking contemporary movements to past struggles against authoritarianism. Dissatisfaction among youth a source of incentive on corruption, unemployment, migration pressures, lack of faith older parties. The accessibility of the internet and social network user provide facilities. The counterfeit discourse provides a moral framework. Subsequently, participation in protest creates public pressure. Public pressure deepens democratic accountability. But lacking constitutional channels may destabilise institutions.



Digital mobilisation is treated as a mediating mechanism rather than as an automatic democratic outcome.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Nepal's Democratic Mobilisation Shift



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Source note. Author's analytical construction based on the theoretical framework and secondary literature.

7. Methodology

This study uses a mixed-method analytical design based on secondary data. The design is descriptive because it maps patterns of internet penetration, social media use, voter turnout and democracy indicators. It is analytical because it interprets the relationship between digital connectivity and political mobilisation. It is comparative because it contrasts Jan Andolan-era mobilisation with the 2025 Gen Z-led digital mobilisation. The study area is Nepal, with historical reference to Jan Andolan I and Jan Andolan II and empirical emphasis on the 2020-2025 period.

The quantitative component uses publicly available secondary data from DataReportal/Kepios digital country reports, Freedom House country scores, IFES ElectionGuide turnout data, IPU parliamentary election records, World Bank indicators and selected Nepal Telecommunications Authority reports. The qualitative component uses institutional reports, digital-rights analyses, media reports and policy documents to interpret protest narratives, platform regulation and democratic risks. The paper does not use individual-level survey data and therefore does not claim to measure individual attitudes directly.

The main variables include internet penetration, social media user identities, mobile subscriptions, youth demographic share, selected election turnout indicators, democracy scores, digital-rights restrictions and major political mobilisation events. Data quality varies by source. DataReportal social media figures represent advertising-reachable user identities or platform-derived estimates rather than verified unique citizens. NTA figures represent telecom subscriptions and broadband accounts, which can exceed population because of multiple SIMs, shared devices and overlapping subscriptions. These limitations are explicitly acknowledged in the interpretation.

Table 1. Variables Used for Democratic Mobilisation Analysis

Variable	Operational meaning	Main source	Use in analysis
Internet users (%)	Share of population using the internet	DataReportal; World Bank	Connectivity trend and digital mobilisation context
Broadband/subscription indicators	Telecom subscriptions and	Nepal Telecommunications	Infrastructure proxy; not treated



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	broadband access	Authority	as unique users
Social media users	Platform-derived user identities or ad-reachable accounts	DataReportal/Kepios	Social media scale and online mobilisation potential
Youth population share	Age composition, especially 18-34 and under 30	DataReportal; secondary demographic analyses	Generational basis of mobilisation
Voter turnout	Turnout in selected national elections	IFES ElectionGuide; Election Commission Nepal	Electoral participation and trust proxy
Democracy/freedom score	Freedom House aggregate political rights and civil liberties score	Freedom House	Institutional democratic environment
Digital rights restrictions	Platform bans, social media bill, regulatory restrictions	UNESCO; Access Now; CIVICUS; Digital Rights Nepal	Rights-risk interpretation
Protest intensity/event frequency	Major mobilisation episodes and reported protest consequences	Reuters; Carnegie; The Guardian	Qualitative protest timeline
Political trust indicators	Indirect evidence from turnout, corruption discourse and public protest narratives	IFES; Transparency International; media reports	Interpretive context

Note. The study uses secondary indicators and does not treat telecom or platform-account data as equivalent to individual political participation.

8. Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis combines descriptive statistics, trend analysis, comparative historical analysis, correlation interpretation and qualitative thematic analysis. Descriptive statistics summarise digital connectivity, social media user identities, selected turnout figures and democracy scores. Trend analysis examines change between 2020 and 2025. Comparative



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analysis contrasts Jan Andolan mobilisation with Gen Z mobilisation. Correlation analysis is used only as an illustrative association between internet penetration and social media user identities; because the dataset has six annual observations, the coefficient is not treated as causal proof. Thematic analysis identifies recurring protest frames: anti-corruption, social media freedom, anti-nepotism, youth dignity, joblessness and accountability.

