

From Protests to Political Vacuum: Unpacking Nepal's Unrest

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Summary

Mass protests have led to a political vacuum in Nepal. This brief examines the factors that led to the uprising and considers what lies ahead for Nepal.

Mass protests in Nepal have led to the fall of the government, creating a political vacuum. On 8 September 2025, thousands of youths took to the streets in Kathmandu and other cities ostensibly to oppose the government's move to ban several social media platforms. This protest, which is being popularly described as a 'Gen-Z' uprising, was met by a violent response from the security forces. [Twenty-two protesters were shot dead and more than 400 injured](#) as the police opened fire. Such action spurred attacks on official buildings, government installations and the homes of politicians. As government buildings burnt and images of ministers being attacked circulated widely, Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli and his ministers resigned, effectively leaving the military in charge. While calm has returned to the streets for now, two days of protests have raised questions about the political future of Nepal. The demands of the protesters have rapidly expanded and several of them have asserted that they are not willing to accept a return of the political old guard, which they [accuse of being corrupt](#).

To understand the developments that are transpiring in Nepal, it is crucial to note that the protests were not solely about the ban on social media platforms. The ban served as a catalyst. There has been a strong undercurrent of economic and social unhappiness in Nepal. The youths, in particular, have been vocal about widespread corruption, lack of jobs and the glaring disparity between ordinary citizens and, what they describe as 'nepo-kids'. Tellingly, in the lead-up to the ban on social media platforms, the hashtag, #NepoBaby, had been trending in Nepal and social media discussions were inundated by severe criticisms of 'nepo-kids' or children of politicians who display their wealth online.

According to data from the World Bank, youth unemployment rate in Nepal was [20.82 per cent in 2024](#). This is a particularly alarming number given that Nepal is experiencing what demographers describe as a 'youth bulge'. This refers to a stage of development when a significant share of a country's population is young. In Nepal's case, approximately 28.3 per cent of the population is currently below the age of 30. While a youth bulge can prove to be a demographic dividend, the lack of employment opportunities in Nepal has resulted in this emerging as a serious challenge for the country.

Confronted by a lack of opportunities, Nepal's youths are migrating in large numbers in search of jobs. The rural areas, in particular, have witnessed high rates of migration to countries like India, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The extent of this is clear from the fact that foreign remittances are estimated to have constituted [33.1 per cent of](#)

[Nepal's Gross Domestic Product](#) in 2024. In addition, those with financial resources are looking to pursue educational opportunities overseas in the hope that this will open more job opportunities overseas.

The Gen-Z protest also signals the anger felt across much of Nepal over the failure of various governments to introduce systematic reforms. Following a decade-long civil war, Nepal's constituent assembly voted to end monarchical rule in 2008. In 2015, a constitution that established a federal and democratic republic was promulgated. Significantly, the constitution [incorporated provisions](#) to ensure equal representation and put in place a system of checks and balances. These included parallel voting systems that consisted of the first past-the-post and proportional representation systems. The idea was that political parties would be able to ensure representation for women, marginalised castes, indigenous groups and ethnic groups through their electoral lists for proportional voting.

In reality, Nepal has experienced a fractured political system in which political figures have employed patron-client relations to entrench themselves in positions of authority. Since 2008, no government has been able to complete its term. The complex electoral system has resulted in politicians indulging in attempts to form and break coalitions. Furthermore, the same political leaders have continued to dethrone and replace each other.

Corruption, nepotism and a fragmented political system have led to a sense of political disillusionment. The Gen-Z protest is not the first sign of dissatisfaction. In May 2025, thousands took to the streets to demand the restoration of the monarchy. While this protest did not gain momentum, it was yet another sign of the level of political disillusionment. Following the resignation of Nepal's government, sections of the Gen-Z protestors are calling not just for political change but also for [broad reforms](#). Their demands include the formulation of a new constitution, term limits on anyone holding the post of prime minister and judicial reforms. Here, they are mirroring the youth-led uprising of 2024 in Bangladesh, which resulted in a review of the political system.

Looking ahead, a caretaker government is likely to be established in Nepal. With the collapse of any form of political authority, the military has taken up the role of ensuring public peace and negotiating with the protesters. There are, however, no indications that it aims to assume the reins of power. Apart from paving the way for new elections, the caretaker government will need to engage with the calls for political reforms. The protestors have suggested that former Chief Justice Sushila Karki be appointed to head an interim government. Karki is a well-respected figure who has a reputation for asserting the independence of the judiciary and has taken a strong stance against corruption. However, the Gen-Z protesters are but just one faction which the head of the interim government will have to engage with. The political future of Nepal will be shaped by how the caretaker government balances the various groups, including the disparate voices among the youths, pro-monarchists, ethnic groups and, not to mention, the entrenched political leaders who may be down but not necessarily be out.

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