

A New Force in World Politics: Understanding the Recent Gen Z Protest Wave Across the World

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Introduction

Across the globe, Generation Z has emerged as a distinct political actor, responding to structural governance failures, economic pressures, and perceived deficits in institutional legitimacy. Unlike previous cohorts, this generation is deeply connected through digital platforms, enabling rapid mobilization and coordination even in contexts where traditional civil society channels are constrained. Their activism often reflects not only immediate grievances but broader assessments of the political and economic structures shaping their prospects.

In diverse contexts, from South Asia to Europe and Africa, young citizens have increasingly challenged entrenched elites, anti-democratic practices, and ineffective policymaking. Their mobilization is frequently leaderless, facilitated through online networks, and oriented around issues that combine socio-economic vulnerability with political frustration. While some movements aim to address specific policy decisions, many are symptomatic of deeper legitimacy gaps, highlighting structural weaknesses in governance and democratic institutions.

This commentary examines six case studies —Nepal, Kenya, Morocco, Peru, Bulgaria and our very own Bangladesh, to analyze how Gen Z activism manifests under different political, economic, and institutional conditions. Each case illustrates the interplay between youth expectations, systemic constraints, and the strategies young people employ to navigate or contest political systems. Taken together, these examples provide insights into the challenges and

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opportunities that contemporary governance faces in responding to the demands of a digitally connected, politically conscious generation.

Nepal: Anti-Corruption Protests and the Crisis of Post-Transition Governance

The recent youth-led protests in Nepal signify more than episodic dissent; they reveal a profound governance deficit rooted in systemic corruption, entrenched elite privilege, and institutional inertia. What began with discontent over a government ban on 26 major social media platforms quickly became an expression of broader malaise among young citizens who perceive pervasive cronyism and lack of accountability as principal barriers to equitable opportunity.²



Source: Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS)

Transparency International's ranking of Nepal near the lower tier of global corruption indices reveals the depth of public frustration with malfeasance across political and bureaucratic spheres. For Generation Z — a cohort deeply enmeshed in digital networks and cognizant of global norms

² Teekah, Ethan. 2025. "2025 Nepalese Gen Z Protests | Background, Social Media Ban, & Political Breakdown." Encyclopedia Britannica. September 9, 2025. <https://www.britannica.com/event/2025-Nepalese-Gen-Z-Protests>.

— the social media restrictions were not the core grievance but the catalyst that elevated long-standing concerns about opaque governance and nepotistic advantage into public action.

Economic precarity amplifies these political grievances. With more than a fifth of working-age youth unemployed and persistent inequalities in income and access to services, many young Nepalis regard the traditional political order as indifferent to their prospects. In this context, the resignation of the sitting prime minister and the dissolution of parliament, steps taken under intense pressure reflect a rupture in elite legitimacy, not merely tactical retreat.

However, the absence of clear organizational direction within the movement risks diluting its longer-term impact. Without credible institutional channels for translating street mobilization into sustainable reform, there is a danger that Nepal's political class will reassert itself without addressing the structural deficits that provoked the unrest in the first place.

Kenya: Cost-of-Living Pressures and the Political Meaning of Economic Exposure

In Kenya, the youth-driven protests that coalesced around economic disquiet and governance failures illustrate a persistent structural disjunction between public expectations and state performance. The immediate impetus for contention in 2024 was the Finance Bill 2024, a legislative package intended to broaden the tax base.³ For many young Kenyans already burdened by protracted unemployment and rising living costs, the bill was interpreted not as fiscal prudence but as an exacerbation of socio-economic precarity.

³ Frankline Kibuacha. 2024. "GeoPoll Report: Gen Z Protests in Kenya - GeoPoll." GeoPoll. July 4, 2024. <https://www.geopoll.com/blog/geopoll-report-youth-protests-in-kenya>.



