

Gen Z Mobilisation and Political Uprisings in South Asia: A Comparative Study of Bangladesh and Nepal

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Abstract

This study addresses the question of how, when, and why young people in South Asia have become an important political force by examining the experiences of youth-led mobilisation and uprisings in Bangladesh versus Nepal. The paper, which is at the intersection of comparative politics and International Relations, examines the impact of digital nativity, socio-economic grievances and transformations in political identities on the nature of youth participation in the present. It examines some of the reasons why Gen Z mobilisation may be occurring in these contexts. How and why do digital platforms affect the nature of contentious politics in different ways?

This study's theoretical frameworks include contentious politics and the political opportunity structure, indicating that Gen Z uprisings are not arbitrary but rather coordinated responses to poor governance, unemployment, corruption, and disillusionment with democracy. This study uses secondary literature, media reports, and digital discourse analysis of social media to trace patterns of mobilisation and state reactions, using the qualitative comparative case study method.

The initial investigation suggests that digital mobilisation and youth-led opposition culture are strong in both Bangladesh and Nepal. The uprisings take different paths and have different effects, depending on regime type, state capacity, and political openness. The political system and mobilisation in Bangladesh are more episodic and constrained than in Nepal. Nepal has a more democratic political system that enables sustained youth mobilisation. The study contributes to a better understanding of Gen Z as an important stakeholder in the restructuring of state-society relations in the digital era. It is also important in the ongoing conversation about youth politics, democratic change, and the stability of the South Asian region.

Keywords: Gen Z, Mobilisations, Nepal, Bangladesh, Political Uprising

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Introduction

Over the last few years, South Asia has witnessed strong political movements. These political movements were derived by Generation Z, those born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, around the world. This demographic transition is especially important in South Asia, where the region has a large young population and is undergoing democratic and developmental transitions. The world has seen a string of youth-led protests, movements, and digital campaigns in countries like Bangladesh and Nepal, indicating a shift in political participation. Gen Z is not just immersed in a digital world, but also in an ecosystem that fosters novel ways of mobilisation, which might be interpreted as online and street politics.

This paper examines the phenomenon of ‘Gen Z mobilisation’ and political uprisings in South Asia by comparing Bangladesh and Nepal. There are some similarities in the region, history and socio-economic context of both countries. However, they vary on a number of issues, including politics, governance, and the openness of the state. Bangladesh has a more centralised political system, and concerns are rising about the democratic backsliding and curtailment of dissent. Nepal has a relatively more open, albeit maturing, political climate after the transition from monarchic system to a federal democratic system of government. The differences offer an intriguing case for comparative research on the character, intensity and results of youth-led uprisings as a function of political opportunity structures.

The key findings of this study are that South Asian Gen Z uprisings are not random or spontaneous, but rather part of a deeper structure comprising governance weaknesses, joblessness, corruption, and a perceived loss of democratic accountability. Gen Z’s unique selling point is also that they can use digital technologies to coordinate, communicate and amplify dissent. Social media sites like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram have become essential spaces for political engagement. They help disseminate information, create collective identities, and coordinate protests. The digital dimension brings freshness to the old conceptualisations of political participation and contentious politics, and requires a fresh look at the analytical frameworks.

Based on this, the following three research questions guide this study. What are the key factors behind the mobilisation of Gen Z in Bangladesh and Nepal? What are the new forms and strategies of youth-led uprisings? Why are the paths and consequences of these movements different in the two cases? The paper seeks to fill this gap and, by addressing these questions, to show how youth movements at the domestic level may have wider implications for state legitimacy, governance and regional stability.

The method used in this paper is a qualitative comparative case study. It uses secondary literature,

policy reports, and analysis of media and digital discourse. This way, there is a nuanced understanding of both structure and agency that accounts for the dynamic relationship between state responses and youth activism. This comparative approach also allows for the recognition of convergences, such as the primacy of digital mobilisation, and divergences, specifically in relation to state repression, accommodation, and policy outcomes.

