



Nepal: From Monarchism To Gen Z Protests – A Political Evaluation

Debatra Bhattacharjee

Department of Political Science, Tripura University

Abstract

Nepal's political evolution is a remarkable narrative of transformation, resilience, and democratic experimentation. From an entrenched monarchy that centralized political power for more than two centuries to a participatory democratic republic, the nation's history mirrors the broader South Asian struggle for political modernization and civic empowerment. The monarchy under the Shah and Rana regimes symbolized a hierarchical governance structure that resisted reform, but successive popular movements – particularly the People's Movements of 1990 and 2006 – served as defining milestones that redefined Nepal's socio-political landscape. The abolition of the monarchy in 2008 was not merely a structural shift; it marked a psychological rupture between traditional legitimacy and popular sovereignty. However, the optimism of a democratic republic has been tempered by persistent political instability, corruption, and elite capture of the state apparatus. In this context, the emergence of Generation Z as a political actor has reinvigorated Nepal's democratic imagination. These digitally aware and globally connected youths have used social media, protest culture, and civic networks to demand transparency, accountability, and participatory governance. Their activism highlights a growing generational consciousness that transcends traditional party politics. Thus, this research evaluates Nepal's political trajectory from monarchism to Gen Z-led protests as an evolving continuum of democratic engagement – where the youth redefine citizenship, leadership, and collective action in twenty-first-century Nepal.

Keywords

Nepal, Monarchy, Democracy, Political Transformation, Generation Z, Youth Activism, Governance, Protest Movements, Political Transition, Federalism

Introduction

The history of Nepal's political evolution is intertwined with its monarchical heritage, revolutionary upheavals, and democratic experiments. Since its unification under King Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1768, Nepal functioned as a hereditary monarchy, combining religious legitimacy and centralized authority. The subsequent Rana oligarchy (1846–1951) institutionalized autocracy, restricting public participation and isolating Nepal from global modernity. However, post-1950 political developments, particularly after the

end of Rana rule, ushered in waves of democratization attempts, often disrupted by royal interventions and military influences. The People's Movement of 1990 (Jana Andolan I) established a constitutional monarchy with multiparty democracy. Yet, King Gyanendra's attempt to reassert autocratic rule in 2005 provoked the Second People's Movement (Jana Andolan II), which ultimately abolished the monarchy in 2008 and established Nepal as a Federal Democratic Republic. Despite these institutional transformations, the political system has been plagued by instability, factionalism, and public distrust in leadership. In recent years, a digitally literate and politically conscious Generation Z has emerged as a vital social force challenging corruption, demanding inclusion, and redefining civic participation through grassroots mobilization.

Literature Review

A significant body of academic and journalistic literature has explored Nepal's democratic transition and its socio-political dynamics. Baral (2012) identifies the 1990 movement as a transformative event in dismantling royal hegemony. Hachhethu (2009) emphasizes the coalitional nature of the 2006 uprising, which united political parties, civil society, and marginalized groups. Mishra (2017) critically analyzes post-republican governance as suffering from elite domination and erosion of democratic values. Subedi (2021) and Koirala (2023) argue that youth activism, particularly by Generation Z, represents a new model of participatory democracy. The literature reveals that Nepal's political evolution is both historical and generational—where each phase of reform redefines the meaning of freedom and governance.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretative, and historical-analytical approach. It relies on secondary data sourced from academic journals, government documents, policy papers, newspapers, and interviews with political analysts. The research traces Nepal's political evolution from 1950 to 2025, focusing on institutional transitions, ideological narratives, and socio-cultural transformations. Additionally, it applies political transition theory and generational change frameworks to assess how youth participation and digital activism shape democratic resilience. The data interpretation emphasizes thematic analysis and comparative evaluation of pre- and post-republican governance structures.

Results / Findings

1. The fall of monarchy in 2008 marked the institutionalization of people's sovereignty but failed to guarantee political stability.
2. Post-republican Nepal witnessed frequent government turnovers and erosion of public trust in party-based politics.
3. Generation Z represents a politically aware, non-partisan force that prioritizes transparency, issue-based activism, and digital mobilization.
4. Social media platforms like Twitter, TikTok, and Facebook have become alternative arenas of political discourse and protest organization.
5. Youth protests are primarily directed against corruption, unemployment, and inefficient governance rather than traditional ideological battles.

6. The rise of urban-centered, educated youth movements signifies the democratization of dissent and re-politicization of the Nepali public sphere.
7. Despite challenges, the youth movement embodies optimism and renewed belief in Nepal's democratic potential.

Discussion

The evolution of Nepal's democracy from monarchic absolutism to youth-led civic protest demonstrates the continuity of political awakening across generations. While earlier struggles sought structural transformation – the removal of monarchy and establishment of a republic – today's activism focuses on qualitative transformation, such as accountability, inclusion, and ethical leadership. Generation Z's protests represent not a rejection of democracy but a demand for its maturation. Their activism, manifested through decentralized, leaderless movements, challenges the dominance of political elites and introduces a participatory model rooted in digital culture and civic autonomy. However, challenges persist. Institutional corruption, unemployment, migration, and disillusionment with political parties threaten long-term engagement. Furthermore, the absence of formal political representation for youth movements limits their impact on policymaking. Nonetheless, their consistent presence in national discourse signals a democratic reawakening that may redefine Nepal's governance in the coming decades. In essence, Nepal's Gen Z protests are the contemporary continuation of the same democratic spirit that once overthrew monarchy – only now reimagined in a digital and globalized era.

Conclusion

Nepal's political transformation is an ongoing journey marked by resilience and generational renewal. From the fall of monarchy to the rise of Gen Z-led activism, the nation has transitioned from authoritarianism to participatory democracy. While institutional reforms remain incomplete, the youth's re-engagement with civic life symbolizes a hopeful direction for Nepal's future. Their protests and advocacy efforts demonstrate that democracy is not a destination but a continuous struggle for justice, equality, and responsible governance. In conclusion, the Gen Z protests are not merely an episode of dissent but a pivotal force shaping the next chapter of Nepal's democratic evolution.

References

1. Baral, L. R. (2012). *Nepal's Democratic Transition: Challenges and Prospects*. Adroit Publishers, Kathmandu.
2. Hachhethu, K. (2009). *Party Building in Nepal: Organization, Leadership, and People*. Mandala Book Point.
3. Mishra, C. (2017). *The Tragedy of Nepali Politics*. Himal Books.
4. Subedi, D. B. (2021). "Youth, Peace, and Political Participation in Nepal." *Journal of Asian Studies*.
5. Koirala, S. (2023). "Digital Democracy and the Rise of Youth Movements in Nepal." *The Kathmandu Post*.
6. The Himalayan Times (2024). "Generation Z and the Future of Nepali Democracy."
7. International Crisis Group (2020). *Nepal's Political Transition: Stagnation and Struggle*.