Vol. 3, No. 2, November 2025

DOI: https://doi.org/10.3126/rjurj.v3i2.88045

Political culture and democratic transition after Gen Z movement in Nepal

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Abstract

The manuscript explores how the Gen Z movement in Nepal has reshaped political culture and influenced the trajectory of democratic transition. Findings reveal that Gen Z activists, empowered by digital platforms, have challenged traditional party-centric politics and introduced a value-driven, transparency-oriented and issue-based political orientation. Their demand for accountability, ethical leadership and participatory governance has generated new expectations within the democratic process. While institutional rigidity, limited youth inclusion and digital divides remain significant challenges, the movement marks a critical turning point in Nepal's evolving democratic landscape. This research methodology uses published secondary sources. Overall, Gen Z has emerged not merely as a protesting group but as a transformative force redefining Nepal's democratic political culture.

Keywords: Political culture, Democratic transition, Moral leadership, Accountability

1.0 Introduction

The recent emergence of the Gen Z movement has become a contemporary political phenomenon that inspires a reassessment of the understanding of Nepal's political culture and democratic transition from a new perspective. The independent and unorganized political activism of the young generation, born in the digital age, technology-friendly, familiar with global political consciousness, has further reinterpreted traditional political behavior, values, and citizen-state relations in a challenging way. Political culture is the sum total of the beliefs, attitudes, values and behavior of the people towards a political system (Mahajan, 2016, p. 171). Nepali political culture is no longer shaped only by traditional party socialization or class-caste politics, but is also connecting with emerging characters such as digital participation, alternative resistance, and moral-political criticism. This changing environment has established the Gen Z movement as an indispensable analytical tool in the study of democratic transformation in Nepal. In this context, the recent 'Gen Z Movement' (September 8 and 9, 2025) has brought a new phenomenon to Nepali political culture (Magar, 2025).

In general, the meaning of political culture includes the specific customs, habits, skills, and attitudes that an individual learns as a general experience of their political system (Shivakoti, 2019, p. 527). The root of the imbalance in political culture and moral decline in Nepal is reflected in the behavior of political parties. A political party is not democratic internally, for instance, if it fails to conduct, at regular intervals, open elections among its members for party leadership, or bans the establishment of intraparty factions (Mersel, 2006, p. 96). The state of intra-party democracy among Nepali political parties is significantly lacking, a situation common to many countries in the Third World, particularly in South Asia (Hachhetu, 2025). Corruption was rampant in Nepal, and political parties, the government, and the leadership were never sensitive enough to control it (Magar, 2025).

As a result, public trust in political institutions is declining and citizens are increasingly disillusioned with democracy. Nepali voters are understandably frustrated with current governance and political instability (Thapa, 2024). This situation has trapped Nepali democracy in a vortex of moral crisis, where power transfers and changes are regular but political culture

does not improve. Party divisions, corruption, and the moral failure of leadership have reduced the quality of democracy. Nepal is in the transition of democracy and the state of fragility (Silwal, 2024), yet democratic transition continues. In this context, the recent Gen Z revolution, has brought a new kind of stir to Nepal's political culture and moral consciousness. They organize online campaigns to raise awareness, participate in peaceful protests, and utilize social media to disseminate alternative narratives and hold leaders accountable (Karki, 2025).

Generation Z (Gen Z) individuals born between 1997 and 2012, aged under 28 are already reshaping the future of work and society. With an innate connection to digital technology, Gen Z approaches challenges and tasks with a different mindset from previous generations (Rachmand, 2025). Gen Z, grown up in the digital age, global connectivity, and an environment of critical political thinking, is emerging as the bearer of the moral democratic renaissance in Nepal today. From the "Enough is Enough", "No Not Again", campaign to the "Nepobaby" slogan and the widespread participation of youth in various civic movements, the moral boundaries of traditional political practice have been sharply questioned. This generation is demanding not just policy change, but also moral transformation, which is trying to transform democracy from state-centricity to citizen-centricity. Gen Z has begun to interpret democracy in particular by linking it to the lifestyle of the people, transparency, and moral accountability of leadership.