Table 2. Comparison between Jan Andolan Mobilisation and Gen Z Digital Mobilisation

Dimension	Jan Andolan mobilisation	Gen Z digital mobilisation
Primary arena	Streets, squares, party offices, civil society networks	Social platforms, messaging apps, hashtags, VPNs and streets
Leadership form	Party and civil-society leadership with recognisable negotiators	Decentralised youth networks with emergent digital influencers
Communication speed	Slower diffusion through meetings, print, radio and organisations	Rapid diffusion through visual posts, memes, livestreams and groups
Core democratic claim	End authoritarian rule and restore popular sovereignty	End corruption, protect expression, renew representation and accountability
Risk profile	State repression and elite compromise	Misinformation, coordination ambiguity, platform dependence and repression
Institutional pathway	Negotiated constitutional and governmental change	Uncertain transition from protest energy to institutional reform

Note. The comparison is analytical and based on secondary-source interpretation of mobilisation repertoires.

Table 3. Internet Penetration, Mobile Connectivity and Social Media Usage in Nepal, 2020-2025

Year	Internet users (m)	Internet users (%)	Social media users (m)	Social media users (%)	Mobile connections (m)	Mobile connections (%)	18-34 share (%)
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2020	10.21	35.0	10.00	35.0	42.85	148.0	N/A
2021	10.78	36.7	13.00	44.2	38.61	131.3	N/A
2022	11.51	38.4	13.70	45.7	40.58	135.5	32.4
2023	15.85	51.6	12.60	41.0	42.78	139.2	32.0
2024	15.40	49.6	13.50	43.5	37.47	120.6	32.1
2025	16.50	55.8	14.30	48.1	39.00	132.0	30.3

Note. Data are compiled from DataReportal/Kepios annual Nepal country reports. Social media figures represent platform-derived user identities, not verified unique citizens. Demographic age shares are available in comparable form for 2022-2025.

Table 4. Nepal's Voter Turnout and Youth Political Participation Indicators

Indicator	Value	Interpretation	Source
2008 Constituent Assembly turnout	58.52%	Post-conflict electoral participation during constitutional transition	IFES ElectionGuide
2013 Constituent Assembly turnout	77.57%	High participation during constitution-making process	IFES ElectionGuide
2017 House of Representatives turnout	78.24%	High post-constitution federal election turnout	IFES ElectionGuide
2022 House of Representatives turnout	61.85%	Decline of 16.39 percentage points from 2017	IFES ElectionGuide
First-time youth voters in 2022	Over 2 million	Large youth electorate but limited age-disaggregated turnout evidence	IFES
Women elected to HoR in 2022	91 of 275 seats	Approximately one-third representation after election	IPU

Note. Age-disaggregated turnout is not sufficiently available; therefore the study avoids claiming a direct youth-turnout effect.

Table 5. Democracy and Civic Freedom Indicators for Nepal, 2020-2025

Year	Status	Aggregate score /100	Political rights /40	Civil liberties /60
2020	Partly Free	56	25	31
2021	Partly Free	56	25	31
2022	Partly Free	57	25	32



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2023	Partly Free	58	26	32
2024	Partly Free	62	28	34
2025	Partly Free	62	28	34

Note. Freedom House scores are annual country assessments. The 2025 assessment does not capture all later protest consequences if events occurred after its reporting window.

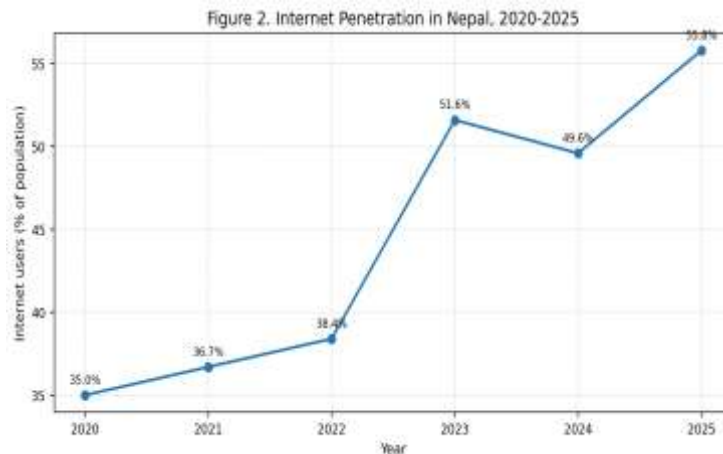


Figure 2. Internet Penetration in Nepal, 2020-2025

Source note. Compiled from DataReportal/Kepios annual country reports; values are shown as percentage of population.