Source: The Elephant

Persistent inflation and high unemployment with joblessness frequently cited alongside cost-of-living pressures as dominant concerns have been central to youthful disaffection.⁴ In successive public opinion surveys, unemployment, cost pressures, and corruption remain the top cited reasons for protest participation, with a significant majority indicating that government responses have been insufficient and exclusionary.

Crucially, these demonstrations have been digitally coordinated; platforms such as X and TikTok have served both as organizational infrastructure and as a medium for countering official narratives perceived as dismissive of young voices.⁵ This digital facilitation has enhanced mobilization but has also drawn sophisticated state countermeasures. A recent Amnesty International analysis shows authorities and allied networks deploying tech-facilitated repression, including coordinated disinformation, online intimidation, and algorithmic suppression, aimed at undermining protest leadership and deterring participation.

⁴ “Most Kenyans Believe Gen Z-Led Protests Will Bring Change – Survey.” 2024. The Star. 2024. <https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2024-07-18-most-kenyans-believe-gen-z-led-protests-will-bring-change-survey>.

⁵ “Journalists and the Gen-Z Protest in Kenya.” 2025. Al Jazeera Media Institute. 2025. <https://institute.aljazeera.net/en/ajr/article/2967>.

The evolution of these protests into broader critiques of governance shows a deepening mistrust in institutional responsiveness. While the initial legislative trigger receded with the withdrawal of contentious measures, the enduring resonance of the movement reflects a generational insistence on accountability, inclusion, and an economic order that aligns with their expectations of dignity and opportunity.

Morocco: Youth Mobilization Amid Socioeconomic Exclusion

In Morocco, the recent Gen Z protests articulate a persistent disjuncture between macroeconomic growth and substantive social inclusion. While the country has sustained relatively robust GDP expansion and pursued high-profile infrastructure projects such as preparations for the 2030 FIFA World Cup, these achievements have not translated into broad-based opportunities for young people.⁶ Official data indicate youth unemployment rates exceeding 35 percent which is significantly higher than the national average and chronic joblessness among graduates, reflecting a labour market that is neither absorptive nor aligned with educational outputs.⁷ This economic mismatch has been compounded by the prevalence of informal work, where many youth subsist without social protections or pathways to stable careers.

The protests, mobilized under the banner of a decentralized collective known as “GenZ 212,”⁸ are symptomatic of growing frustration with governance priorities and limited political agency. Demonstrators have criticized state investments that favour mega-events and symbolic infrastructure over essential public services, such as healthcare and education, an imbalance highlighted by high maternal mortality incidents in under-resourced hospitals. The leaderless nature of the movement, organized primarily through digital platforms like TikTok and Discord

⁶ Gbadamosi, Nosmot. 2025. “What’s behind Africa’s Sweeping Gen Z Protests.” Foreign Policy. October 8, 2025. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/10/08/africa-gen-z-protests-madagascar-morocco>.

⁷ walawpress. 2025. “Moroccan Youth Squeezed by Unemployment, Weak Services, and Rising Risks, Rights Group Warns.” Walaw. August 22, 2025. https://en.walaw.press/country/Morocco/QWSP/articles/moroccan_youth_squeezed_by_unemployment_weak_services_and_rising_risks_rights_group_warns/GQGXPBGPMX.

⁸ Agence France-Presse. 2025. “What We Know about Morocco’s GenZ 212 Protests.” NDTV. October 3, 2025. <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/what-we-know-about-moroccos-genz-212-protests-9392899>.

which reflects both the sophistication and the fragmentation of contemporary youth mobilization. It allows rapid scale but offers limited channels for negotiation with established institutions.



Source: RFI

State responses have included both expanded social spending and heavy-handed crackdowns, with mass arrests and prosecutions underscoring the limits of Morocco's political compact. The juxtaposition of economic modernization with enduring social deficits has thus amplified a sense of political estrangement among young Moroccans, signaling that formal economic growth alone is insufficient to sustain legitimacy without parallel advances in equitable opportunity and participatory governance.

