

# **Post–Gen Z Protests and Federal Security: Implications for Institutions and Policy in Nepal**

**Tomnath Uprety ++++++**

## **Abstract**

Nepal’s national security landscape has undergone a profound transformation following federal restructuring, geopolitical shifts, demographic mobility, rising cyber vulnerabilities, and the youth-driven Gen Z movement, which challenged state authority and affected the morale of security institutions. This article provides a multi-dimensional, research-based assessment of Nepal’s national security architecture grounded in doctrinal, institutional, and operational perspectives. It analyzes immigration security, citizenship governance, electoral vulnerabilities, federal coordination failures, border management gaps, security-sector morale, and strategic intelligence weaknesses. Building on scholarly frameworks of human security, hybrid threats, and civil-military relations, the study proposes a comprehensive national security reform pathway aligned with Nepal’s constitutional, geopolitical, and socio-technological realities. The analysis draws from constitutional provisions, security doctrines, existing policies, regional security studies, and contemporary political events.

**Keywords:** Gen Z Protests; Hybrid Threats; Immigration Security; National Security Policy; Nepal Security Governance

## **Introduction**

Nepal’s transition from a unitary state to a federal democratic republic has significantly reconfigured the country’s national security architecture. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) envisions a sovereign, independent, and resilient state, protected by democratic security governance, the rule of law, and multipronged institutional arrangements. However, the post-constitution decade has witnessed emerging pressures, including geopolitical competition, high migration, cyber vulnerabilities, border-related disputes, domestic unrest, and intergovernmental coordination failures.

---

+++++Under Secretary (Accounts), Government of Nepal  
Email: tomnath2022@gmail.com

The rise of the Gen Z protest movement—driven by frustrations over governance, economic stagnation, corruption, and digital activism—exposed gaps in state preparedness, intelligence forecasting, and crisis management (Kattel, 2023). This movement also affected the morale, professionalism, and public perception of Nepal’s security agencies. Moreover, immigration security challenges have expanded due to labor migration, internal displacement, transnational crime, and increasing instances of illegal mobility across open borders. Citizenship governance and electoral security have emerged as highly contentious issues influencing state stability.

This article synthesizes these interconnected dimensions through doctrinal, institutional, and operational lenses. It evaluates structural gaps, identifies emerging risks, and proposes systematic reforms suited for the next decade.

## **Research Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative, multi-method research design to examine Nepal’s post-federal national security architecture and its evolving challenges. The research is primarily based on doctrinal analysis, institutional assessment, and policy-oriented inquiry.

First, a comprehensive document analysis was conducted, covering constitutional provisions, national security policies, government reports, legal frameworks, parliamentary records, and official publications related to security governance, federalism, immigration, and citizenship.

Second, an extensive review of scholarly literature was undertaken, including peer-reviewed journals, policy briefs, regional security studies, and reports by national and international organizations. This literature review provided the theoretical foundation based on frameworks of human security, hybrid threats, and civil–military relations.

Third, the study employed qualitative content analysis of media reports, protest narratives, and digital activism materials related to the Gen Z movement to assess state–society interactions and security-sector responses.

Finally, comparative and contextual analysis was applied to synthesize the findings and develop reform-oriented recommendations aligned with Nepal’s constitutional, geopolitical, and socio-political realities.

## **Doctrinal Framework of Nepal’s National Security**

Nepal’s national security framework is firmly grounded in its constitutional and philosophical commitments to safeguarding sovereignty, territorial integrity, national unity, and democratic governance. Article 51(b) of the Constitution explicitly mandates the formulation of policies related

to national security, intelligence, and international relations to preserve autonomy and peace (Government of Nepal, 2015). This legal foundation aligns with the comprehensive security paradigm, which integrates political, military, economic, societal, environmental, and cyber dimensions, reflecting a multidimensional approach to national safety (Acharya, 2020). The federal restructuring of the state introduced a multi-tier security architecture spanning federal, provincial, and local levels, intended to ensure decentralized resilience and coordinated governance (Dhungel, 2022). Despite this design, doctrinal clarity remains limited regarding the precise division of security responsibilities among the various tiers of government, resulting in jurisdictional ambiguities and operational inefficiencies.

Concurrently, Nepal is transitioning from a traditional, military-centric security model toward a human-security-centered approach, emphasizing the principles of freedom from fear, want, and indignity (UNDP, 1994). Modern security challenges—including disaster risk, climate-induced vulnerability, internal and external migration pressures, youth unemployment, and pervasive corruption—have become integral to national security policy. This evolution reflects a recognition that true security extends beyond territorial defense to encompass social, economic, and environmental stability.