The political participation of Gen Z has given the democratic transition a form of 'bottom-up pressure,' forcing critical debates on governance reform, internal party democracy, leadership ethics, economic transparency, social justice, youth-friendly public policies, and capacity-building. They seem to be rejecting the legacy of the old political culture and are engaged in the creation of a new value-culture. This is not just an external event of democratic transition, but a form of internal historical force pushing towards a qualitative transformation of democracy. Nepal's transition from an authoritarian regime to a multi-party democracy was merely over 30 years ago (Chaulagain, 2023). The reason for such government frequent changes in regime and power is because of the wrong political culture within political parties. Although changes in governments have been frequent, Cabinet decisions once taken have rarely been rolled back by subsequent governments, even when ideological differences prevail (Shrestha, 2019, p. 5). The old political culture is fundamentally an immoral culture that hinders the democratic process in some way or another. Such public awareness has become a potential basis for the restoration of moral democracy in Nepal, which can chart a new direction for political sustainability.

Against this important backdrop, this study presents a sociological and political analysis of the new political consciousness emerging in Nepali society. It attempts to examine the interrelationship between political culture and democratic transition in terms of structural, historical, digital, psychological, and institutional dimensions. In particular, the political consciousness after the Gen Z movement, the reinterpretation of power relations, and the need for reform of state institutions are the main areas of its analysis. This article aims to seek answers to the questions: where Nepali democracy might be headed in the coming decade, what kind of democratic character the new form of political culture creates, and what lasting impact the political activism of the young generation will have on state-social transformation.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Basis of Political Culture

Political culture is composed of attitudes and orientations which people in a given society develop towards objects within their political system (Agarwal, 2004, p. 423). According to Rosenberg and Hoveland (1960), these attitudes and orientations may have three distinct dimensions which are cognitive, affective and evaluative. The development of the specific concept of political culture came to light in the 1950s, particularly through the works of Gabriel

Almond and Sidney Verba (1963). They defined political culture as the beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors of citizens that shape their perceptions of the state and political system. Almond and Verba (1963) argue in their book that civic and political cultures are directly related to the stability and quality of democracy. According to them, where values such as citizen participation, tolerance, mutual trust, and political accountability are strong, moral democracy also has a chance to flourish well.

2.2 Nepal's Political Culture and Historical Development

The development of Nepal's political culture has historically been further influenced by the background of monarchy, panchayat governance, and subsequent democratic movements. The 1990's People's Movement re-established a multi-party system, while the second Jana Andolan of 2006 paved the way for a republic. However, the value-based transformation of political culture has occurred at a very slow pace. According to Dahal (2024), in Nepal, political culture has been found to promote the personal interests of the leadership, family structures, and party protectionism. It is such a mental and psychological perception that determines the political activity and role of a person (Budhathoki, 2024). As a result, the moral aspects of democracy, such as responsibility, transparency, and the spirit of public service, have not been institutionalized. This is the root cause of the moral crisis of Nepali democracy.

2.3 Political Culture and its Relationship with the Gen Z Movement

Studies on political culture in Nepal often interpret traditional value structures, individualistic political behavior, patriarchal socialization, and party-centered political processes as obstacles to democratic institutional development. Almond and Verba's (1963) concept of civic culture and its interpretation in the Nepali context seem to confirm the relationship between political stability and participatory governance. Although recent studies have shown the emergence of digital movements, youth political activism, and "networked citizenship" created by social media as important turning points, those studies have been more event-based, descriptive, and focused on the psycho-social aspects of the movement.

In particular, a detailed and structural analysis of the impact of the Gen Z movement on the creation of political participation, transparency, accountability, and a policy-oriented political culture does not yet appear to have been developed. While international literature portrays Gen Z as digitally-empowered, argument-based, and value-centered political consciousness bearers, studies on how this generation has challenged traditional political culture in Nepal are extremely limited. This also opens the important question of whether a fundamental transformation is taking place in Nepal's political culture. The recent Gen Z-led uprising, triggered by a sweeping ban on social media platforms, has not only dismantled the sitting government but also exposed the deep fractures within Nepal's democratic framework (Dahal, 2025). He argues that "This is not just a political shift it is a cultural one".

