

Alternative Politics and Gramsci's Hegemonic Theory: A Study in the Context of Nepal¹

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Abstract

The Manuscript explores the rise of alternative politics in Nepal through the lens of Antonio Gramsci's hegemony. It examines how new political movements, particularly the Gen Z Movement of 2025, challenge the dominance of traditional parties drawing from Gramsci's ideas of hegemony and counter-hegemony, the study argues that alternative politics in Nepal represents a cultural and ideological struggle against entrenched political power rather than a mere quest for leadership change. Using a qualitative and analytical approach based on secondary sources, the research employs thematic content analysis to study political discourse, youth activism, digital movements, and civil society engagement. It investigates how Gen Z's digital activism and social media campaigns have created a new counter-hegemonic space, reshaping Nepal's political consciousness. The literature review situates this movement within global and Nepali contexts, emphasizing gaps in existing studies that overlook the connection between Gramsci's theory and Nepal's political transformations. Through qualitative analysis, it explores Gen Z's role in building counter-hegemonic structures that emphasize accountability and participatory democracy. The study concludes that alternative politics, if institutionalized, could reshape Nepal's democratic culture and governance.

Keywords: Alternative politics, Gramsci's hegemonic theory, counter-hegemony, Gen Z movement in Nepal

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Introduction

“Alternative politics refers to the emergence of new political forces that challenge traditional power structures and offer alternative visions of governance. In Nepal, alternative politics has been gaining traction in recent years, especially among the younger generation”,(Timilsina, 2023). This concept was first developed in Nepal by Dr. Baburam Bhattarai. He formed the Naya Shakti Party with a five-S vision, believing that the legitimacy of the old political parties had ended. The debate on "alternative politics" is emerging strongly in Nepal. In fact, alternative politics is the act of engaging in activities with organized or unorganized forces that aim to somehow end the impasse and advance alternatives that provide a way out. This debate is not only about finding an alternative to the party system or leadership, but also an attempt to reinterpret the power relations of power, society, and culture in a broader sense. Thus, alternative politics is not limited to any specific ideology, but is emerging as a comprehensive political campaign focused on the restoration of social justice, transparency, equality, and democratic values. “The aspirants of alternative politics particularly wish to see the development process going faster”,(Dulal, 2025).

Antonio Gramsci's theory of "hegemony" is considered particularly important to clarify and deepen this discussion. “Power is generally in the form of relationships, in human life there will always be those who are ruled and those who rule, and those who are ruled and those who rule”, (Naufal Adya Wijaya, 2025, p. 450). Gramsci explained how dominance in society is maintained not only through political power, but also through cultural, ideological and moral power structures. In a multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-religious society like Nepal, alternative politics, by interrelating with Gramsci's concept of hegemony, holds the potential to interpret the balance between state power and civil society in a new way. “The basis of political power is psychological influence, leadership and its will power”, (Agarwal, 2004, p. 434). While Nepali mainstream political parties seem to have built ideological and institutional dominance to expand their power, alternative politics has begun to emerge as a challenge to this. “This transformation brought about profound changes not only in the political and economic spheres but also in social and intellectual life”,(Yazici, 2025, p. 2). “Gramsci’s intellectual legacy, particularly his concept of hegemony, is both rich and diverse, yet highly contested”, (Kucuk, 2025, p. 222).

In this context, the recent "Gen Z Movement" (September 8 and 9, 2025) has brought a new phenomenon to Nepali political culture. This forced the ruling political parties to flee and replaced the government of the Nepal Communist Party (UML) and Nepali Congress. An interim government formed from the foundation of the movement is now in power, led by Sushila Karki. "The Gen Z movement has redefined Nepal's political landscape. The general public's growing distance from the traditional political parties has seemingly made them closer to alternative forces", (Dawadi, 2025). This new generation, raised under the influence of social media, digital technology, and global values, is expressing its dissatisfaction with the traditional parties through both street protests and digital movements. "The Gen-Z generation, who grew up immersed in digital technology, is more emotionally attuned than commonly believed", (Pathak, 2025). According to Bishnu Pathak (2025), "Gen Z strove to break the cycle of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, seeking social justice and equality to establish a free and fair egalitarian society". Their movement is not only a dissatisfaction with economic inequality or unemployment, but also a resistance against social media restrictions, widespread corruption, incompetence, and irresponsible leadership. It can be seen as a new form of alternative political practice, which has the potential to put into practice Gramsci's "counter-hegemony", that is, the ideological and cultural struggle against dominance. "Gramsci's starting point is the idea that it is important to match political tactics with the conditions in which they operate and the goals that they seek to pursue", (Riley, 2011).