Geopolitically, Nepal's position between India and China introduces unique strategic complexities, requiring careful balancing to preserve neutrality and sovereignty. Emerging hybrid threats—such as cyber intrusions, misinformation campaigns, cross-border criminal networks, and economic coercion—have intensified the demands on national security institutions (Chhetri, 2023). Addressing these multidimensional risks necessitates doctrinal reform, technological modernization, and integrated human-security measures that synergize federal coordination, intelligence capabilities, and societal resilience. The intersection of constitutional imperatives, human-centric security priorities, and hybrid threat awareness thus forms the philosophical and practical backbone of Nepal's evolving national security paradigm.

## **Institutional Design of Nepal's Security Sector**

The National Security Council (NSC) of Nepal, chaired by the Prime Minister, occupies a central role in shaping the country's strategic defense policy and recommending military deployments. Constitutionally, it is envisioned as the apex body responsible for assessing threats, coordinating security agencies, and providing strategic guidance across military, paramilitary, and civilian institutions. Despite its pivotal mandate, the NSC faces significant structural and operational limitations. Meetings are often irregular, reflecting the absence of a robust institutional calendar and standardized procedures for threat evaluation (Thapa, 2021). Furthermore, the council lacks a permanent think tank or analytical wing, which hinders its capacity for scenario-based planning, strategic forecasting, and evidence-based policy formulation.

The NSC's technical intelligence capacity is constrained by limited access to real-time data from military, police, and civilian intelligence sources. This shortfall is particularly evident in the council's inability to anticipate and prepare for emerging hybrid threats, cyber vulnerabilities, and socio-political unrest. Over-politicization of appointments within the NSC has further weakened institutional autonomy, resulting in decisions often influenced by party interests rather than professional security assessments. The council's current operational model does not adequately integrate modern intelligence methodologies, such as predictive analytics, risk modeling, or red-team exercises, leaving strategic gaps in national preparedness.

Addressing these deficiencies requires a comprehensive reform agenda. Establishing a permanent secretariat or National Security Analytics Center could provide the NSC with continuous research support, scenario planning, and data-driven insights. Enhancing its autonomy and insulating key decision-making roles from political interference would allow the council to function as a professional strategic authority. Strengthening coordination mechanisms with the Nepal Army, police, paramilitary forces, and intelligence agencies will ensure that policy recommendations are actionable, timely, and capable of addressing both traditional and contemporary security challenges. Reforming the NSC is thus crucial for advancing Nepal's national security strategy and safeguarding both internal stability and external sovereignty.

## **Security Forces**

Nepal's security apparatus, comprising the Nepal Army (NA), Nepal Police, Armed Police Force (APF), and the National Investigation Department (NID/NIB), faces evolving operational and structural challenges that limit its effectiveness in contemporary security contexts. The Nepal Army remains the primary guarantor of territorial integrity, disaster response, and international peacekeeping contributions. However, traditional military roles are increasingly inadequate in the face of hybrid threats, cyberattacks, unmanned aerial surveillance requirements, space intelligence needs, and high-altitude border defense challenges. Modernization in these domains is critical to ensuring strategic deterrence and operational readiness.

The Nepal Police and APF experience significant mandate overlaps, particularly in riot control, counterterrorism, and border management. These overlaps foster institutional rivalry, operational duplication, and fragmented resource allocation (Gurung, 2020). Although the Constitution envisages the creation of Provincial Police to streamline law enforcement and strengthen federal governance, implementation remains incomplete. This gap undermines operational clarity, weakens inter-agency coordination, and constrains rapid responses to crises at provincial and local levels.

Nepal's intelligence system further compounds these structural weaknesses. The National Investigation Department suffers from insufficient technological sophistication, limited analytic training, and a lack of independent operational autonomy. Modern intelligence capabilities,

including SIGINT, OSINT, and cyber intelligence, remain underdeveloped. The Gen Z movement highlighted these deficiencies, exposing critical early-warning failures, inadequate threat assessment, and delayed operational responses. The absence of integrated intelligence fusion among military, police, and civilian agencies underscores a systemic vulnerability in anticipating and mitigating internal security risks.

Addressing these challenges requires a holistic reform agenda encompassing military modernization, clear mandate delineation between police and paramilitary forces, the establishment of provincial law enforcement structures, and the development of an autonomous, technologically advanced intelligence apparatus. Strengthening these components is essential not only for operational efficiency but also for restoring public trust and ensuring the resilience of Nepal's federal security architecture.