2.4 Theoretical Literature on Democratic Transition

Although classic literature on democratic transitions explains the dynamics of transition stages, balance of power, and institutional reconstruction, no in-depth study has been developed on the impact of the digitally-inspired Gen Z movement on the latest phase of democratic transformation in Nepal. In various countries around the world, Gen Z individuals are using social media to raise their voices against corruption, economic inequality, undemocratic governance, and inflation (Pathak, 2025). The available literature mainly focuses on peace processes, constitution-making, identity-based politics, federalism, and power struggles, but does not seem to adequately address the structural challenges posed by the new-generation movement to leadership ethics, political legitimacy, party monopoly, and democratic accountability.

Foreign studies have shown Gen Z as "post-conventional political actors," arguing that their digital mobilization has intensified the demand for a new participatory democracy and deliberative political culture. They are commanding the attention of the broad public including empathizers, businesses, and governments around the world. With Gen Z strategically dominating virtual spaces, the traditional dynamics of soft power are being transformed around the world (Roche & Szobonya, 2022). However, in Nepal, an analytical discussion on how deep, how sustainable, and how institutionalized the democratic transition can become after the Gen Z movement is still absent. The main objective of this research is to systematically address this gap in the available literature, namely the interrelationship between political culture and democratic transition in Nepal after the Gen Z movement. Nepal's 'Gen Z Anti-Corruption Movement' represents distinct yet interconnected phenomena that illuminate broader patterns of state-society relations, generational politics, and democratic participation in the region (Win, 2025).

Table 1: Summary of the literature on political culture and democratic transition

Title	Main Theme	Key-points (existing studies)	Research Gap
political culture and its relationship to	Nepal's political culture, traditional values, leader-oriented politics,	Leader-oriented, people-oriented political behavior, youth digital participation, and	political behavior, and demand for transparency and
	balance of power, institutional reconstruction,	•	impact of the Gen Z

2.5 Moral Democracy and Institutional Crisis

Mahajan (2016) defines political culture as the sum total of citizens' values, beliefs, and political behavior. When these values lack ethics, accountability, and a sense of service, the very spirit of democracy weakens. Party politics in Nepal is often seen as power-centric and opportunistic. As a result, political decisions are based on calculations of power and profit rather than on moral standards. The Rising Nepal (2023) also points out that democracy cannot survive without a culture of tolerance, equality, and mutual understanding. The lack of institutional practice of such values in Nepal has left democratic structures weak in practice. Democratic government and government based on morality would appear to be one and the same thing (Boutroux, 1921).

2.6 Personal Interests and Structural Failures

Personal gain, nepotism, favoritism, factionalism, cronyism, and clientelism are deeply rooted in Nepal's political culture. Dahal's (2021) study shows that political parties have become more individualistic or person-centered than institutional. This promotes vested interests and protectionism rather than ethics and responsibility. Even the movements for change of power have not been able to bring about value changes, but rather old behaviors have been re-

established in the new structure. This has further complicated the crisis of political ethics and has reduced public trust in democratic institutions.

2.7 Civic Participation and Democratic Awareness

The core element of democratic culture is citizen participation. According to Almond and Verba (1963) citizen participation is actually the lifeline of democracy. However, in the context of Nepal, citizens' participation is often limited to the electoral process. When the level of political awareness is weak, the tendency for citizens to be limited to party propaganda, deification, demonization, and personality worship prevails. Devkota (2020) states, "Political culture is ethical only when citizens understand their rights as well as their duties and responsibilities." The lack of general citizens' awareness in Nepal has prevented the roots of ethical democracy from becoming deeply rooted.

2.8 The Role of Communication, Civil Society and the Education System

Education, media and civil society have an important and decisive role to play in transforming political culture. However, education in Nepal has been limited to imparting exam-oriented knowledge rather than political awareness. Dahal (2023) has criticized civil society and media as 'extensions of political party'. Thus, institutional bodies have also become entangled in the web of political patronage, which has led to the loss of opportunities to improve political culture. Restructuring civic education, media impartiality and civil society independence are indispensable for making democracy morally sound.