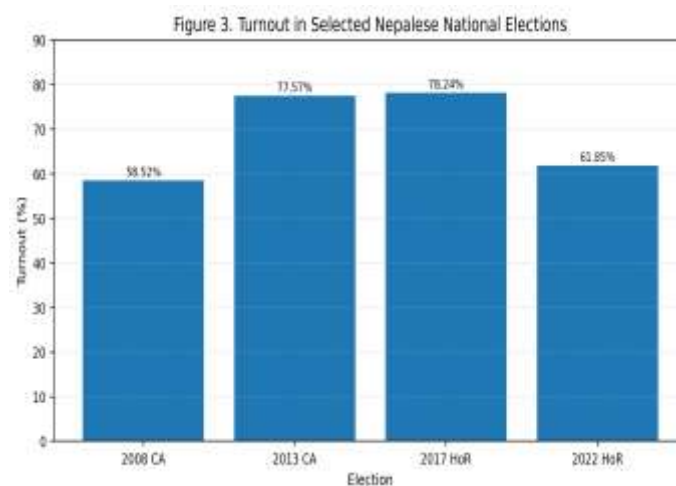


Figure 3. Voter Turnout Trends in Selected Nepalese Elections

Source note. Compiled from IFES ElectionGuide turnout series. CA = Constituent Assembly; HoR = House of Representatives.



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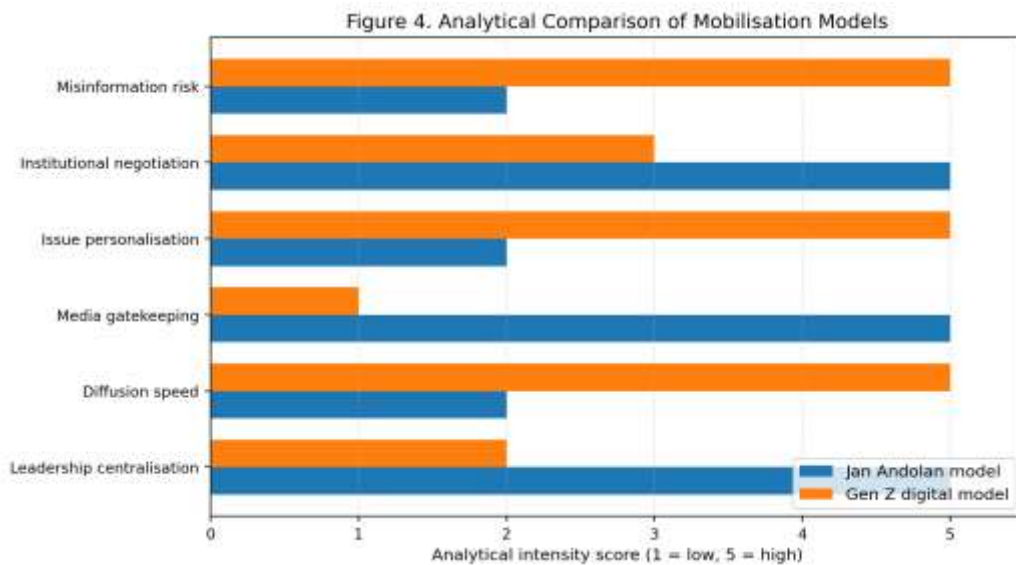


Figure 4. Comparative Chart of Traditional Mobilisation and Digital Mobilisation

Source note. Author's analytical coding, where 1 = low and 5 = high intensity on each dimension. It is not a survey result.