Peru: Political Instability and Gen Z's Rejection of Elite Cycles

In Peru, the 2025 youth-led mobilizations reflect a chronic breakdown in institutional legitimacy rather than an isolated policy grievance. The immediate trigger was a controversial pension reform that mandated compulsory contributions for workers, including a largely informal youth workforce. For many young Peruvians already facing precarious employment and economic

uncertainty, this measure was interpreted as both regressive and out of touch with lived realities, particularly given high informal sector participation and limited social protections.⁹

Yet the grievances of Generation Z extend well beyond pension policy. Widespread corruption scandals, persistent political volatility, and rising crime have eroded trust in both the executive and legislative branches, whose approval ratings sank to historically low levels. The rapid succession of presidents with José Jerí becoming Peru's seventh in less than a decade which shows persistent elite fragmentation and the erosion of normative democratic protocols.



Source: Outlook India

The protests' resonance owes much to this legitimacy deficit. Young protesters articulated a broad agenda that included demands for the resignation of political leaders, dissolution of Congress, and

⁹Aquino, Marco, and Alexander Villegas. 2025. "Peru's Gen Z Rallies against President Boluarte, Protesting over Pensions and Corruption." Reuters, September 27, 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/perus-gen-z-rallies-against-president-boluarte-protesting-over-pensions-2025-09-27/>.

structural accountability mechanisms for past abuses, including state violence during earlier protests. Demonstrations were digitally coordinated, with platforms such as TikTok and Telegram serving as organizing infrastructure that bypassed traditional party structures.

State responses, characterized by tear gas, rubber bullets, and occasional deadly clashes, have amplified perceptions of an unresponsive polity, deepening intergenerational distrust. The Peruvian case thus illustrates how enduring institutional fragility when combined with socio-economic insecurity, can channel youth discontent into sustained political mobilization absent clear mechanisms for constructive engagement.

Bulgaria: Youth Mobilization in Response to Institutional Dysfunction

In Bulgaria, the resurgence of youth-inspired civic mobilization in late 2025 reflects a deep-rooted crisis of democratic credibility and systemic institutional decay rather than an isolated policy dispute. The proximate trigger for mass demonstrations was widespread opposition to the government's proposed 2026 state budget, which proposed higher taxes and increased social contributions without addressing entrenched governance failures. Tens of thousands of citizens, particularly in urban areas such as Sofia and Plovdiv, interpreted the budget as a superficial fiscal measure that obscured persistent patterns of corruption and elite capture rather than as a legitimate framework for economic stability.¹⁰

¹⁰ "Bulgaria: Government Falls under Pressure from Public Protests." 2025. OSW Centre for Eastern Studies. December 12, 2025. <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2025-12-12/bulgaria-government-falls-under-pressure-public-protests>.



Source: Mirror Now

The protests quickly expanded beyond fiscal objections into a broader critique of a political order perceived as unresponsive and opaque. Public mobilization drew substantial participation from young Bulgarians including organized student contingents, signifying a departure from historical political apathy and a re-emergence of generational political engagement. Social media and digital networks amplified mobilization, enabling a dispersed cohort of Gen Z activists to articulate demands that encompassed anti-corruption measures, government accountability, and more transparent democratic processes.

The depth of institutional distrust in Bulgaria is underscored by repeated electoral fragmentation; the country has held multiple national elections in recent years without producing a stable majority government, and reports by electoral observers and civil society document widespread procedural irregularities and voter scepticism about electoral fairness.

The resignation of Prime Minister Rosen Zhelyazkov's cabinet, tendered minutes before a looming no-confidence vote, signals that public pressure can extract concessions, but it also portends continued volatility in the absence of substantive reforms.¹¹ As long as corruption and political

¹¹ "Bulgaria: Rock Bottom Election Turnout Exposes Accountability Failure...." 2013. Transparency.org. May 14, 2013. <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/bulgaria-rock-bottom-election-turnout-exposes-accountability-failure-of-pol>.

fragmentation remain salient, youth disillusionment with democratic mechanisms will likely intensify rather than diminish.