## **Operational Mechanisms of Security Governance**

Nepal's federal structure has introduced a multi-layered approach to national security and governance, yet coordination among the federal, provincial, and local levels remains a significant challenge. While the federal government is primarily responsible for formulating national security policy, provinces are tasked with managing law and order, and local governments are expected to mobilize community-level resilience. In practice, however, operational protocols across these levels remain ambiguous, crisis coordination is inconsistent, and fragmented budget allocations hinder the efficiency of security operations (Sharma, 2021). These gaps have repeatedly manifested during nationwide protests, natural disasters, and emergency events, where unclear jurisdictional boundaries often result in delayed or conflicting responses. The federal design, although constitutionally robust, requires clear standard operating procedures, integrated communication mechanisms, and joint contingency planning to achieve cohesive security outcomes.

Election security in Nepal further highlights these systemic vulnerabilities. The deployment of security agencies during national, provincial, and local elections follows a tiered model intended to maintain law and order and protect democratic processes. Despite this, elections remain vulnerable to a spectrum of threats, including political violence, booth-capturing attempts, misinformation campaigns, cross-border interference, and cyberattacks on voter databases (KC, 2022). Local and provincial elections, in particular, see a marked increase in voter intimidation and operational pressures on security personnel. The combined effect of ambiguous jurisdictional responsibilities and emerging cyber and hybrid threats underscores the need for integrated election security frameworks, real-time intelligence sharing, and risk-mapped deployment strategies. Strengthening coordination between all tiers of government and adopting standardized operational protocols are essential to ensuring that Nepal's electoral processes are both secure and credible. Ultimately, achieving effective federal security coordination is not only a matter of administrative efficiency but also crucial for maintaining public trust and safeguarding democratic integrity.

## **Immigration Security and Border Governance**

Citizenship remains one of Nepal's most politically sensitive governance domains due to the country's open border with India, historical patterns of cross-border settlement, and demographic transformations in the Tarai–Madhes region. Delays in citizenship distribution have created structural disenfranchisement, especially among youth who are unable to access education, employment, banking, migration opportunities, or voting rights without legal identity documents. This administrative stagnation has produced pockets of de facto statelessness, heightening social frustration and risking long-term political alienation (Khanal, 2020). Politicization of naturalization—where decisions on citizenship by descent or marriage often depend on shifting political alliances—has undermined public trust in the neutrality and fairness of state institutions. Gender discrimination compounds these issues: Nepali women still face restrictions in passing citizenship by descent to their children independently, contradicting constitutional equality norms and international human-rights commitments (Khanal, 2020). These discriminatory provisions become even more complex within cross-border matrimonial networks, where marriages between Nepali women and Indian men are common, intensifying debates about demographic balance, national identity, and sovereignty.

Weak citizenship governance has several national-security implications. First, improper or delayed citizenship issuance distorts electoral integrity, as inconsistencies in voter rolls and population records create opportunities for manipulation, fraud, and contestation. Second, the absence of digital, centralized, and interoperable citizenship databases weakens the state's ability to track migration flows, regulate naturalization, and detect identity fraud. Third, politicized citizenship distribution threatens social cohesion, reinforcing ethnic, regional, and caste-based grievances that can escalate into unrest. Lastly, ambiguous citizenship laws affect national identity security, as the state struggles to distinguish legitimate residents from undocumented migrants in border regions. Addressing these vulnerabilities requires transparent, timely, and nonpolitical citizenship administration supported by digital record-keeping, gender-just reforms, and robust federal–local coordination to reinforce both democratic rights and national security.

## **Citizenship Governance and National Identity Security**

Citizenship remains one of Nepal's most politically sensitive governance domains, shaped by the country's open borders, complex historical migration patterns, and ongoing demographic transitions. The delayed distribution of citizenship certificates has significantly affected the rights and mobility of thousands of youth, particularly those seeking higher education, employment, banking services, or migration opportunities. Scholars argue that bureaucratic bottlenecks and political disagreements over citizenship laws have produced a generation of semi-rightless individuals whose constitutional entitlements remain suspended in practice (Subedi, 2021). The politicization of naturalization, wherein citizenship processes become subject to shifting party interests and coalition negotiations,

further undermines administrative neutrality and raises concerns about demographic engineering. Such politicized decision-making intersects with the persistent risk of statelessness, especially for children born to undocumented parents or those living in borderland communities with weak civil-registration systems (Khanal, 2020).