This study aims to explore in depth the interrelationships between Nepal's political transition, alternative political practices, Gramsci's theory of hegemony, and the Gen Z revolution. In particular, it focuses on the question of how alternative politics can challenge the traditional structure of power and party hegemony. Similarly, a critical discussion will be held here regarding whether the nationwide movement raised by Gen Z creates a new opportunity to institutionalize democracy in Nepal or remains limited to a temporary dissatisfaction.

Research Methodology

All the data used in this study are derived from secondary sources. The analytical method has been adopted. The nature of the research is qualitative and analytical, in which, without collecting primary data, published books, reviewed journals, policy reports, newspapers and research works of established authors have been used as a basis.

Which, as necessary, provides an in-depth analysis of Nepal's political transformation and hegemonic struggles. It has adopted thematic content analysis method, which helps to identify how ideas related to dominance, counter-hegemony, civil society, and the new youth generation has been manifested in Nepal's political discourse and practice. These findings have attempted to find out how alternative politics challenges or reproduces traditional dominance by referring to democratic transformation, identity movements, culture, various forms of movements and local practices. Mainly, the content analysis includes the political participation of the Gen Z generation, digital movements and consciousness expression through social media, many more digital platforms which attempts to show how alternative politics has set a different perspective and environment in Nepal through the activism of the new generation. Alternative political practices in Nepal, student movements, indigenous peoples' movements, movements by the new generation, digital campaigns, political platforms are analyzed in depth. The ideological structure, organizational structure and cultural interventions of such practices are studied within the theoretical framework of Gramsci's dominance and counter-dominance. In addition, it also makes a comparative assessment between the political consciousness of Gen Z in Nepal and the ideas propounded by Gramsci in the European context. Thus, an attempt is made here to further highlight how effective alternative politics has been in the process of challenging the hegemonic structure and how the new generation is making ideological and cultural contribution.

Literature Review

Although studies on alternative politics and hegemony are limited in Nepal, Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony is considered an important component of political thought in a global context. "Culture comprises of things people often do in daily life as socially and culturally formulated activities for long", (Paudel, 2025, p. 84). Gramsci sees hegemony as a process of producing intellectual and cultural consensus, not as a ruling power maintained through the use of pure force. "Emotions and affects constitute important social and political forces for activist groups struggling to challenge the status quo of social hierarchy", (Zembylas, 2013, p. 2). In this view, the ruling class does not maintain dominance only through the state apparatus, but rather uses social institutions, cultural values, the education system, and the media to establish its ideas as common sense among the general public. On this basis, alternative politics often refers to the practice of seeking new political possibilities by directly challenging existing governing

structures, ideologies, and policies. “The first is represented by the economic structure and the second by socializing mechanisms such as language, religion, education, law, ideology, mass media and the army”,(Yechouti, 2017, p. 002). The democratic movement of 2046 BS in Nepal, the people's movement of 2062/63 BS, and the recent extreme discontent of the young generation, the Gen Z uprising of Bhadra 23 and 24, 2082 BS, can all be understood as the emergence of alternative political consciousness. But the available literature still does not appear to have attempted to deeply integrate these movements with Gramsci's theory of hegemony, which is why this study is necessary.

Gramsci's literature on hegemony theory is the second foundation for this research. Gramsci (1971) defined "hegemony" in his Prison Notebooks as a process of building consensus in society through ideology, culture, and values, rather than just political or military control. “Political culture is only a part of the general culture”, (Mahajan, 2016, p. 173). This ability to build hegemony serves as a means of maintaining the long-term power of the ruling class, but he called the process of challenging hegemony counter-hegemony, in which civil society, labor movements, or alternative power centers attempt to build a new social consensus through their ideas and practices. “Gramsci argues that ‘true’ hegemony resides in the process of a war of position”,(Smith, 2010, p. 48). Although the existing literature has focused on Gramsci's theory more in the European context, recent studies have shown that it is also useful in third countries, especially in societies undergoing democratic transition. In Nepal, this theory can be used as an analytical framework to compare alternative political practices or activities with hegemonic structures.