This study is important because it contributes to the developing dialogue on youth politics in the Global South. The literature clearly identifies several critical gaps. Research on youth political participation, particularly on Gen Z, is lacking in the broader context of youth political participation in South Asia. Secondly, the nature of digital activism in relation to traditional contentious politics has not been sufficiently studied in non-Western contexts. Third, there has been little comparative research on the relationship between political opportunity structures and youth mobilisation in other countries. Lastly, there has been a lack of integration between comparative politics and International Relations, particularly in the analysis of the broader meanings of youth movements for the legitimacy of the state and the stability of the region.

This study attempts to fill these lacunae by providing a comparative, theory-based analysis of the mobilisation of Gen Z in Bangladesh and Nepal. By weaving in lessons from contentious politics, digital activism, and constructivist theory. It helps build a fuller understanding of youth-led uprisings, their meanings and implications for democratic transformation and governance in South Asia.

Literature Review

The field of youth-led political mobilisation has undergone a significant transformation over the past two decades, especially in the age of digitally connected youth. The literature study is segmented into four interconnected themes: youth political participation, contentious politics, digital activism, and the South Asian context. Gaps identified in the present study include:

(2.1) Democracy, Youth, and Political Participation

“Previous research on political involvement was often characterised as pessimistic about youth’s participation in politics or as describing youth on the way to becoming full-fledged civic citizens” (Almond and Verba 1963). “Conventional participation measures (voting and party membership) were analysed. More recent research, however, casts doubt on this institutional bias, suggesting that younger generations are increasingly engaging in non-institutionalised ways, such as protest, campaigning, and activism, on various issues” (Dalton 2008 and Norris 2002).

“Keeping this in mind, one can only consider this a special generation, raised in a world of globalisa-

tion, technology and socio-economic uncertainty. Modern youth are generally thought to be distrustful of formal institutions and to prefer horizontal, decentralised forms of involvement” (Foa & Mounk 2016). “In the Global South, these factors are exacerbated by structural problems such as unemployment, inequality, and weak governance, which serve as triggers for political mobilisation” (Honwana 2012). Although young people are an increasingly vital part of the political landscape, much of the literature has focused on Millennials, and Gen Z has not been studied as a distinct political cohort.

(2.2) Controversial politics and social movements

“The theoretical framework for studying uprisings has been set forth by Charles Tilly (2004) and Sidney Tarrow (2011) in their contentious politics approach”. “Contentious politics is collective, public engagement in which people make claims that involve the interests of others, and may include confronting the state. One of the key ideas in this approach is the concept of political opportunity structures and how they affect the nature, extent, and outcomes of mobilisation. Elite alignments, repression, and a state’s openness are key to explaining movement trajectories” (Tarrow 2011).

“This has been further developed in subsequent scholarship, which includes aspects of framing processes, collective identity, and resource mobilisation” (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly 2001). The concept of movement is therefore read not just as a reactant but also as produced through strategic interaction. These dynamics are significant in the case of Gen Z, since youth movements can be based on symbolic stories, identity building and online communication.

However, classical contentious politics theorists developed their theories in pre-digital times and made assumptions about relatively organised and hierarchical forms of mobilisation. For this reason, they need to be adapted to fit the current movements they are experiencing, which are more decentralised and fluid, due to their digitally mediated nature.

(2.3) Digital Activism and Networked Movements

Digital technologies have dramatically changed the nature of political participation. In their study of the role of social media in the construction of “networked movements”, scholars like Castells (2012) note that these movements are built on horizontal communication, quick mobilisation and transnational connections. Likewise, Bennett and Segerberg (2012) propose a new framework of connective action with content shared and personalised, rather than collective.

“Digital platforms have reduced barriers to participation by allowing youth, particularly those in Gen Z, to engage in politics without organisational structures” (Shirky 2011). “These platforms also helped to develop collective identities using hashtags, viral content, and online narratives. The effects

of digital activism, however, are controversial. There is a danger that it can become superficial engagement or ‘slacktivism’ with little real-world impact” (Morozov 2011).

“In parallel, states have learned to become digital by adjusting themselves through embracing systems of surveillance, censorship and information control (Deibert 2015). This establishes a tension between digital empowerment and state repression, especially in “hybrid political regimes”. Digital engagement is not only a political engagement of Gen Z, but also part of forming political identities and performing political actions.