2.9 Contemporary Discourse and the Future of Nepalese Democracy

The election is a part of the political process in the democracy and if there is no election, there is no democracy (Chitlaoarporn, 2015). Contemporary Nepali political discourse views the moral crisis as a major challenge to democracy. In fact, lack of morality has become a constant political problem across the globe, and thus morality in politics generally is a far-cry (Dhakal, 2020). Democracy is not just a system of elections, it is also a system of values, behavior, and responsibility. Nepal's political culture still carries old feudal tendencies such as individualism, faith-based support, and intolerance. Without transforming these, the development of moral democracy is not possible. Modern political theories such as deliberative democracy and participatory ethics can be relevant in the Nepalese context, where a restructuring of mutual trust and responsibility between citizens and the state is necessary.

3.0 Research Methods

The research methodology in this study is based entirely on secondary sources. Here, without collecting primary data, existing literature, academic articles, research reports, books, national and international journals, newspapers, policy documents, government reports and critical views of scholars have been made the main basis for analysis. Through secondary sources, the nature of Nepal's political culture, democratic transitions, its historical context and the moral crisis seen in democratic practice have been analyzed. The methodology used in this study provides an opportunity to look at existing studies from the perspective of comparison, criticism and structural analysis. In particular, aspects such as political consciousness, citizen participation, party politics and the impact of social values on the political process in Nepali society have been identified and compared according to the views of various scholars. It presents an overall picture of the positive and negative aspects of Nepal's political culture by linking the studies with contemporary contexts.

By analyzing the existing literature extensively, the main causes, trends and potential consequences of the problems seen in Nepal's political culture present in a critical manner, it aims to draw conclusions from a factual and ideological perspective based on historical events,

constitutional changes, electoral processes, party structures and civil movements documents and published analytical reports. The recent youth movement in Nepal has dealt a major blow to the dominance of the old political parties, and the then government has been replaced by a new interim government. This is likely to lead to a major change in Nepal's democratic culture. Under this methodology, methods such as comparative study of secondary sources, content analysis and theoretical reflection have been used, which have revealed the structure of Nepal's political culture, the influence of social values and the crisis in moral democracy from a holistic perspective. This may be helpful to present possible measures for improving Nepal's democratic practice and critical suggestions in the context of policy-making through the existing literature.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Transforming Political Culture

The first important fact shown by the research results is that the Gen Z movement in Nepal has created a new mode of structurally redefining political culture. The facts prove that Gen Z is not just an active social-media agitator generation, but has emerged as a new political agent promoting transparency, accountability, leadership ethics, inclusive representation, ethical politics and issue-centered political consciousness. The protests were largely led by Gen Z students and young citizens. The protests were sparked by a nationwide ban on multiple social media platforms and fueled by public outrage over government corruption (Odira, 2025). Their political behavior is clearly deviating from the traditional leader-oriented and party-centered political culture, which has accelerated the emergence of citizen-oriented political consciousness in Nepal.

From the Maoist insurgency (1996–2006) to the recent rise of Gen Z activism, each generation has sought to challenge structures of inequality, exclusion, and unaccountability embedded deep within the nation's socio-political fabric (Gyawali, 2025). Gen Z has a strong dissatisfaction with party monopoly, corruption, moral decline of leadership and lack of transparency in the decision-making process, which has led them to resist political activism. They all wanted an end to corruption in a country where families of Communist, Maoist and social democrat leaders alike paraded their wealth while the rest of the population seemed to slide into hopelessness (Beech, 2025). Thus, this study supports the conclusion that the Gen Z movement has established a "post-conventional political orientation" in Nepal's political culture, that is, a value-based, logic-centered, digitally-enabled, and participatory political orientation.

4.2 Impact and Challenges of the Gen Z Movement in Democratic Transition

The Gen Z movement has created new standards of transparency, ethical leadership, and participatory governance in Nepali democracy, which is redefining the future direction of the transition process. It is about space, recognition, transparency and participation (Devkota, 2025). Digital mobilization has expanded the practice of 'horizontal transparency' in state-citizen relations, where citizens have begun to prioritize direct policy reform, transparency, and active resistance against impunity over party structures. Good governance entails the presence of effective and transparent institutions, as well as active citizen participation (KC, 2024). While this change has injected new energy into the democratic transition, some structural challenges, such as the outdated structure of political institutions, the limitations of formal political inclusion of youth and the difficulty of translating the effects of the movement into institutional reforms. Despite these challenges, it is clear that the Gen Z movement has pushed Nepal's democratic transformation in a value-centered, participatory, and citizen-responsive direction.

