

Algorithmic Political Socialization: How TikTok and Discord Rewired Intergenerational Voting Behavior in Nepal

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Introduction

In Nepal, the recent political shift driven by young voters has often been described as a “Gen Z victory.” Much of the discussion has focused on protests, new political actors, and public frustration with corruption. However, a quieter and less visible transformation may have played an equally important role, which is, the way digital platforms reshaped how political opinions are formed and shared within families.



Applications like TikTok and Discord did more than mobilize young voters. They created new pathways for information to flow across generations. In many households, younger users became the primary curators of political content, sharing videos, clips, and discussions with parents and older relatives. Instead of relying on traditional media or party networks, older voters were

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increasingly exposed to political narratives through content filtered, selected, or explained by younger family members. This shift suggests a change in how political socialization takes place. Traditionally, political beliefs in South Asia have often moved from older generations to younger ones, shaped by family loyalties, historical experiences, and long-standing party affiliations. In Nepal's recent experience, this direction appears to have partially reversed. Digital platforms enabled younger citizens not only to form their own opinions but also to influence the views of those around them in subtle but continuous ways.

Understanding this change is important because it highlights a new layer of political influence that is not immediately visible in election results or protest movements. If digital platforms are reshaping how different generations interact politically, they may also be altering the foundations of democratic participation. This commentary examines how algorithm-driven platforms are contributing to this emerging pattern and what it could mean for the future of politics in Nepal and beyond.

Why Gen Z in Nepal Chose TikTok and Discord Over Conventional Social Media

In 2025, Gen Z in Nepal shifted strongly toward TikTok and Discord, moving away from many conventional social media platforms due to a mix of government restrictions and changing communication needs. After the government banned several social media platforms that did not comply with registration rules, young users used VPNs and alternative apps to continue communication and protest organization. TikTok became important because it allowed fast sharing of short, emotional videos that highlighted corruption, inequality, and protest events, making political messages easy to spread. At the same time, Discord became a key space for coordination, with large groups such as “Hami Nepal”, using it for debates, planning, and even online voting on leadership choices, functioning like a “digital parliament.”² These platforms were also preferred because they allowed more open, decentralized, and less controlled communication compared to traditional media and older social networks, which many youths saw as slower or influenced by

² Samik Kharel. 2025. “‘More Egalitarian’: How Nepal’s Gen Z Used Gaming App Discord to Pick PM.” Al Jazeera. September 15, 2025. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/15/more-egalitarian-how-nepals-gen-z-used-gaming-app-discord-to-pick-pm>.

gatekeepers. Overall, the shift was driven by both necessity and a strategic choice for faster, more direct, and more participatory political communication.

Algorithmic Echoes Across Generations

One of the least discussed aspects of Nepal's recent political shift is not just that young people used digital platforms, but that different generations were exposed to different versions of political reality at the same time. This divide was not accidental. It was shaped by the way algorithms on platforms like TikTok prioritize and distribute content.³



Algorithms are designed to show users content similar to what they have already watched, liked, or shared. Over time, this creates highly personalized information environments. For many young users in Nepal, TikTok feeds were filled with short videos highlighting corruption, inequality, and protest activities. These videos were often emotional, visual, and easy to understand. In contrast,

³ Aaradhyaa Gyawali. 2026. "Nepal's Gen Z Used TikTok and Discord to Win a Historic Election." Tech Policy Press. March 9, 2026. <https://www.techpolicy.press/nepals-gen-z-used-tiktok-and-discord-to-win-a-historic-election>.

older generations who were less active on such platforms or used them differently were more likely to rely on television, Facebook, or word-of-mouth networks, where information moved more slowly and was often less visually impactful.

This difference meant that within the same household, people were not just holding different opinions, they were reacting to different streams of information. For example, a young person might repeatedly see viral clips of protest crackdowns or displays of elite privilege, reinforcing a sense of urgency and injustice.⁴ Meanwhile, a parent might receive fragmented or delayed information, or content framed in a more neutral or institutional tone. As a result, their perception of the same political situation could be less intense or even skeptical. This situation can be described as algorithmic segmentation of reality. Unlike traditional media systems, where large audiences consumed similar news, digital platforms create multiple parallel narratives. These narratives do not always overlap, and users are often unaware of what others are seeing. In Nepal's case, this contributed to a generational gap in how political events were understood and evaluated.

However, the divide was not absolute. In many cases, young users acted as bridges by sharing content with family members. When a viral video crossed from one feed into another through direct sharing, it often carried strong emotional weight. This helped transfer not just information, but also a sense of urgency. This pattern suggests that modern political behavior cannot be understood without considering how algorithms shape exposure to information. In Nepal, the political shift was not only driven by protests or elections, but also by how differently those events were experienced across generations within the same household.

