

# Generation Z and the New Geography of Protest



## The Awakening in Nepal

In early September 2025 the Himalayan city of Kathmandu became the flash-point for a youth-driven revolt. When the government of Nepal abruptly suspended 26 social-media platforms, ostensibly for regulatory non-compliance, the country's digitally-native generation rose up. Young protesters numbered in the tens of thousands, predominantly drawn from the cohort born circa 1997-2010 — often referred to as Generation Z. They were motivated not just by the ban, but by broader grievances, including pervasive corruption, nepotism, unemployment, and a sense that the inter-generational compact had broken down. Within days the movement had forced a dramatic political shift as the social-media ban was lifted, parliament was stormed and set on fire, the prime minister resigned, and an interim government was installed. This uprising exemplifies the emergent pattern of Gen Z activism sweeping across the Global South.

## Why Generation Z Is Mobilizing in the Global South

Several structural conditions [converge](#) in many Global South states to make this moment [uniquely volatile](#) for Generation Z. First, the demographic bulge of young adults born into the digital age finds itself confronting stagnant job markets, high youth unemployment, and the sense that the promise of rising living standards will not be fulfilled. In Nepal, these pressures were evident in the narratives of frustrated youth who flooded

Kathmandu's streets after the government's social-media ban, chanting about jobs being scarce and competition being fierce ([more than 80%](#) of employment in Nepal is in "informal jobs"). Similar grievances fueled the [Gen Z 212 movement](#) in Morocco, where tens of thousands of young protesters demonstrated against corruption, unemployment, and poor public services, arguing that state funds were being poured into stadiums rather than schools.

Second, the digital ecosystem empowers youth in ways that were impossible for previous generations. In Nepal, protesters [coordinated](#) through Discord and TikTok, while in Madagascar, where Gen Z activists recently helped topple President Andry Rajoelina, [mobilization spread](#) similarly. When authorities in both countries tried to shut down digital networks, the act itself became a catalyst for broader revolt with online organization transformed into physical confrontation.

Third, weak governance, elite capture, corruption, and a perception that political systems serve a narrow class create fertile ground for youth movements. In Nepal, the [juxtaposition](#) of ministers' children flaunting wealth on Instagram against the backdrop of widespread underemployment intensified anger. In Nigeria, the [echoes](#) of the 2020 #EndSARS protests were revived in smaller Gen Z-led demonstrations against police abuse and inflation, showing how disillusionment with unresponsive governance can quickly ignite into mass action. Across Africa and Asia, the combination of digital literacy, frustration with state failure, and a lack of institutional outlets for young voices has produced what might be called a Gen Z generational radicalization.

All of these conditions align most powerfully in states where the social contract is fraying and formal institutions are brittle. Hence, we are witnessing a wave of youth uprisings stretching from Nepal's digital revolt to Morocco's anti-corruption marches, Madagascar's palace-storming protests, and sporadic Gen Z demonstrations in Nigeria and Indonesia, each connected by technology, shared grievance, and a refusal to inherit a broken order.

## Why the Same Pattern Is Less Evident in the Global North

In stark contrast, many advanced-economy democracies are witnessing a different phenomenon among young adults, especially among young men of Gen Z. Studies show a growing [gender gap](#) in which young men are [shifting toward](#) right-wing or conservative politics, young women are more likely to lean left. For example, in South Korea men aged 18-29 showed around 30% support for the right-wing Reform Party while only about 3% of young women supported it. Several factors explain this divergence. In the Global North the youth cohort often still benefits from relatively robust social mobility, democratic institutions, and welfare-state protections. Though frustration exists, the institutional channels for political voice and protest are more developed and less existential. Rather than mass mobilization in the streets, young people in the North may engage through conventional political pathways, voting or digital activism, but not (so far) widespread revolutionary protest.

Furthermore, the specific grievances of young men in the North often relate to perceived loss of status (economic, social, cultural) rather than the acute governance-failure or survival-crisis dynamic present in many Southern states. The transition is one of cultural reaction rather than systemic revolt. Meanwhile, young

women, facing their own distinct pressures, tend to remain aligned with progressive politics on issues of equality, climate, and social justice. The result is a demographic divergence within Gen Z rather than a unified uprising. Therefore, the absence of broad Gen Z protest waves in many rich democracies does not reflect passivity but rather structural differences with stronger institutions, less extreme governance failure, different economic trajectories and more viable channels for voice, albeit with new forms of identity politics and gender-based alignment.

## The One Piece Flag and Youth Symbolic Rebellion



A striking feature of recent Gen Z protest movements is their adoption of pop-culture symbols to communicate identity, defiance, and transnational solidarity. The black “Jolly Roger” skull-and-crossbones flag of the pirate crew known as the Straw Hat Pirates in the Japanese anime/manga One Piece has emerged as one such symbol. In Nepal the flag was seen at the gates of the government palace as protesters carried it alongside slogans against corruption and privilege. It became a shorthand for “we refuse your system” and “we ride for freedom.” The reason this symbol resonates is multifold. The flag comes from a cultural artefact widely known among youth globally, making it a visual lingua franca. In addition, the narrative of One Piece of young rebels questing for freedom and fighting the injustices of a corrupt world-government mirrors the protest mood. Interestingly, the flag’s adoption

signals networked youth culture as the same icon appears across Indonesia, Nepal, Madagascar, France and beyond. This is akin to when young protests a few decades ago took on the Guy Fawkes mask as the symbol of freedom following the successful film *V for Vendetta*. While the pop culture reference has changed, the idea of a unifying symbol based on salient narratives is revealing.

## Gen Z Uprisings as a Stability Variable

For analysts and observers, the emergent wave of Generation Z driven protest movements must now be treated as a critical variable in assessing political stability. When young, digitally-connected cohorts confront governance failure, economic precarity and limited mobility, the result can be rapid escalation from online grievance to street revolt. In contrast, when institutional trust remains higher, channeled voices exist and structural conditions are less explosive, the result will likely instead be fragmentation or conservative reaction rather than mass rebellion. The presence of youth movements that symbolize themselves through globalized digital culture, use pop-cultural icons like the One Piece flag, and mobilize via Discord and TikTok has become a frontline metric.

The rise of these movements makes understanding their structural drivers essential. To help quantify that understanding, Insight Forward has developed the Gen Z Global Protest Risk Index. This is a comparative framework that measures where youth-led unrest is structurally likely to emerge or intensify. The Index goes beyond counting demonstrations and evaluates the underlying conditions that make mobilization possible, probable, or inevitable. It draws on demographic, socio-economic, political, and digital-behavioral indicators to translate complex generational pressures into a forward-looking measure of volatility. For corporate operators, risk managers, and strategy teams, it provides an interpretable baseline that helps identify which societies are most exposed to youth-driven disruption and where generational discontent is most likely to surface next.

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