Figure 5. Forms of Gen Z Political Engagement in the 2025 Mobilisation

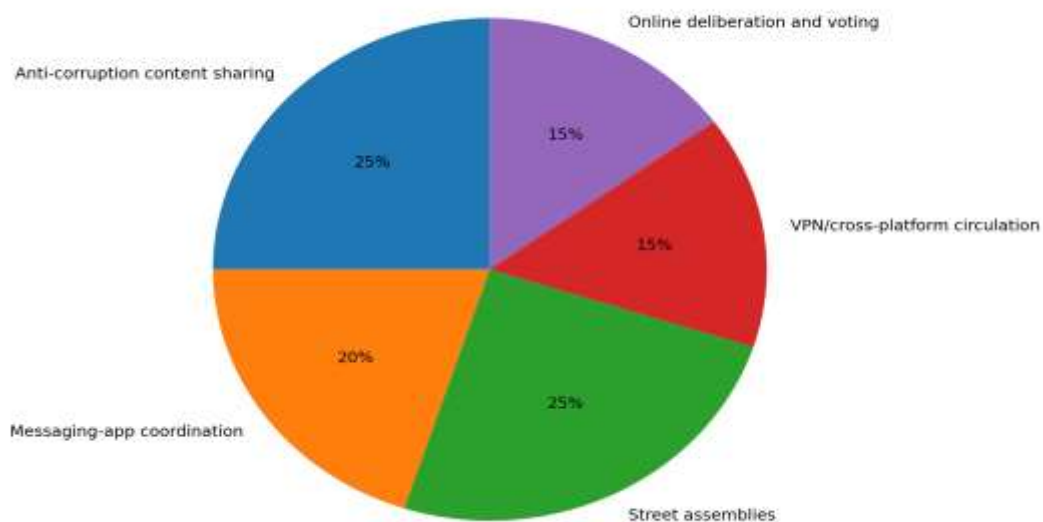


Figure 5. Forms of Gen Z Political Engagement

Source note. Thematic distribution estimated from secondary-source coding of 2025 mobilisation narratives; not individual-level survey data.

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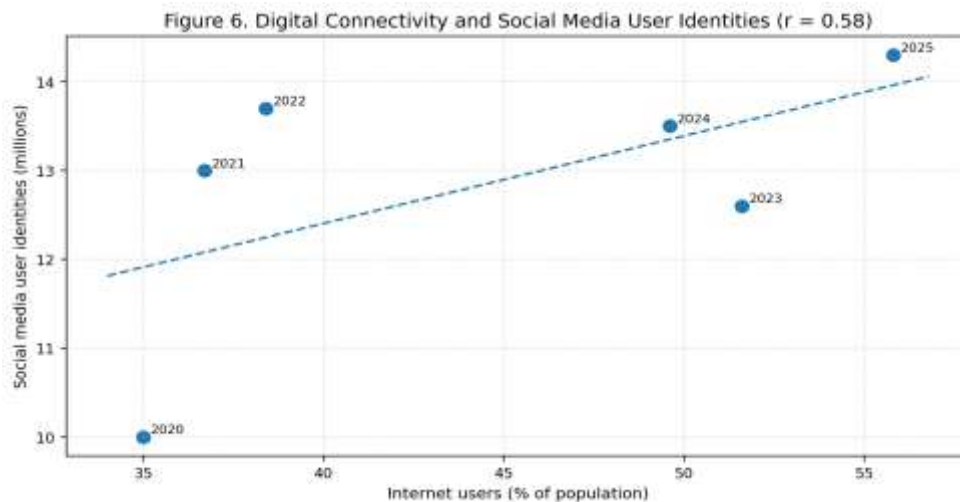


Figure 6. Correlation between Digital Connectivity and Social Media User Identities

Source note. Illustrative Pearson correlation using six annual observations from DataReportal/Kepios; not interpreted as causal evidence.

9. Results

9.1 Growth of Digital Connectivity in Nepal

Namibia to reach 10.21million internet users in 2020 to 16.50 million users in 2025. This online reach between years 2020 to 2025 has experienced a hike. The internet penetration increased by 20.8 percentage points from 35.0% to 55.8% of the population (Kemp 2020 2025). Political significance of cultural industries was often explained by their ability to shape people, objects and the space in between a lot.

The data also demonstrates the necessity for cautious subscription count interpretations. Over the years, mobile connections went up greater than the population because one person may hold multiple SIMs and also connections are not citizens.

The correct inference is not that not each Nepali had a political connection but that there was a dense mobile communication structure in Nepal through which political messages could flow easily. Through this infrastructure, digitized mobilization became possible even as internet access remained uneven in terms of class, geography, language and gender.

Social media user identities projected to grow from 10.0 million in 2020 to 14.3 million in 2025, an an increase of approximately 43.0%. Nonetheless, the social media series entails platform-methodology changes and estimates of advertising-reach which should render it as a measure of scale and not precise civic participation. A significant outcome is the presence of



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a significant audience by 2025, an audience that appeals against-platform bans and is behind youth-led mobilisation.