(2.4) Youth Movements in South Asia: Bangladesh and Nepal

South Asia has a long history of youth and student activism. Still, there is not much extensive research on contemporary youth and student mobilisation in the region. In Bangladesh, research has identified the historical significance of student movements in national political governance, as well as the mobilisation of students over issues of governance, including public-sector quotas and road safety” (Riaz 2019). “It is important to note that youth mobilisation is not without political context, and this context is significantly constrained by state control and restrictions on dissent” (Lewis 2011).

“On the other hand, Nepal is on a different political track. Youth involvement has played an integral role in the country’s shift from monarchy to a federal democratic republic, especially during the People’s Movement” (Hachhethu 2007). “Recent studies indicate that Nepali youth continue to be political, acting in both organised and unorganised ways” (Snellinger 2018). A relatively open political system leads to greater expression, but it also poses obstacles, such as instability and ineffective governance. Even with these contributions, the youth are generally studied as a population without accounting for generational differences or the distinct qualities of Gen Z. Furthermore, there is limited cross-country analysis across South Asian countries.

Theoretical Framework

The study is offered within a multi-theoretical framework that draws on contentious politics, political opportunity structure, and constructivist theories in International Relations. It is a combination of these factors that enables a relatively fine-grained analysis of two sets of conditions: the structural conditions and the ideational factors that affect the actions of youth-led movements in both countries, Bangladesh and Nepal.

The theory for the study was developed by Charles Tilly (2004) and Sidney Tarrow (2011) and is based on contentious politics. Political eruptions are conceptualised as a ‘public, collective and sometimes confrontative negotiation between claim makers and authorities’ in this paradigm. It stresses

that this mobilisation is organised, not arbitrary, and carried out through regular processes such as collective action, diffusion, and brokerage. Contentious politics is a useful lens to analyse how young people turn grievances, especially the ones of unemployment, corruption, and governance deficits, into organised forms of protest in the context of Gen Z. Unlike the previous generations, however, “Gen Z” mobilisation largely takes place in decentralised networks instead of through formal organisations. It needs a more expansive understanding of ‘contention’ that encompasses digital spaces.

“The idea of the political opportunity structure is closely related to this, and is the theory that seeks to understand how the wider political context affects the development and evolution of social movements” (Tarrow 2011). Factors in political opportunity structures include the openness of political institutions, the state’s capacity and willingness to suppress dissent, and elite divisions. This is especially pertinent for the cross-national differences between Bangladesh and Nepal in this study. The political system in Bangladesh is relatively centralised and restrictive, which limits sustained mobilisation and sometimes gives rise to episodic and suppressed mobilisation. By contrast, Nepal’s relatively open and transitioning democratic process offers more opportunities for ongoing dialogue and negotiation between the youth movements and the State. Political opportunity structures can thus be used to understand how similar grievances can generate different outcomes across contexts.

In addition, it draws on a constructivist tradition in International Relations, exemplified by Alexander Wendt (1999). Constructivism focuses on the influence of ideas, identities and social norms on political action. For Gen Z, political mobilisation is not solely about material circumstances, but also a product of common identities and narratives created through digital interactions. Social media has played a major role in this process, allowing collective meaning, symbols and frames of resistance to be developed and spread. Hashtags, viral content, and Internet conversations, for example, help shape a transnational yet local generation.

Additionally, this study connects to new theories of digital activism, including the theory of connective action (Bennett & Segerberg 2012), “which focuses on the use of digital technologies to engage in personalised, loosely coordinated participation”. Collective action is a traditional form of action, usually based on organisations and collective identity, while connective action is linked to the politically active and characterised by individualised expressions in a digitally networked form. This is particularly true of Gen Z, who are politically active online.

The study integrates these theories to develop a comprehensive analytical framework that captures the interplay among structure, agency, and technology. Theories of contentious politics and political opportunity structures are used to explain when mobilisation occurs, whereas constructivism and

theories of digital activism are used to understand how Gen Z actors interpret, communicate, and enact political resistance. Altogether, they can provide insight into how these youth-led uprisings in South Asia are changing and how they are impacting democracy, governance, and regional political dynamics.

Research Methodology

The study employs a qualitative comparative research design to examine Gen Z mobilisation and political uprising in Bangladesh and Nepal. The selection of a comparative case study approach is informed by the desire to uncover commonalities and differences in youth-led political mobilisation in a common regional context. The study explains how the political and ideational dynamics of two countries with contrasting structural and political conditions shape the character, magnitude, and outcomes of Gen Z uprisings.