Bangladesh: Gen Z Removed Fascist Government

In Bangladesh, the youth-led mobilizations that culminated in the 2024 Monsoon Uprising were not an episodic eruption but an expression of systemic political fatigue and institutional decay. Initially sparked by student protests against the reinstated quota system for government jobs, perceived as unfair and antiquated — the movement quickly reflected deeper anxieties about a closed civic space and persistent governance failures that long predated the immediate grievance.



Source: Institute of Development Studies

For over a decade, state institutions experienced democratic contraction, with opposition parties, civil society actors, journalists, and critics facing intimidation, arrests, and legal constraints under repressive legislation such as the Digital Security Act and subsequent cybersecurity measures. These laws, ostensibly framed as protections, were applied in ways that chilled dissent and stifled public discourse, contributing to Bangladesh’s “repressed” civic space rating even after some reforms under the interim government.

While the youth mobilization succeeded in ending the previous leadership and catalyzing political transition, its leaderless and decentralized character makes translating mass energy into durable institutional reform challenging. The interim government’s efforts at accountability and civil liberties reform have been uneven, and the upcoming elections present a critical test of whether

generational demands for transparency, meritocracy, and participatory politics will be structurally anchored or dissipate into recurrent cycles of disillusionment.

Some Identical Patterns in Global Youth Protests

Across these cases several common patterns emerge. First, economic precarity is a recurring driver of youth mobilizations. High unemployment, rising living costs, and limited access to stable careers consistently amplify frustration among Gen Z populations. Second, corruption and ineffective governance are central grievances. In countries like Nepal, Peru, and Bulgaria, persistent elite capture and institutional weakness erode trust in traditional political structures, prompting young citizens to bypass formal channels and protest directly. Third, digital platforms play a critical role in organizing and sustaining these movements. Social media networks enable rapid coordination, information sharing, and visibility, especially in contexts where conventional civic space is constrained, as seen in Bangladesh, Morocco, and Kenya. Finally, these protests are largely leaderless and horizontally organized, reflecting a generational preference for collective action over traditional hierarchical structures.

What sets these movements apart is their transnational character of grievances and tactics. While rooted in local economic and political conditions, Gen Z activism displays shared features: reliance on digital coordination, focus on transparency and accountability, and an emphasis on participation beyond formal institutions. Unlike previous generations, these movements combine immediate socio-economic concerns with broader systemic critiques, making them both resilient and unpredictable. This indicates a shift in global youth activism: young citizens are not only reacting to policies but are increasingly shaping political discourse in real time, challenging governance systems in fundamentally new ways.

Conclusion

The recent wave of Gen Z protests across multiple countries highlights a generational demand for inclusion, accountability, and meaningful representation in governance. Young people are not only voicing their concerns through street mobilization but are also signaling a desire to participate directly in political processes. Governments should actively engage this demographic, particularly in countries where those aged 18 to 35 constitute a substantial portion of the population, by lowering barriers to entry in political parties and public institutions. Ensuring that young voices

are present in decision-making can help align policies with contemporary social and technological realities, fostering solutions that resonate with the needs of an evolving society.

This year may present a concrete opportunity for youth to translate protest energy into institutional change. Sustainable transformation is most likely when young people combine multiple strategies, including legal reforms, targeted advocacy, and organized campaigns, with continued civic engagement through protests or strikes. In addition, governments can support long-term stability by improving education and healthcare systems, creating equitable business environments, and providing opportunities for meaningful participation in the economy. Gradual but deliberate steps to address these demands can help bridge the gap between citizen expectations and state performance. Ultimately, integrating young citizens into governance structures, responding constructively to their concerns, and facilitating institutional channels for participation is essential to translating youthful mobilization into durable political and social change.