A Changing Pattern of Political Participation

With reference to the election data, there is a contrast between moments of high turnout constitution-making in Nepal and more recent electoral disengagement. Voter turnout for House of Representatives rose sharply after 2008 and remained high in 2013 and 2017. Turnout for 2022 House of Representatives election, however, fell to 61.85% – down 16.39 percentage points from 2017 (IFES ElectionGuide, 2025). While this doesn't prove youth disengagement, it does show that formal electoral participation was no longer enough to contain civic frustration.

The 2022 elections witnessed the emergence of new political actors and those who are digitally visible, with the Rastriya Swatantra Party establishing itself as a significant parliamentary force. In a broader sense, the nature of digital communication is probably not just limited to impacting street protest – they have also altered the visibility of electoral entrants and anti-establishment narrative. The mobilization of Gen Z is a representation of a larger phenomenon in which activists are starting to bypass the mainstream political parties in search for accountability.

Transforming a Party-Centred Mobilisation

The Jan Andolan and Gen Z mobilisation present a departure from organisation-heavy mobilisation to network-heavy mobilisation. The Jan Andolan's success rested on party alliances and more. The digital speed of Gen Z mobilisation used issue personalization and peer-to-peer legitimacy. The first model was negotiable in practice – through institutional channels – but slow; the second, while fast and hard to contain, was also hard to convert into coherent institutional bargaining.

We should not think of the transition as merely the decline of parties. Political parties are crucial for elections, law-making and government formation. The 2025 mobilisation shows that parties are no longer the sole monopolies of democratic energy. When young citizens view parties as self-protective, digital networks become alternative channels for agenda-setting. The crowd in protest as a public assembly is assessed on grievance acknowledgment, not party membership.

Digital Mobilisation against Issues and Corruption on the Rise.

In 2025, the mobilisation of digital rights and anti-corruption was fused. The first grievance was over restrictions on the media, but the slogans and the reporting soon pointed to much deeper anger against nepotism, unemployment, and elite privilege (G. Sharma,



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2025b, S. Sharma and G. Sharma, 2025). As reported by Reuters, blaming inequality and economic opportunities along with corruption were behind the protests. According to Carnegie, the anti-nepotism campaign and deliberation over Discord lay at the heart of the protests' digital repertoire (Mulmi, 2025; S. Sharma & G. Sharma, 2025).

Five frames are identified in thematic analysis. The first one is freedom of expression which makes the shutdown perceived as silencing dissent. The second anti-corruption: protesters framed political elites as taking public resources with no accountability. The third feature is generational dignity, with youth refusing to accept that they should migrate or that they should stay politically mute. The fourth requirement listed under A fourth was institutional renewal: the demand was not merely to remove one leader but to repair representation. The youth digital citizens believed that social media is a new urban space we need to engage with.

Role of social media in agenda-setting and protest diffusion.

The correlation between internet penetration and social media user identities is very high ($r = 0.58$) in the 2020-2025 dataset we compiled. Note, however, that this coefficient should be interpreted with caution, both due to the small number of observations involved (six) as well as the fact that both estimates come from the same digital-market study. The value is useful as a descriptive indication that social media scale expanded alongside internet connectivity. The Internet Growth didn't help spark the Protests.

Evidence that is qualitative is more important for an explanation of mobilisation. The use of these platforms allowed for agenda setting powers to emerge, particularly through hashtags, short videos, visual contrasts between elite privilege and ordinary hardship, messaging groups and VPN-enabled circulation after restrictions.

The movement of 2025 shows how a protest can become simultaneously digital and embodied: the state's political crisis became real when people occupied space around the state's institutions, but the outrage in cyberspace created shared language.

Opportunit  s et risques d  mocratiques 9.6

As per Freedom House, Nepal's overall score improved from 56 in 2020 to 62 in 2025, a six-point increase, yet it remained Partly Free throughout (Freedom House, 2020, 2025). The score trend shows that Nepal retained important space for democracy despite institutional weaknesses. This partial openness enabled digital mobilization: there was sufficiently enough freedom for networks, journalists and civil society to criticize power. But, there was sufficient distrust for protest to escalate rapidly.