(4.1) Case selection and research design.

Hence, the study follows the most-similar systems design (MSSD) using two countries, Bangladesh and Nepal, which share regional proximity, socio-economic issues, demographic traits, and a large youth population. They are, however, very distinct with respect to political opportunity structures, governance models, and levels of state openness. This variation enables a fruitful comparison to determine the impact of different political contexts on mobilisation and state reactions. The political landscape in Bangladesh is relatively centralised and restrictive, whereas that in Nepal is more open and democratic, albeit in transition. These comparisons offer a strong foundation.

(4.2) Data Sources (Secondary Data Only)

Given the scope of this research, only secondary data sources are used. These include:

Journal articles and academic books (published in peer-reviewed journals) on the study of youth politics, social movements and South Asian political systems.

- a. International organisations and think tanks, policy reports & working papers
- b. Authoritative articles in newspapers and media reports in connection with current youth protests and political events.
- c. Content that can be accessed online and is publicly available, such as social media trends, hashtags and online discussions (secondary digital data collected not as a primary data collection)

The secondary sources used are varied, providing depth and triangulation and making the findings

reliable and valid.

(4.3) Method of Analysis

The study combines a comparative analysis and a qualitative content analysis. The comparative analysis helps to understand similarities, differences, and patterns between the two cases, including their drivers of mobilisation, types of protest, and state responses.

Qualitative content analysis is used to analyse textual and digital texts and to explore the recurring themes, stories and set-ups within the context of mobilising youth. This involves examining how the younger generation expresses grievances, shapes political identities, and responds to wider socio-political issues. Digital discourse is the focus of special attention, since the internet has become a vital component of modern contentious politics.

(4.4) Analytical Framework Application

The methodology is in congruence with the theoretical framework. One way of operationalising this is to examine issues such as state openness, legal constraints, and the level of repression to gain insight into how concepts such as the political opportunity structure manifest. Likewise, constructivism is used to explain how identities and narratives are constructed in the context of digital and public discourse. Contentious politics is used as a lens to explore the processes of protest, including mobilisation strategy and interactions with state actors.

Limitations of the Study

The use of secondary data provides a large number of statistical items and comparisons, but it also has limitations. A lack of primary data can limit the ability to represent the individual-level motivations and experiences of Gen Z participants. Also, news and digital outlets may be biased or one-sided. There are, however, constraints that can be mitigated with proper data sources and cross-referencing across multiple sources.

This approach is theory and system-driven, thus offering a coherent and comprehensive understanding of Gen Z mobilisation in South Asia. For this reason, comparative analysis, qualitative content analysis, and the integration of existing theories should make the research more nuanced and grounded in the empirical realities of youth-led political uprisings in Bangladesh and Nepal.

Case Study I (Bangladesh)

The roots of youth political mobilisation lie in Bangladesh's past of student movements, which were a key feature of the Language Movement of 1952 and the Liberation War of 1971. These new ave-

nues of mobilisation, combining digital activism with street protests, are being driven by the younger generation, known as Gen Z. The revolts are mainly due to a lack of governance, a lack of jobs, corruption, and a sense of democratic accountability.

In recent years, one of the most visible mobilisations by Gen Z was the boycott of job reservations in the public sector, which was part of the quota reform movement. The mobilisation was a manifestation of broader dissatisfaction with limited job prospects and the unfairness of state policies. On the same note, localised protests over road safety following a tragic incident involving students showed how incidents can go viral nationwide on social media. Social media played a critical role in mobilisation, information sharing and public records.

Politics, however, contributes largely to the nature of these protests and their direction in Bangladesh. A centralised system of governance and increasing political oppression limit the political opportunity structure in the country. States have resorted to repression, surveillance and co-optation in order to quash protests by the younger people. This crackdown on protesters, press, internet shutdowns and arrests suggests that Gen Z activists face challenges in sustaining long-term mobilisation.