Informal Digital Gatekeepers

An important but often overlooked change in Nepal's recent political moment is the rise of young people as informal gatekeepers of political information within their families. In the past, political understanding usually flowed from older to younger generations, shaped by long-term party loyalties and traditional media. Today, this direction is partly reversing, especially due to the

⁴ Tulsi Rauniyar. 2025. "The inside Story of How Gen Z Toppled Nepal's Leader and Chose a New One on Discord." WIRED. November 4, 2025. <https://www.wired.com/story/nepal-discord-gen-z-protests-vote-prime-minister-election>.

influence of platforms like TikTok and Discord. These platforms produce a large and fast-moving stream of content. To make sense of it, users need to select what to watch, trust, and share. Young users, who are more active online, often take on this role naturally. In Nepal, many followed protest updates, viral political videos, and discussions in real time. However, older family members were less likely to access these sources directly or interpret them independently.

As a result, information often reached older generations through younger relatives. For example, a student might show a short video about corruption or explain a political event based on what they saw online. This is not just sharing, it is curating. The young person decides what is important, what to ignore, and how to explain it. This process shapes understanding in subtle ways. If certain types of content such as videos highlighting inequality or government failure are repeatedly shared, they can influence how older individuals view politics, even without direct debate. Over time, this creates a form of indirect influence based on selective exposure.

However, this also raises concerns. The information being shared may be incomplete, emotionally framed, or influenced by algorithms. Older individuals may trust the source (their family member) without questioning the broader context. This suggests that political knowledge is no longer controlled only by media or institutions. It is increasingly shaped within households, where younger individuals act as filters of political reality.

Crisis Virality and Emotional Synchronization

A critical but underexplored feature of Nepal's recent political events is how digital platforms did not just spread information, rather they helped synchronize emotional reactions across large groups of people, including different generations. This process was driven by algorithmic systems on platforms like TikTok, which prioritize content that generates strong engagement, especially emotional responses.



Source: Al Jazeera

During the protests in Nepal, viral videos played a central role. For example, footage of police crackdowns, protest deaths, and visible inequality circulated rapidly online. Reports indicate that at least 19 people were killed and hundreds injured during early clashes, while later estimates suggest the death toll rose significantly as protests escalated.⁵ These events were not just reported, they were repeatedly shown through short, emotionally intense videos. Algorithms tend to amplify such content because it attracts attention, comments, and shares. As a result, users were exposed to similar emotional triggers multiple times. This repetition created what can be called emotional reinforcement. Even individuals who were not physically present at protests could experience a sense of urgency, anger, or injustice through continuous exposure.

An example would be the spread of videos highlighting corruption or elite privilege. These clips simplified complex political issues into clear visual contrasts, making them easier to understand and react to. When such content circulated widely, it aligned how different people felt about the situation, even if they accessed it through different networks. Case studies of the protests also show how digital platforms enabled large-scale emotional alignment. For instance, a single Discord server linked to the movement gathered over 145,000 members, with more than 10,000 users

⁵ Reuters Staff. 2025. "Why Is Nepal's 'Gen Z' Protesting?" Reuters, September 8, 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/why-is-nepals-gen-z-protesting-2025-09-08/>.

actively debating and reacting in real time.⁶ This constant interaction reinforced shared sentiments and intensified collective responses. However, this synchronization has limitations. Emotional alignment does not always mean informed understanding. Content is often selective, fast-moving, and sometimes lacking context. As a result, strong emotions can spread faster than verified information.

Platform-Induced Authority Collapse

A key feature of Nepal's political shift is how authority moved away from formal institutions toward digitally visible actors. This was not simply about protest mobilization, it was about who people began to trust and follow. During the 2025 crisis in Nepal, traditional institutions such as political parties, senior leaders, and even mainstream media had lost credibility among young citizens. In their place, digital platforms such as Discord became central spaces where political decisions were discussed and, in some cases, made. A major Discord server linked to the protests grew to over 150,000 members, turning into a key coordination and discussion hub.

More importantly, these platforms began to perform functions normally associated with political institutions. For example, a large group of young users conducted a structured online vote to select a preferred interim leader. Around 7,586 participants took part in this digital voting process, which led to the nomination of former Chief Justice Sushila Karki.⁷ This was not symbolic, rather it directly influenced real political negotiations during the transition.