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The ability of digital activism to increase participation, unveil corruption, and compel institutions to act is a democratic opportunity. The battleground represents the development of armed local governance that mobilises militarily. When the state response treats platform restriction as an answer to dissent it may magnify risk. As such the 2025 episode illustrates a dual crisis: the crisis of elite accountability and the crisis of digital governance.

10. Discussion

The main finding is that democratic mobilization in Nepal has not simply moved from offline to online through technological substitution. Hybrid mobilisation has been more pronounced, wherein digital platforms create a field of shared grievances, whereas the streets convert that field into visible pressure. The Jan Andolan initiative situated the street at its core and utilized a communication network to bolster the street. The mobilisation of Generation Z was defined through networked communications deploying the street to force state recognition. This reversal causes a change in the temporal aspect of protests as digital mobilization can go from a grievance to a confrontation.

The Political Opportunity Structure Theory clarifies the significance of the 2025 mobilisation. Nepal's older leadership had lost public trust and elite bargaining had produced fatigue. A noticeable opportunity for youth to associate freedom of expression with corruption and unemployment was created by the social media ban. The government mistook the social media platforms as sites for disorder, whereas they were actually where citizens were thriving. The error in interpretation changed regulation into provocation.

The Resource Mobilization Theory explains a movement's strengths and weaknesses. (12 words) The organizational resources of the Jan Andolan comprised parties, unions, student wings, professional groups and also civil-society networks. The resources of Generation Z were all networked, ranging from mobile phones and memes to livestreams and encrypted or semi-closed groups or online polls or platform reputations. The use of networked resources can help to cut down mobilization costs. They also make mobilizations resilient to the decapitation of formal leadership. Nonetheless, they also generate problems of mandate. Who represents a Discord server, a hashtag or unidentifiable crowd? This ambiguity becomes crucial when demonstrations must adjust institutional reform.

A networked public sphere perspective explains how online spaces became politically generative. Images and stories on digital platforms made corruption visible, not manifesto promises. The anti-nepotism frame was effective in that it took many grievances, which may not resonate with outsiders, and simplified them. Because this type of political communication is affective, it is powerful and shareable. It does not need long ideological training. Nevertheless, the same characteristics have the potential to simplify structural



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dilemmas while heightening rage with an intensity that may surpass the deliberative capacity of institutions.

Results also challenge a romantic view of digital democracy. When digital mobilisation expands voice, invites new participants and demands accountability, it can deepen democracy. Undermining verification, producing crowd pressure without representative process and encouraging state security responses can disrupt democracy. The 2025 movement accomplished both in Nepal. It put accountability on the agenda and illustrated the gap between young people and political parties. Nevertheless, it was a wake-up call about the vulnerability of transition to the global regime.

Examining the global youth-led movements is useful but should not erase the specificity of Nepal. In nations like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Kenya, as well as elsewhere, young demonstrators have used digital platforms to assail corruption, joblessness and elite insulation. Nepal possesses this cross-border language of youth discontent. The Jan Andolan memory gives the Gen Z mobilisation of Nepal this specific democratic lineage. The movement is not just a social media revolt, but an effort to reclaim the earlier promises of Democratic fights from a political class seen as self-serving.

The paper thus proposes the idea of a democratic reboot instead of a democratic replacement. Rebooting means returning a blocked system to its original state, without demolishing its DNA. Protesters from Gen Z pose a challenge to corruption, censorship and representation failure. However, the task of democracy remains institutional: to guarantee rights, restore trust, strengthen local and federal accountability, renew parties and create structured participation of youth. A lack of institutional channel can cause digital mobilization to become a short burst.

Finally, the final results show that digital governance is now central to democratic governance. The ongoing discussions around the Social Media Bill, along with requirements for platforms to register and the limitation of Telegram/social media, suggest that the state is hoping to regulate a space they see as chaotic. Regulatory measures are legitimate when they address fraud, abuse and coordinated harm, following lawful, proportionate and rights-respecting processes. It is democratically perilous when it gives authorities ambiguous power to suppress dissent. Nepal's political future doesn't only hinge on free digital spaces, but also on how they will be regulated, and for whom.