“From early childhood, Gen Z has had access to the internet, smartphones, and social media platforms, rendering digital technology not an enhancement of life but a framework in which life unfolds”, (Szasz, 2025, p. 170). In Nepal, alternative political trends are not limited to the party level, but have spread to the activism of a new generation like Gen Z, campaigns conducted on social media, and identity-based movements. Such developments have given a new dimension to alternative politics and the struggle for dominance. International studies on Gen Z show that this generation is technologically aware, sensitive to issues of social justice, and dissatisfied with traditional power structures. In Nepal, too, their political engagement has been more evident in the digital space, which seems to contribute to building awareness against what

Gramsci called “cultural hegemony.” Culture influence holds great significance in every society. “The institutions and beliefs that the dominant culture support are so powerful, and get hold of people when they are so young, that alternative ways of envisioning reality are very hard to imagine”, (Balakrishnan, 2015, p. 2).

The related issues include the lack of internal democracy in Nepal’s political parties, the practice of power-centeredness, and the uneven representation of social divisions. Existing literature suggests that these problems are largely due to distrust of traditional political parties, which creates an environment for the emergence of alternative politics. But another strand asks whether alternative parties or movements in Nepal are also likely to eventually fall into the same structures? Thus, two strands emerge in the literature, one that challenges the hegemony of alternative politics, while the other argues that it too cannot escape its structural weaknesses. These and similar debates deepen this research because it is through these issues that the extent to which Gramsci’s concept of counter-hegemony applies to Nepal can be tested. “While Gramsci refers to the law as a form of domination, both in its coercive ability but also as a hegemonic instrument, he also provides the theoretical tapestry for analyzing how civil society use the law for counter-hegemonic purposes”, (Raftopoulos, 2025, p. 287).

The Gen Z movement in Nepal has given rise to new discourses on political engagement and alternative political consciousness. Gen Z is often described as a generation that is more active on social media, dissatisfied with traditional party structures, and attracted to new forms of participatory politics. The available literature on alternative politics often focuses on the weaknesses of traditional parties, corruption, lack of internal democracy, and inequality, but the issues raised by the new generation through digital movements, TikTok, X, Facebook, YouTube, Discord, Reddit and Instagram, and their challenges to cultural hegemony have not been adequately studied. Using Grassi’s theoretical framework, it can be interpreted that these young people are trying to build a new “counter-hegemony” within the existing power structure. “Counter-hegemony, as distinct from defensive forms of subaltern resistance, strives to shape those ‘anticipating elements’, so that they may become lasting features of social life”, (Carroll, 2010, p. 169). In this sense, the literature on alternative politics, hegemony theory, and the political behavior of Gen Z is still fragmented, incomplete, and preliminary. Therefore, this study aims to clarify the interrelationship between alternative politics and

hegemony theory in Nepal's political transformation process, placing all of these in a single context.

Results and Discussion

Alternative politics and hegemony theory

According to Gramsci's hegemony theory, state power is not maintained solely through repressive mechanisms or direct control, but rather dominance based on ideas, values, culture, and 'common sense' in society is the main basis of political stability. He has mentioned that both 'consent' and 'force' should be combined to maintain dominance over the people. The political experimentation and dominance of party culture seen in Nepal in the past decades can be viewed from this perspective. "The political elite has a special influence on political culture and has historically influenced politics", (Siwakoti, 2076, p. 528).

Since the establishment of democracy in Nepal, political parties have been establishing their ideas and values as 'common knowledge'. The idea that democracy is limited to party structures or that 'politics without parties is impossible' is an example of this. Initially, new political parties may have weak organizational structures and lack leadership. "Even as the future of Nepal's early alternative parties looks bleak, it does not mean that alternative politics has no place in Nepal's political landscape", (Thing, 2022). Alternative politics is essential to break this. "A political alternative must provide not just an alternative to the faces and symbols in government, but an alternative to the structure of power that determines the course of the country", (Rao, 2022). As Gramsci said, real change is not just the transfer of power, but the kind of power that can challenge ideological and cultural dominance. The discontent shown by the young generation of Nepal, the rise of independent candidates, and digital campaigns have practiced this counter-hegemony.

Alternative politics in Nepal: Movements and forms

Alternative politics in Nepal has emerged in various forms. First, the emergence of Naya Shakti Party (2016) by Dr. Baburam Bhattarai with his 5 'S' Vision, where includes Good Governance (Sushasan), Moral Conduct or Ethics (Sadachar), Social Justice (Samajik Nyaya), and Socialism (Samajwad). Later followed by other parties such as the Bibekshil Sajha Party, Rashtriya Samjwadi Party Nepal, Rashtriya Swatantra Party, Nagarik Unmukti Party, Janamat Party and others, at present applications are filed for the registration of four new parties among them, Harka Sampang-led Shram Sanskriti

Party, Ujyalo Nepal Party, and Nepal Nagarik Party. Second, the victories of independent candidates (in Kathmandu, Dharan, and Dhangadhi, etc.) have instilled in the public the belief that non-party politics is possible. “This had found clear expression as the independent candidates triumphed in the poll, especially in the mayoral positions in different cities in the country in the last elections”, (Rijal, 2025). Third, the anti-corruption campaign, women's rights movement, caste equality, and the Madhesi rights struggle have centered on social justice. All these movements are examples of alternative political forms.