Bangladesh is an ideal illustration within the theoretical framework due to the structural constraints and agency. Contentious politics is a lens through which we can understand the reasons behind protests, but protests may have limited institutional impact because Bangladesh's political system is not very open. Until then, constructivist ideas can be used to describe how Gen Z activists shape collective identities and resistance narratives in virtual spaces despite repression.

Nonetheless, Gen Z in Bangladesh has been resilient and flexible amidst these constraints. Digital spaces help activists bypass some mechanisms of state control, to preserve networks of solidarity, and to keep their causes visible. Such revolts have worked very well to bring about substantive political change, but have been partially successful. It highlights how political opportunity structures are important in determining outcomes.

Case Study II (Nepal)

Nepal, however, presents an alternative, but complementary route of Gen Z mobilisation in South Asia. The constitutional change in Nepal to become a federal democratic republic (most notably after the 2006 People's Movement) has relatively liberalised the Nepalese political environment compared with more centralised political systems in the region. This has enabled the young, including Gen Z, to play an active and visible role in the political debate, provoke the political, and develop protest movements.

Previously, youth and student organisations have been instrumental in anti-monarchy movements and in Nepal's democratisation. Some of the issues the Gen Z activism is revolving around today include bad governance, corruption, unemployment, and the application of the constitution. The prominence of youth-led contentious politics is evident in protests against political instability, demands for high-quality public services, and responses to corruption scandals. Such mobilisations can occur in both urban and provincial settings and indicate the level of youth participation in politics.

An important facet of Gen Z mobilisation in Nepal is the blend of online and offline activism. Social media are important tools for coordination, awareness and narration construction. In Nepal, digital activism is not constricted and can thrive over time and across a wider range of actors. Hashtag campaigns, internet petitions, and digital advocacy benefit street protests by providing a blended model of mobilisation that is aligned with theories of "connective action".

Nepal has a more tolerant political opportunity structure for protest and dissent. The state is relatively tolerant of public mobilisation, although the political challenges of fragmentation and governance gaps do remain. This openness enables the momentum of Gen Z movements to persist longer and, in some instances, contribute to public debate and policy discourse.

The Nepali case, meanwhile, shows some weaknesses. Although the political environment is relatively open, it doesn't necessarily translate into tangible policy outcomes for youth mobilisation. Protests, however, due to institutional inefficiencies, elite control and political instability, tend to be defused. This implies that political opportunity structures can be pro- as well as anti-mobilising, but even then, they may not be effective in policy responsiveness.

In theory, Nepal illustrates how a more open political system can interact with youth agency in a digitally enabled political environment to generate sustained forms of contentious politics. There are also elements of a constructivist approach, as Gen Z activists actively construct narratives of accountability, democratic rights and national identity. The case of Nepal shows that Gen Z mobilisation can thrive in more permissive settings, but will only have a transformative effect within a broader institutional and political setting.

Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis of mobilisation among Gen Z in Bangladesh and Nepal reveals interesting parallels and differences in what triggers mobilisation, the types of protests used, and the state's response. The analysis situates both cases within an overarching South Asian context to emphasise that similar structural grievances are addressed differently depending on the political opportunity

structure.

At the most elemental level, there are common causes of the uprisings of the “Gen Z” in both countries. Youth mobilisation is driven by factors such as governance, unemployment, corruption, and perceived deficits in democracy. The mobilisation has been widely used by Gen Z in both environments. Social media plays an integral role in information outreach and community building, fostering a sense of community by encouraging protests. This convergence highlights how digital nativity has emerged as a key trait of Gen Z’s political participation across South Asia.

Nevertheless, a number of significant distinctions between the two situations regarding political opportunity structures and state reactions also exist. In Bangladesh, the comparatively centralised and narrow political system inhibits long-term mobilisation. Protests tend to be short-lived and are quickly contained, often by the state and its agents through arrests, surveillance, and limits on digital freedoms. It can be general and rapid, but doesn’t lead to a lasting impact on policy and governance.

In contrast, Nepal’s more open and pluralistic political arena makes it easier to create continuity in youth activism. Gen Z mobilisation in Nepal is more likely to be enduring, and immediate constraints to protesting are less likely. Political instability and institutional inefficiency remain, but the state is more tolerant of dissent. This helps to maintain the link between youth movements and political institutions, even when policies don’t always meet expectations.

