

THE DOUBLE EDGE OF REBELLION

Nepal reshaping the grammar of politics

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Nepal, a small republic pressed between giant neighbours, is once again breathing through smoke and slogans. From Baneshwar, Maitighar to Basantapur, from tea stalls to bus rides in public, one hears the same restless refrain: *aba ta feri ladnu parchha* (now we must fight again).

In every generation, Nepal seems condemned to replay the cycle of hope and disillusionment, revolution and betrayal. Yet this time, something feels different. This time, the young—those born after 1990, raised in the aftermath of the Maoist war, and socialised in the language of TikTok and memes—are at the front. They call themselves Gen-G, a digital generation that has turned despair into anger, and anger into collective action.

Here lies the generational maturity: anger, yes, but also a refusal to abandon democratic gains. Nepal's federal, secular, inclusive republic—though crippled by corruption—remains a historic achievement. The youth are not demanding monarchy or dictatorship; they are demanding a republic that works.

Rumours swirl in Kathmandu like autumn dust: the army may hand power back to the palace, “neighbours” may be scripting events from behind the curtain, the republic may collapse overnight. For now, those fears have not materialised. The constitution remains intact, though cracked.

And in a move both unexpected and symbolic, President Ramchandra Paudel named Sushila Karki—Nepal's first female Chief Justice, known for her integrity—as interim Prime Minister. Some had imagined Balen Shah, Kathmandu's 35-year-old mayor, in that role. But he himself refused cleverly, knowing that accepting interim office would disqualify him from the coming elections.

Thus, Sushila Karki carries the nation's fragile hope. Around her name gathers a collective sigh of relief, yet also a storm of suspicion. The streets have quietened, but not stilled. Youthful anger remains, waiting to erupt again should betrayal return.

Symbols and the fragility of trust

Sociology teaches us that symbols carry more power than institutions in times of rupture. Karki, though one individual, became the symbolic answer to the symbolic chaos.

She embodied something rare: credibility in a system corroded by patronage and lies. For a brief moment, her appointment seemed to turn bloodied streets into cautious prayers.

But Weber reminds us: charisma alone is never enough. Charisma must be institutionalised, or it vanishes like smoke. Karki's task is immense: to hold elections within six months, to calm rival parties already furious at the dissolution of parliament, and to rebuild some semblance of trust in the republic.

The old guard—Congress and UML—protest loudly, calling the process illegitimate. Royalists whisper that the time has come to restore their lost throne. Opportunists circle like crows.

In teashops across the valley, one hears the same scepticism: *K garla ra? Ekdamai garo cha*. (What can she really do? It's extremely difficult.) Yet there is also quiet admiration: *Kam se kam safi cha*. (At least she is clean.)

These mixed voices capture Nepal's fragile trust. Symbols can soothe anger, but if they collapse, disappointment is deeper than before.

Hijackers of hope

Every revolution risks hijack; Pratap Bhanu Mehta notes that youths' revolutions have more chances of being hijacked during big revolutions. The Gen-G protests began as a raw, authentic cry against corruption and political crookedness. Young men and women, many still in their twenties, marched with banners demanding transparency, jobs, dignity. Yet soon, other forces joined—the royalists, hoping to use youth anger to reopen the palace gates; the new populist parties, eager to claim visibility; even old party factions, pretending to be vigilantes.

Reports suggest these groups were the most violent—smashing property, torching vehicles, throwing stones—actions that diluted the moral clarity of the youth. The question spread quickly on talk shows: were the protests about justice, or about power?

Durkheim would call this moment one of “collective effervescence”—a flood of shared emotion binding people into one body. But effervescence is fragile; it can be redirected by skilled opportunists. Here lies the double edge of rebellion: it awakens possibility but also invites hijackers. In this sense, the youth are both powerful and vulnerable. Their voices carry authenticity, but their platforms can be stolen.

Digital squares and politics

One cannot understand this uprising without understanding its digital heartbeat. The 1990 People's Movement had the street as its stage. The 2006 uprising used FM radios, pamphlets, and clandestine networks. The 2020s belong to TikTok, YouTube, Discord, or Reddit.

The Gen-G protest did not begin in a square but in comment sections, memes, and livestreams. When teenagers in Baneshwor uploaded videos of police violence, those clips travelled faster than any newspaper headline. The digital sphere became a new public sphere, echoing Habermas but transformed for the algorithmic age.

On TikTok, Oli and Deuba were mocked through parody songs. On Reddit threads, anonymous youth drafted manifestos demanding free healthcare, fair taxation, and the end of *afno manche* politics (nepotism) while lambasting the NepoBaby (hinting at one's career success attributed to their parents in politics). On YouTube, young creators uploaded fiery speeches comparing Nepal's corruption to a “poison in the national bloodstream.”