The common feature of these forms is the challenge against 'cultural hegemony'. As Gramsci said, the acquisition of power is not just about controlling the 'political and military' apparatus, but also about redefining the ideas and values in society. Alternative politics in Nepal seems to demonstrate this powerfully. In particular, the new generation has further challenged the ideas imposed by the old parties through digital campaigns.

Table 1

The main form of alternative politics in Nepal

Appearance	Focus/Example	Relationship with Gramsci's theory
Party/Independent Candidate	Local elections in Kathmandu, Dharan, Nepalgunj, etc.	Counter-hegemonic practice
Social movement	Anti-corruption, the women's movement, racial and ethnic equality campaign	Against cultural dominance
Politics through digital/social media	Youth Generation Campaign, Gen Z Activism	Building a new cultural force

Source: Author's development.

Hegemony and party dominance in Nepal

Nepal's traditional parties like Nepali Congress (NC), CPN (UML) and, CPN (Maoist Centre) are excellent examples of Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Since the establishment of democracy in Nepal, these political parties have repeatedly ruled the country. For the last four decades, until the Gen Z Movement, the chairs of Prime Minister and ministers have revolved around these parties and leaders. These parties have presented their ideology as the only 'truth'. For example, it is common for parties to promote a view that development only emphasizes the construction of roads, buildings, or physical infrastructure. Similarly, the belief that political leadership is not possible without party affiliation has also been transformed into 'common knowledge' by parties.

However, such dominance is gradually weakening. The internal factionalism, corruption, distance from the people, and failed governance seen in the parties have made the people dissatisfied. “Party politics have dominated Nepal’s governance at the expense of policy substance”, (Magar, 2025, p. 156). This has created what Gramsci called a 'crisis of authority'. When the old structure becomes unreliable among the people, a situation arises for the emergence of alternative forces. The success of independent candidates and new parties in Nepal can be considered a result of this crisis. “The guardians as ruling class are doing the same as Gramsci argues that they are trying to impose an ideology by teaching art, literature, or say rules”, (Kushmi, 2025, p. 15).

The Gen Z movement and the alternative agenda

Gen Z, or those born after 1997, has further strengthened Nepal's alternative politics. This generation of youth is tech-savvy, active in digital campaigns, and emphasizes transparency and accountability. They associate democracy not just with elections but also with lifestyle, transparency, environmental justice, and social inclusion.

Gen Z has made its voice heard through social media. In this way, due to the campaigns carried out through various social media, the dominance of traditional political parties was destroyed through street rebellions. In line with the Gramscian concept of hegemony, they questioned the 'common sense' of the old parties and prepared a new ideological-cultural basis. For a long time, the Nepali people have been looking for alternatives to mainstream political parties. Corruption was rampant, and political parties, the government, and the leadership were never sensitive enough to control it. “Corruption, as a pervasive challenge in modern democracies, continues to undermines the fundamental tenets of transparency, accountability, and fair representation”, (Subedi, 2024, p. 40). As a result, the two-day Gen Z movement on September 8 and 9 completely displaced the KP Oli-led government in Nepal. This has not only created an alternative political environment, but it is also a golden opportunity for the leadership of a new generation of young people to be established in the Nepali political mainstream. In this way, the Gen Z movement has deepened alternative politics not only in electoral politics, but also in cultural and social practice.

Table No.: 2

Gen Z's alternative political agendas

Agenda	Significance	Possible impact
Transparency, accountability	Anti-corruption and the open governance system	Increased credibility in the state

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Environmental politics	Campaign against the climate change	Emphasis on the sustainable development
Social justice	Equality on Gender, Ethnic, Regional	Inclusive democracy
Digital democracy	Campaign through online, e-participation	Direct participation

Source: Author's development.

Alternative politics and participation

Alternative politics has brought a new level of citizen participation in Nepal. Until now, the role of ordinary citizens was weakened due to the dominance of party leaders in the political decision-making process. However, alternative practices have made citizens directly involved. The practice of citizen hearing, budget transparency, and participatory planning at the local level is gradually increasing. Gramsci's 'war of position' has also been seen in Nepal, where civil society has created an alternative balance of power by planting new values within the old structure. Independent journalism, social movements, citizen activists, and youth participation have increased the potential to further strengthen democracy. Thus, the wide expansion of citizen participation has provided a deep social basis for alternative politics.