The second distinction concerns the nature of mobilisation. Mobilisation in Bangladesh tends to surface in response to triggering events, such as policy decisions or incidents, and wanes in times of stress. However, in Nepal, mobilisation is more deeply rooted in the broader political processes, as there is a much longer tradition of participatory activism and democratic engagement.

These differences, in theory, further support the explanatory power of political opportunity structures in explaining movement trajectories. Contentious politics is responsible for the rise of uprisings in both settings, but differences in outcomes point to the importance of state openness and institutional responsiveness. There are also aspects of constructivism in both scenarios, as Gen Z actors and others are developing a collective story and identity via digital means. Overall, the comparison highlights that although there are shared concerns and ways of engaging amongst Gen Z throughout South Asia, their mobilisation is significantly influenced by the political context in which they act.

Discussion

The comparative study of Gen Z mobilisation in Bangladesh and Nepal provides valuable lessons for the broader discussion in Political Science and International Relations on issues of democratic trans-

formation, state legitimacy, and changing state–society relations in South Asia. This research focuses on the local and regional dimensions of youth-led revolts, and recognises the emerging power and influence of Gen Z as a political force whose impact is not just demonstrative but extends to ongoing governance processes at a structural level.

One of the main issues examined that is highlighted is youth mobilisation and democratic legitimacy. This is a reflection of the growing disillusionment of the citizens with the State institutions of both countries, which are two symptoms of the uprising of Gen Z. Lack of confidence in political institutions and corruption, together with poor economic opportunity, have played a part in diminishing the public trust in political systems, especially among younger generations. This is not surprising, given a broader theoretical discussion that the basis of democratic legitimacy is not just elections, but also responsiveness, accountability, and inclusiveness. Examining the mobilisation of Gen Z in this context might be seen as a sign of democratic deficits and as a potential corrective mechanism that compels states to change.

The results also indicate the importance of political opportunity structures to moderate the effects of youth activism. However, the youth mobilisation in Bangladesh is of short duration and has little policy consequence, as the country’s political space is rather restricted. This is a time when states have broadened their tactics of repression and digital surveillance to the extent that movements are less able to transform protest into institutional transformation. However, Nepal’s political openness allows for continued engagement, but in varying degrees of success. It means that openness is good for participation but not necessarily for good governance or responsiveness to policy, suggesting that consolidating democracy is difficult in transitional spaces.

Constructivist elements are also woven into the study within an IR framework to demonstrate how Gen Z builds political identities and narratives that are not confined to traditional IR. Youth can engage with international debates and processes such as democracy, human rights and social justice on digital platforms, but also make them local. This process is a way of building a global perspective, with a political awareness, but informed by local experiences. In doing so, actors from Generation Z are influencing both domestic politics and the broader regional debate on political norms and expectations of good governance and legitimacy.

An additional aspect of the ongoing debate is the change of state–society relations in the digital society. The convergence of online and offline activism has changed the nature of political participation, producing new arenas for challenge and new means of state control. Digital media is a double-edged sword in both scenarios: it can empower youth by creating opportunities to participate and reducing

barriers to participation, and it can also expose youth to monitoring and repression. This duality is linked to a global trend in which digital technologies are changing the dynamics between empowerment and control. Hence, the findings of this study point to an important moment in the development of politics in South Asia, viz., the mobilisation of Gen Z, which highlights deeper structural tensions and offers opportunities for democratic renewal, depending on states' responses to the demands and aspirations of the young population.

Findings

The findings of this study are very important for understanding the nature, drivers, and impact of Gen Z mobilisation in Bangladesh and Nepal. The findings are presented in terms of four major categories: (a) drivers of mobilisation, (b) modes of engagement, (c) state response, and (d) political outcomes.

Firstly, the study highlights that the long-term structural issues, such as unemployment, corruption, poor governance, and discontent with political elites, drive Gen Z uprisings in both countries. As upward mobility and economic security become increasingly precarious for the generation, these issues are especially relevant to Gen Z. The root causes of protests can stem from a variety of factors, including policies or specific events, but they ultimately stem from systemic issues. This implies that Gen Z is not mobilising episodically or spontaneously, but rather that it is a continuation of the longstanding grievance against the current political and economic system.