4.3 The Original Nature of Nepal's Political Culture

The development of Nepal's political culture is deeply connected to history. Both phases, monarchy and republic, have had a profound impact on political thinking, behavior and values. This form of political culture has further weakened the moral aspect of democracy. The dignity of the individual speaks to the place of morality in a democracy. Individual citizens continue to be moral agents entitled to respect as such (Kahn, 2024). Leadership change, transparency and the tradition of critical dialogue within the party structure are all weak. As a result, although the democratic system is formally running, the practice of moral values and responsibility is disappearing in it. It promotes transparency, responsiveness, and adherence to ethical standards, which are crucial for sustaining public trust and the democratic process itself (Gupta et al., 2024). The moral basis necessary to sustain democracy is tolerance, accountability and civic responsibility, these things have not been institutionalized in Nepal.

Table 2: Major trends in Nepal's political culture

Trend	Description	Result
Leader politics	Prioritized the leaders than parties	Institutional weaknesses
Protectionism	Practice of supporting for profit and power	Increase Corruption
Nepotism	Family-centered leadership	Lack of meritocracy
Thoughtless/idealess competition	Prioritize power than policy	Policy instability
Political opportunism	Alliance for power and division	Lack of long-term perspective

4.4 The Decline of Moral Democracy and the Crisis in Public Trust

According to the study results, the biggest challenge to democracy in Nepal is the weak moral aspect. Public trust has declined due to political leadership and those in public office prioritizing their own interests rather than service. The fundamental aspect of political culture is the moral relationship between citizens and leadership, and when that relationship becomes strained, the very spirit of democracy is lost. A similar situation has emerged in Nepal, where the tendency to make decisions based on party interests, power bargaining, and personal gain has reduced transparency in governance. The recent protests set a powerful reminder that comprehensive digital education is fundamental for civic participation, economic opportunity and accountable governance (Dahal, 2025). Declining public trust in the governance system is a dangerous sign in terms of democratic stability. When political decisions are based on party and individual interests rather than public interest, both policy instability and public discontent increase. Table 3 presents the detrimental factors prevailing in past and present Nepalese politics.

Table 3: Indicators of decline in moral democracy

Description	Consequence	
Abuse of public office	Using position for personal gain	
Lack of accountability	Lack of transparency in public decision-making	
Party interests	Policy instability	
Power-centrism	Lust for the power over cooperation	

4.5 The state of civic participation and political awareness

The foundation of a democratic system is participation. Table 4 presents various factors hindering citizens' participation. Studies show that in Nepal, citizen participation is limited to election periods, while people's voices in policy debates and social value creation are extremely rare. Lack of civic education, media bias, and party divisions have hindered the development of conscious citizenship. As The Rising Nepal (2023) has noted, democracy thrives only when citizens are tolerant, responsible, and informed. Such values have yet to be translated into institutional practice in Nepal.

This Research has also shown that voting tendencies based on ethnic, regional, religious and party identity dominate among citizens in rural areas rather than democratic values. These patterns can be assessed through various lenses, including ecological regions and rural-urban distinctions. Concurrently, an analysis of voting disparities elucidates the competitive dynamics between political parties (Karki, 2025). Such a culture further weakens the foundations of moral democracy because citizen participation is based on emotions rather than values. A proper education system, a healthy civil society and coordinated efforts by local administration are essential for expanding civic awareness.

Table 4: The main reasons hindering citizens' participation

Obstacle	Description	Improvement measures
Political frustration	Lack of trust in leaders	Transparency in leadership
Lack of civic education	Lack democratic knowledge	Curriculum reform and civic education
Media-bias	Lack of impartial news	Independent journalism
Economic dependence	Unemployment and poverty	Economic-empowerment program

4.6 Institutional Weaknesses and Instability of Governance Structures

Political institutions are the backbone of democracy, but in Nepal, these institutions have not yet become stable and accountable. The study shows that the practice of internal democracy within parties is very weak, which has led to a lack of transparency and accountability in the decision-making process. The tendency for personal relationships to be more decisive than party balance in political appointments has increased institutional inefficiency. As constitutional bodies have also not been freed from political pressure, public trust in them has been declining.