Another example highlights the scale of this shift. A youth-led network organized through digital platforms mobilized around 30,000 people onto the streets in Kathmandu, showing how online visibility translated into real-world influence.⁸ At the same time, broader protest networks

⁶ "The 2025 Gen Z Uprising in Nepal: A Three-Part Analysis | Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health." 2025. Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. HSPH. November 17, 2025. <https://hsph.harvard.edu/atrocity-prevention-lab/news/the-2025-gen-z-uprising-in-nepal-a-three-part-analysis>.

⁷ "The 2025 Gen Z Uprising in Nepal: A Three-Part Analysis | Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health." 2025. Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. HSPH. November 17, 2025. <https://hsph.harvard.edu/atrocity-prevention-lab/news/the-2025-gen-z-uprising-in-nepal-a-three-part-analysis>.

⁸Aaradhyaa Gyawali. 2026. "Nepal's Gen Z Used TikTok and Discord to Win a Historic Election." Tech Policy Press. March 9, 2026. <https://www.techpolicy.press/nepals-gen-z-used-tiktok-and-discord-to-win-a-historic-election/>.

involving over 160,000 participants were coordinating discussions and decisions online.⁹ This suggests that authority was increasingly derived from participation and visibility within digital networks, rather than from formal positions or electoral history. Individuals or groups who could attract attention, organize discussions, and maintain engagement gained influence, even without official roles.

However, this form of authority has clear limitations. Digital platforms are open, fast-moving, and often difficult to regulate. Participation is uneven, and not all voices are equally represented. Moreover, credibility based on visibility can be unstable, as it depends on trends and engagement rather than long-term accountability.

Domestic Information Rewiring

A major change in Nepal's recent political shift is not only what people believed, but where and how they discussed politics. Political conversation in Nepal has gradually moved away from public spaces like newspapers, radio programs, tea-shop debates, and rallies. Instead, it has shifted into private digital spaces inside homes and mobile phones, especially through platforms like TikTok and Discord.

This change is important because private digital sharing works differently from public media. In public systems, information is usually shared in a common format for everyone. But in private digital networks, information travels through personal messages, group chats, and forwarded videos. During the Gen Z protests, TikTok videos, protest clips, and political messages often spread first through private sharing rather than television news or newspapers. For example, activists used Discord and messaging platforms to circulate updates, coordinate actions, and share live information before it reached mainstream media. Reports show that Discord servers became

⁹ Samik Kharel. 2025. "‘More Egalitarian’: How Nepal’s Gen Z Used Gaming App Discord to Pick PM." Al Jazeera. September 15, 2025. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/9/15/more-egalitarian-how-nepals-gen-z-used-gaming-app-discord-to-pick-pm>.

central hubs for coordination, sometimes with over 100,000 members discussing protest updates in real time.¹⁰

This means political awareness often started inside households. A young person might see a viral video about corruption or police action and send it directly to family members in a chat group. The first political impression of many older people did not come from news channels, but from messages forwarded by someone they trust personally. This changes the nature of political communication: trust shifts from institutions to relationships. This “domestication” of political information has two major effects. First, politics becomes more emotional and personal, because it enters through family networks rather than formal reporting. Second, it becomes more unequal and fragmented, because different households receive different content depending on who shares what.

Way Forward

The Gen Z protests in Nepal send a message that goes far beyond a single country or a single government. They show that political power is no longer controlled only through institutions, parties, or traditional media. Rather, it is now also shaped inside digital networks where young people live, think, and organize. When platforms like TikTok and Discord became tools of mobilization, it proved that information can move faster than state control, and public opinion can form outside official gatekeepers. This shifts the balance of politics from “top-down communication” to “network-driven decision making.”

Globally, the message is clear: governments that rely only on control, censorship, or slow institutional response will struggle in a world where youth can coordinate instantly and transparently online. The protests also show that young people are not politically passive. They are algorithmically connected, emotionally responsive, and highly organized when trust in systems breaks down. Their actions reflect a deeper global reality: legitimacy is no longer inherited; it is continuously tested in real time on digital platforms.

¹⁰ FP Explainers. 2025. “VPNs, Discord & More: How Nepal’s Gen Z Mobilised Protests amid Social Media Ban.” Firstpost. September 10, 2025. <https://www.firstpost.com/explainers/nepal-gen-z-mobilised-protests-social-media-ban-13932446.html>.

For global leaders, this is a warning and an invitation at the same time. The warning is that ignoring digital youth spaces can trigger rapid political shocks. The invitation is to rethink governance itself- towards more open, participatory, and digitally aware systems. In simple terms, Nepal's Gen Z has shown that the future of politics will not just be voted in polling booths, but also shaped in feeds, servers, and online communities where a generation quietly decides what is fair, acceptable, and worth changing.