Second, the results of this study highlight the importance of digital platforms in the context of current young people's mobilisation. Social media is a key platform for Gen Z activists in Bangladesh and Nepal to organise, spread information and build collective identity. Digital tools facilitate rapid mobilisation and reduce obstacles to political participation, thereby enabling movements to emerge quickly and gain visibility. In parallel, the online–offline activism continuum is producing a new contentious politics defined as hybrid protests: online activism alongside street protest. This reinforces the significance of digital nativity as a key tenet of Gen Z political ways.

Thirdly, the study reveals substantial differences in the state's responses and political opportunity structures. State reactions are more repressive, with intrusive measures such as repression, surveillance, and restrictions on dissent seen in Bangladesh. Such measures undermine the sustainability of youth movements and often fragment or suppress protests. Nepal, on the other hand, has a relatively tolerant context, where the State usually tolerates dissent and facilitates sustained mobilisation. This openness, however, does not necessarily mean it will lead to better policy responses, because the power of youth activism is constrained by institutional weaknesses and political instability. Political opportunity structures, therefore, influence the course of mobilisation, but not its results.

Fourthly, the results show that Gen Z's political influence on uprisings is uneven and context-dependent. The impact of youth mobilisation on policy and governance remains limited in Bangladesh, despite strong mobilisation, largely due to the political environment. Youth movements are more visible and continuous in Nepal, but face structural and institutional limitations in realising policy impact. This points to the need for mobilisation to generate transformative results, which, in turn, requires institutional responsiveness.

Lastly, the research shows that Gen Z is actively changing political discourse and state–society relations in both cases. Digital and physical activism is a strategy that young people are using to express new demands for governance, accountability and participation in the democratic process. This indicates a move away from traditional, institution-based politics to a more decentralised, issue-based politics, with their engagement. In general, these results reveal that Gen Z mobilisation is a potent and growing phenomenon in South Asia, yet its success depends on structural conditions, political landscapes, and the state's ability to meet young people's demands.

Conclusion

In this research, the dynamics of Gen Z mobilisation and political uprising have been explored and analysed in Bangladesh and Nepal, in a comparative, theory-informed perspective. By integrating interpretations of contentious politics, the political opportunity structure, and constructivist theories of International Relations, the youth-based revolutionary campaigns in South Asia have revealed that the Gen Z mobilisation is not spontaneous but grounded in broader political forces. Rather, they are embedded in broader structural circumstances, including governmental failures, financial insecurity, and shifting political identities enabled by new technologies and digital spaces.

A major discovery of the study is that Generation Z is a generational change agent whose political engagement practices differ markedly from those of its predecessors. The rise of digital activism, together with street protests, has brought new forms of participation that are networked, decentralised and fast. This has influenced the historical trend of political mobilisation as it is now more pliable and no longer dependent on organisational forms. Another point the study highlights is that although digital tools have the potential to be empowering, they do not always lead to permanent political change, particularly in places with well-established networks of state control.

The comparison emphasises that studying political opportunity structures is important for understanding the processes and outcomes of youth mobilisation. But in Bangladesh, political constraints undermine the sustainability and efficacy of Gen Z uprisings and frequently sustain them in an episodic fashion. Political openness, however, is more conducive to sustained interaction than in Nepal,

but institutional inadequacy and political upheaval diminish the likelihood that mobilisation will yield concrete policy results. This implies that state openness and institutional capacity are important factors to consider when determining whether youth activism translates into meaningful change.

As a contribution to the broader debates in political science and IR, the study enhances understanding of the emergent state-society relationship and democratic legitimacy in the South Asian context. Gen Z mobilisation is driven by a desire to hold leaders accountable, be transparent and take part in inclusive governance, questioning the status quo of traditional power dynamics and political processes. Concurrently, it implies a risk to regional stability if youth voices are not heard and institutional avenues for youth participation are dysfunctional.

Therefore, the Gen Z uprisings in South Asia reflect the complexities and opportunities of modern-day politics. Although they are currently constrained by the structure of the political system, the staying power of youth activism suggests a dynamic politics in which youth have become a key part. This study can be expanded by adding primary data, conducting a comparative analysis with other countries in the South Asian region, and undertaking an in-depth analysis of the future prospects of digital activism for influencing democratic governance and regional political relations.

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