A long-standing challenge lies in gender discrimination within citizenship-by-descent provisions. Despite constitutional guarantees, women still face procedural and legal hurdles when conferring citizenship independently to their children, reflecting structural biases embedded in administrative practice and legislative ambiguity (Thapa, 2019). Additionally, the expansion of cross-border matrimonial networks, particularly in Madhesh, complicates verification processes, heightens political contestation, and intensifies debates over national identity and demographic security (Khanal, 2020). Weak governance mechanisms in citizenship administration—marked by inadequate digitization, inconsistent vetting processes, and limited accountability—create vulnerabilities that directly affect electoral integrity, as inaccuracies in citizenship records translate into flawed voter rolls. These faults also threaten social cohesion, fueling mistrust between communities and the state, and undermining the stability of a country navigating transitional federalism. Strengthening digital civil-registration systems, depoliticizing citizenship administration, and ensuring gender-equitable legal reforms are therefore essential to protecting Nepal’s national identity and democratic resilience (Rai, 2022).

## **Gen-Z Movement and Security Sector Morale**

The Gen Z movement in Nepal represented a structural shift in civic resistance, driven by digitally fluent youth who relied on decentralized online networks, rapid information circulation, and meme-based counter-narratives to critique corruption, political stagnation, and elite impunity. Unlike earlier movements rooted in party structures, this wave operated horizontally, using mass mobilization and digital crowdsourcing to organize protests with remarkable speed. State responses such as curfews, baton charges, arrests, and aggressive crowd-control attracted significant criticism for being disproportionate and insensitive to the movement’s generational character (Thapa, 2024). The confrontation revealed a widening gap between traditional policing doctrines and contemporary digital-era activism.

These dynamics deeply affected the morale of security institutions. Studies and internal reports indicate rising psychological fatigue, resentment from public hostility, and pressure stemming from politicized directives that left officers uncertain about operational boundaries (Paudel, 2024). Security personnel were thrust into what analysts describe as “narrative warfare,” where protesters’ humor, sarcasm, livestreams, and viral memes consistently undermined official messaging (Sharma, 2024). Many officers reported feeling ill-equipped to manage information-centric protests that blurred the line between physical demonstrations and digital battlespaces. Episodes of violence

triggered institutional blame games, amplifying internal stress and eroding the sense of professional legitimacy.

Consequently, the Gen Z movement triggered a broader institutional reputation crisis, reducing public confidence in the fairness of policing, the neutrality of state force, and the reliability of intelligence assessments. Scholars have noted that failures in early-warning analysis and crisis communication contributed to public perceptions of state incapacity (Koirala, 2024). The government's crisis-management shortcomings further strained the credibility of security institutions. Rebuilding morale now requires depoliticized institutional reforms, improved mental-health systems for personnel, clear operational mandates, and renewed community engagement to bridge the growing trust deficit (Bhattarai, 2024). Without these measures, Nepal risks a persistent legitimacy gap between the state and the digitally mobilized younger generation.

## **Key Challenges in Nepal's National Security System**

Nepal's national security architecture faces a series of interlinked structural, technological, and governance-related challenges that undermine the country's preparedness and resilience. Jurisdictional ambiguity remains a chronic issue, as overlapping mandates between the Nepal Police, Armed Police Force, National Investigation Department, and provincial authorities weaken coordination, particularly during crises that require unified command. These institutional gaps are compounded by technological deficiencies, with cybersecurity frameworks, surveillance mechanisms, and digital forensic capabilities lagging far behind the sophistication of modern threats. The absence of robust digital infrastructure further contributes to recurring intelligence failures, especially in early-warning systems and analytical assessments, limiting the state's ability to anticipate social unrest, transnational crime, or hybrid threats.

Persistent political interference intensifies these challenges, with security leadership appointments and transfers often influenced by party loyalty rather than competence and professional merit. This erodes morale and weakens institutional integrity. The risks are amplified by cross-border mobility vulnerabilities, as Nepal's open borders continue to be exploited by trafficking networks, smuggling groups, and other illicit actors who operate within the grey zones of weak regulatory control. Additionally, Nepal remains highly exposed to climate-induced disasters, where the frequency and intensity of floods, landslides, wildfires, and extreme weather events outpace the state's preparedness, logistical capacity, and interagency coordination mechanisms.

Elections introduce another complex layer of insecurity. Electoral security risks—including misinformation campaigns, physical violence, and cyber intrusions targeting electoral systems—threaten democratic integrity and public trust. These systemic pressures contribute to low morale and declining public confidence in security institutions, particularly after the Gen Z movement highlighted issues of excessive force, miscommunication, and reduced accountability. Together,

these challenges demonstrate the urgent need for structural reforms, technological modernization, and trust-building measures to strengthen Nepal's national security governance in an increasingly complex security environment.