Institutional instability and constant changes of power have also further weakened policy implementation. With increasing political interference in parliament, commissions and local levels, the issue of ethics and a long-term perspective in policy-making had disappeared. The policies and legislation formulated about the ecosystem and its services has increased sharply since the ratification of the Constitution of Nepal in 2015 (Nepal, 2025). Institutional weakness has become a permanent cause of the moral crisis of democracy. When the influence of individuals and parties increases unnaturally in institutions, the fundamental values of democracy, such as fairness, accountability and public service, are lost.

4.7 Major causes behind the Gen Z movement

Gen Z's active political engagement is not a sudden or reactive phenomenon. It has emerged as the aggregate result of long-term structural-political crises. Political elitism and corruption were among the most significant drivers. Decision-making authority was centralized among a limited political elite, characterized by the prevalence of nepotism, favoritism, and patronage networks

in governance (Thapa, 2025). This led to frustration and hatred towards leadership among the people. Factors such as broad access to technology and family political experience play a role in shaping this generation's participatory political preferences (Solihat, 2024). High unemployment, inequality of opportunity, and uncertainty about the future have created deep insecurity among young people. Gen Z, along with numerous Nepali citizens, has long been frustrated by the country's broken system (Pandey & Gautam, 2025). This is also why the foundation of the Gen Z movement can be considered to have been laid. This has increased the tendency to question traditional governance structures. The decline in governance capacity, service delivery, and transparency has exacerbated the legitimacy crisis towards the state. Another important reason is the government's ban on social media. The September 2025 Gen Z anti-corruption movement in Nepal was ignited by the government's digital censorship via a social media ban (Gautam, 2025).

4.8 Criticism

Although the existing literature provides important insights into political culture, democratic transitions, and youth movements, these studies are often developed from isolated perspectives, and are therefore insufficient to comprehensively understand the new political landscape created by the Gen Z movement in Nepal. Studies on political culture have mainly focused on traditional values, leader-oriented political behavior, and party-centered structures, which describe but fail to accommodate the new digital dimensions of political participation in an analytical manner. Similarly, most existing studies have interpreted social-media-induced political consciousness as a fleeting, extreme, or emotional response. This does not seem to take seriously the questions of Gen Z's political identity and capacity for sustainable change. From a critical perspective, the tendency in the literature to portray youth as a unified group is also a problem. Because aspects such as the digital divide, class differences, urban-rural gaps, and educational opportunity disparities have brought significant diversity to Gen Z's political behavior, which are not comprehensively represented by existing studies.

Similarly, the literature on democratic transitions, while analytically strong on the issues of structure, balance of power, political consensus, and institutional restructuring, is weak in capturing the qualitative changes brought about by the political activism of a new generation in the transition process. Popular theories such as transitional theory or consolidation theory have not been sufficiently updated to address how citizens' political agency is being redefined in the current digital era. In Nepal, the demands for transparency, strong rejection of corruption, issue-centered political culture, and direct challenges to party dominance have given new shape to the transition process, but the existing literature has neither included such changes in institutional analysis nor presented a model of the long-term effects of political culture. That is, the Gen Z movement should be understood not only as a social movement, but also as a driving force for political culture change and a decisive element in redefining the dynamics of democratic transition.

5.0 Conclusion

Overall, the main conclusion of this manuscript is that the Gen Z movement has become a significant historical turning point for both the transformation of political culture and the reconstruction of democratic transition in Nepal. Moving away from traditional leader-oriented, party-centered, and structurally complex political practices, the Gen Z movement has given rise to a new political consciousness that promotes issue-centered, transparency-oriented, and ethical leadership. Their digitally-enabled participation is transforming state-citizen relations toward "horizontal accountability," making the role of citizens in the democratic process more active, guaranteed, and effective. However, challenges such as the archaic structure of political institutions, lack of formal political inclusion, and the digital divide still exist. However, it is

clear that the Gen Z movement has created new values, behaviors, and expectations that will have a long-term impact on Nepal's democratic journey. In conclusion, the Gen Z movement is not just a momentary reaction to discontent, but rather the cornerstone of a new democratic political culture emerging in Nepal, which holds significant potential to pave the way for democratic stability, institutional reform, and citizen-centered governance in the future.

Declaration

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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