This digital rebellion spilled into the physical. What had been likes and shares became marches and chants. Baneshwor, Maitighar, Ratna Park—all became extensions of the digital commons; young protesters were seen on the screen of Kantipur TV with the background of a vandalised studio during the protest.

State violence and the collapse of legitimacy

The bloodthirsty state's response was predictable yet devastating. Instead of dialogue, it sent police with batons, tear gas, rubber bullets. Teenagers, some barely 20–28, fell injured or dead. In Chitwan, a young girl was filmed crying, holding her wounded brother, asking, “Why did they shoot us? We were only shouting.” That clip went viral, crystallising anger across the country.

When a government kills its youth, it loses its moral right to rule. This was true when Rana regime fell, true the monarchy collapsed, and



▲ Nepal's former Chief Justice Sushila Karki has been appointed as the country's interim leader, while President Ramchandra Paudel has dissolved parliament and announced fresh elections for 5 March, 2026.

“structural backbone” of modern life. When that backbone fractures, society collapses into distrust.

Nepalis are no strangers to betrayal. But there was a rawness this time. Whether in tea stalls of Jhapa or in bus queues of Pokhara, people whispered over television news: *Sarkar afnai chhori chhori lai marna tayar cha*. (The government is ready to kill its own children.) That sentence contains the deepest sociological meaning of distrust—when the state is no longer father but predator.

The flame of anger and the architecture of renewal

And yet, even as blood dried on the streets, something else was born: an insistence that this republic, however broken, must not be surrendered. Youth slogans declared: “*2063 ko ragat 2082 ma raja bhauna bageko hoina*.” (The blood of 2006 was not shed to bring back the king in 2025.)

Here lies the generational maturity: anger, yes, but also a refusal to abandon democratic gains. Nepal's federal, secular, inclusive republic—though crippled by corruption—remains a historic achievement. The youth are not demanding monarchy or dictatorship; they are demanding a republic that works.

Sociology teaches that anger can be generative if channelled into architecture. The challenge now is to institutionalise this energy. Strengthen the Election Commission so it cannot be bought. Reform the bureaucracy so a driver's licence does not require bribes. Create spaces for youth in local governments, not as



Demonstrators shout slogans as they stand on a barricade during a protest against corruption and the government's decision to block several social media platforms, in Kathmandu, Nepal, September 8. REUTERS/Navesh Chitrakar

remains true today. Institutions—the police, parliament, cabinet—appeared not as guardians but as predators. Giddens reminds us that institutions are the

token ward members but as decision-makers.

If this does not happen, today's anger will fade into cynicism. But if it does, the Gen-G rebellion will mark not just a rupture but a rebirth.

Between tea shops and tiktok: Everyday politics transformed

Perhaps the most enduring change is not in parliament but in everyday conversations. Tea shop debates now host fiery arguments about youth futures, unemployment, digital taxation. Bus rides echo with debates about Balen's refusal of the premiership. Farmers in the hinterland wonder aloud if the republic will ever protect their crops. Migrant workers in the Gulf send money home while streaming TikTok lives of the protest.

Politics is no longer distant. It has entered the kitchen, the teashop, the smartphone. Gen-G has forced ordinary Nepalis to see the state not as distant rulers but as accountable servants. Whether this perception lasts depends on how the next months unfold. But the shift is undeniable: the republic now belongs to public conversations, not just parliamentary elites.

The double edge of rebellion

The Gen-G movement stands in continuity with Nepal's long history of revolt, yet it is distinct in form, character, and horizon. It is digital, decentralised, ironic, poetic. It is angry at corruption yet protective of democracy. It is easily hijacked, yet resilient in its refusal to return to monarchy. It is fragile, yet historic.

This is the double edge of rebellion: it can liberate or it can be stolen. It can build institutions or burn them. It can inspire a generation or exhaust it. Which edge cuts deeper will depend not only on the youth but on the opportunists who surround them, and on whether figures like Sushila Karki can protect the fragile promise of transition.

For now, Nepal stands at a threshold, fragile but luminous. The smoke over Kathmandu has lifted with rains, but the memory remains. The youth have spoken: they will no longer scroll silently, no longer accept crumbs, no longer bow to crookedness. Their anger has reshaped the grammar of politics. Whether this grammar becomes poetry or tragedy remains the unfinished story of Nepal.

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Burnt remains lie inside a section of the Parliament House that was set on fire by protesters, in Kathmandu, Nepal, September 11, 2025. REUTERS/Adnan Abidi