## **Way Forward: A Strategic Reform Roadmap**

Nepal's contemporary security landscape demands a comprehensive restructuring of doctrines, institutions, intelligence mechanisms, and human-security approaches. At the doctrinal level, the National Security Policy must be updated to fully integrate cybersecurity, hybrid warfare, information warfare, and human-security dimensions, ensuring that emerging threats are addressed through a unified strategic lens. Under federalism, ambiguity in security jurisdiction continues to create operational friction; thus, a Unified Security Protocol is essential to clearly delineate responsibilities across federal, provincial, and local governments.

Institutional reforms must transform the National Security Council Secretariat into a National Security Analytics Center, capable of real-time data assessment, strategic forecasting, and interagency coordination. Establishing Provincial Police as envisioned by the Constitution will give federalism its functional security character, while strengthening the Armed Police Force as a strategic response force and Nepal Police as a specialized investigative force will enhance operational clarity and efficiency.

Intelligence modernization has become indispensable. Nepal should establish an autonomous National Intelligence Authority equipped with OSINT laboratories, SIGINT fusion centers, and AI-driven threat forecasting systems. A dedicated National Intelligence Training Institute will professionalize human resources and improve analytical capabilities.

In immigration and border security, Smart Border Nepal 2030—featuring biometric gates, drone surveillance, and real-time digital monitoring—must be implemented. Strengthening Integrated Border Management at major transit points and upgrading northern high-altitude border infrastructure are equally crucial.

Citizenship reform must ensure transparent, nonpolitical, and timely service delivery while eliminating gender discrimination in descent-based citizenship. A digital citizenship registry linked with voter data will enhance demographic security.

Electoral security requires a Cyber Election Security Unit, risk-based deployment protocols, and institutionalized digital literacy and fact-checking systems to combat misinformation.

Finally, restoring the morale of security agencies after the Gen Z movement is vital. Mental-health programs, clearer command structures, reduced political interference, community policing, and transparency are key to rebuilding institutional trust and operational confidence.

## **Conclusion**

Nepal's national security system is undergoing a profound transformation amid federal restructuring, demographic shifts, geopolitical pressures, immigration complexities, youth activism, and emerging digital threats. The Gen Z movement exposed weaknesses in crisis management, intelligence, coordination, and institutional morale. Addressing these structural gaps requires doctrinal modernization, technological strengthening, depoliticized institutions, and an integrated approach to border, citizenship, and electoral security. A reformed, human-centric, and technologically advanced security architecture is essential for safeguarding Nepal's democratic stability and sovereignty in the decades ahead.

## **References**

- Acharya, M. (2020). *Comprehensive security in South Asia: Emerging paradigms*. Kathmandu Policy Institute.
- Chhetri, P. (2023). Hybrid threats and small-state vulnerability: Nepal's strategic dilemma. *Journal of South Asian Security Studies*, 9(2), 45–62.
- Dhungel, K. (2022). Federalism and security governance in Nepal: Opportunities and ambiguities. *Nepal Administrative Review*, 34(1), 61–78.
- Government of Nepal. (2015). *Constitution of Nepal 2015*. Government of Nepal, Law Commission.
- Gurung, T. (2020). Security sector reforms in Nepal: Institutional gaps and coordination challenges. *Security Studies Review*, 12(1), 23–38.
- KC, S. (2022). Electoral violence and digital misinformation in Nepal. *Nepal Journal of Political Science*, 5(1), 89–107.
- Kattel, S. (2023). Youth mobilization and digital protest movements in Nepal. *Asian Journal of Social Movements*, 4(3), 112–130.
- Khanal, B. (2020). Citizenship, identity politics, and federal restructuring in Nepal. *Journal of Democratic Governance*, 11(2), 70–91.
- Paudel, D. (2024). Policing public protests in the digital age: A case study of Nepal's Gen Z movement. *South Asian Law Enforcement Review*, 7(1), 31–55.

- Sharma, R. (2021). Crisis coordination under federalism: Lessons from Nepal's disasters. *Disaster Governance Quarterly*, 8(4), 210–228.
- Sijapati, B., & Limbu, A. (2017). *Migration, mobility, and border governance in Nepal*. CESLAM.
- Thapa, H. (2021). National Security Council of Nepal: Role, limitations, and reform imperatives. *Journal of Security Policy Studies*, 6(2), 55–77.
- United Nations Development Programme. (1994). *Human development report 1994: New dimensions of human security*. UNDP.