11. Final thoughts

According to the study, Nepal's democratic mobilisation has followed a three-prong trajectory; street-based democratic mobilisation during the Jan Andolan phase, institutional democratic consolidation following the republican transition, and platform-based Gen Z



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democratic disruption in the ongoing 2025 mobilisation. Each stage represents different relationships between citizens, communication infrastructure and political authority. Coordination of party and civil society with visible street pressure was relied upon by Jan Andolan. The establishment of republicanism was dependant on elections, Constitution and federal institutions. Digital networks, anti-corruption symbolism and rapid hybrid protest: how Gen Z mobilised for change.

According to empirical analysis, Nepal's digital connectivity increased considerably during 2020-2025. Internet users rose from 35.0% to 55.8% and social media user identities jumped from 10.0 million to 14.3 million. The pressure for change and renewal has grown in all areas of life to become one of the most important social movements. Bypassing traditional political parties, youth activists could communicate and coordinate grievances. The 2025 protests demonstrated that digital mobilization must be linked to constitutional processes if it is to produce durable democratic reform.

A need for accountability, transparency, representation and institutional renewal drives Gen Z activism. Restoration of platforms by the state after banning is not enough and replacing cabinet by political leaders is not sufficient. To reboot democracy, we need structural channels for youth voice; credible anti-corruption reform; civic education; rights-respecting digital governance; and party renewal. The democratic imagination may be revamped due to digital activism, but implementation must be their institutionalisation in laws, representation and accountability.

12. The Implications of Policy

- Encourage empowering youth against misinformation through digital civic education programme for children and youth in conflict with the law.
- Safeguard freedom of expression online by means of clear, lawful, necessary and proportionate digital regulation.
- Establish constant channels of consultation with youth at the federal, provincial and local levels.
- Propose clear mechanisms for fighting corruption with data open to the public and enforceable conflict-of-interest rules.
- Employ online mechanism for processes of democratic consultation, participatory budgeting and redress of complaints or grievances instead of merely for public relations.
- Make reforms in the process of candidate-selection of the party to include women ,young leaders and marginalised groups in winnable positions.



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- Verification of non-usage for desensitizing the public to critics of public officials; independent investigation of registration or governor regime of social media.

13. Constraints, Delimitations

- The research study is solely based on secondary data and does not have any primary interviews or surveys of Gen Z activists.
- There is very little data on political participation broken down by age.
- The numbers associated with social media users are identities and estimated advertising reach, from the platforms themselves, not verified unique citizens.
- It is hard to measure online mobilisation intensity without platform-level data access.
- The interpretation of the protests of 2025 largely depends on the institutions and media at hand, which may be revised later.
- Correlation analysis is illustrative only since the six observations pertain to annual data, which does not support causation.

14. Future research endeavors

- Carry out initial research with Gen Z voters, student activists and first-time voters throughout urban and rural Nepal.
- Investigate the use of social media sentiment analysis on protest hashtags, anti-nepotism narratives and platform-ban discourse.
- A similar youth-led movement in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India and Kenya, Indonesia, among others.
- Interview young protestors, journalists, internet rights organisation, policymakers and party representatives.
- The aim is to develop a longitudinal study on digital democracy, electoral behaviour and youth political trust in Nepal.
- Examine the network connectivity that facilitates the spread of the online social network.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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Appendix A. Analytical Dataset

The following table summarises the compact dataset used for the descriptive and illustrative quantitative analysis. It is suitable for replication in Excel, SPSS, R or Python. The dataset combines digital connectivity indicators, democracy scores and major political/digital events. It does not include micro-level survey observations.

Appendix Table A1. Compact Dataset Used for Descriptive Analysis

Year	Internet users (%)	Social media users (m)	Mobile connections (m)	Freedom House score	Major political/digital mobilisation event
2020	35.0	10.00	42.85	56	COVID-era digital dependence and democratic continuity under partial freedom
2021	36.7	13.00	38.61	56	Pandemic recovery, party instability and expanding online political discussion
2022	38.4	13.70	40.58	57	Federal/provincial elections; over 2 million first-time youth voters
2023	51.6	12.60	42.78	58	Growth of social media debate and new political actors after 2022 election
2024	49.6	13.50	37.47	62	Social media regulation debate and digital-rights concerns intensify
2025	55.8	14.30	39.00	62	Social media restrictions, Gen Z mobilisation and anti-corruption protest wave

Note. Event descriptions are qualitative summaries based on the sources cited in the paper.