Challenges and opportunities

Alternative politics in Nepal is still in its infancy. For this, organizational weakness, the emergence of clear leadership, the expansion of digital platforms, the influence of international democratic values, and public discontent indicate that alternative politics will emerge as a major force in the future. If it can strengthen organizational capacity and formulate a long-term vision, it can establish a new socio-political dominance through what Gramsci called counter-hegemony.

Table No.: 3

Alternative Politics in Nepal: Challenges and Opportunities

Dimensions	Challenge	Possibility
Organizational	Lack of leadership, lack of resources, and the institutional weaknesses	New generation activism
Ideological	Policy ambiguity, lack of the long-term vision	Democratic values, inclusive agenda
Political	Party obstruction, electoral competition	The rise of the independent candidates
Social	Less impact in rural areas	Digital campaign and the

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Source: Author's development.

Final Criticism

Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, former Prime Minister of Nepal, is one of the key architects of the decade-long Maoist insurgency, who has highlighted the need to build 'alternative forces' to challenge traditional political dominance. While the research analyses alternative politics in the context of Gramsci's hegemonic theory, it does not adequately explain the complexities that leaders like Bhattarai face in actual political practice. While the research emphasizes the potential for the formation of alternative political parties to challenge the current dominance, it does not adequately address the challenges posed by ethnic diversity, structural inequality, internal party divisions, and new social movements of young people such as the recently emerged Gen Z movement. In particular, while the Gen Z movement has further raised awareness of alternative politics through good governance, youth empowerment, social justice, and digital campaigns, its impact and theoretical analysis remain incomplete. It could have more clearly highlighted the gap between thought and practice in the construction of alternative politics. Overall, while the manuscript makes an important contribution from a theoretical perspective, it needs to be more systematically incorporated into Nepali political reality, including practical challenges and modern social movements.

Alternative politics in Nepal is moving in a way that is directly aligned with Gramsci's theory of hegemony. The old party structure, which had long been established as 'common knowledge' in society, is now being questioned. Under alternative politics, the dominance of the old establishment is being challenged through new parties, independent candidates, social movements, digital campaigns, and the activism of Gen Z. This process is not yet stable, but its potential is profound. If alternative politics can bring organizational strength and ideological clarity, then long-term political transformation in Nepal will be possible.

Conclusion

A new dimension has been added to the current political landscape of Nepal. For a long time, the traditional mainstream parties dominated Nepali politics, but through the recent Gen Z movement, powerful parties have lost that dominance. As Gramsci said, dominance is not achieved through coercive rule alone and cannot always be sustained, but is achieved through the creation of cultural, educational, social and intellectual

consensus. This idea has been clear in the context of Nepal, where parties have maintained their dominance in name only without seriously embracing development, stability and nationalism. But with time, such traditional dominance has been challenged by a new generation. The voices of alternative politics are becoming louder. In recent times, the strong movement of September, 8 and 9 has pushed the old hegemonic structure in a new direction. Thus, this study illustrates how Gramsci's theory emerged as a counter-hegemonic practice in Nepal.

The search for alternative politics has been underway in Nepal for a long time. Gramsci's "organic intellectuals" can be said to be embedded among Nepal's youth, as they are building alternative agendas based on their real-life experiences and skills. Through social media, street protests, and citizen campaigns, they have built a new kind of counter-hegemony capable of challenging the organization, leadership, propaganda, factionalism, and traditional ideology of established powerful parties. This has not only signaled improvements in Nepal's democracy, but has also broadened the base of leadership development, ideological awareness, and political participation among the new generation of youth. However, there are some challenges to institutionalizing alternative politics and the practice of counter-hegemony. The deep roots of the old parties, lack of resources, inability to expand widely, lack of a clear sense of direction, and the internal disputes, instability, and divergences that sometimes occur within alternative parties can weaken the movement. Overcoming the challenges, if alternative politics can be made youth-centered, value-based, and inclusive, the agenda of stability and good governance is more likely to be established in the long term. This alone can develop a new democratic political culture. Gramsci's theory of hegemony is not just a theoretical discuss, it has proven to be an important tool for closely understanding and defining the practical politics of Nepal. Therefore, what the political future will be and how it will be redefined as a result of alternative politics and the turbulent movement of Gen Z is related to the idea of counter-revolution. This has clearly indicated that a new political consensus and culture will be laid from a new vein.

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