


# The Inheritors of an Unfinished Revolution

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**Growing up after the monarchy's fall, Nepal's youth are confronting a republic that transformed political institutions while leaving the underlying social order intact.**

In the first week of September 2025, Nepal saw its biggest wave of unrest in almost twenty years. A small protest against a far-reaching social media ban quickly turned into a nationwide uprising against corruption, unemployment, and growing authoritarianism. In Kathmandu and other cities, tens of thousands of young people took to the streets, facing off against security forces and tearing down symbols of state power. The crackdown that followed was swift and brutal. By mid-September, the bloodiest confrontation since the fall of the monarchy occurred, with dozens of people killed and thousands injured after security forces opened fire on demonstrators.

The uprising, often described as a Gen Z movement, did not emerge in

isolation. Across South Asia, a new cycle of revolt has unfolded over the past few years. In Sri Lanka, mass protests in 2022 forced a president to flee the country. In Bangladesh, sustained mobilizations between 2024 and 2025 brought down a government. In each case, young people were at the forefront, confronting political systems that had failed to deliver economic security and democratic accountability, leaving an entire generation unable to build dignified lives for themselves.

Nepal's revolt carries a particular historical irony. Seventeen years earlier, the country had abolished its monarchy and declared itself a federal democratic republic. The generation spearheading the 2025 uprising was born after that rupture, brought up under the republic's flag, and promised a future characterized by equality and participation. Their rebellion is therefore not simply against a government but against the unfulfilled promises of the post-2008 order itself.

### Monarchy to Republicanism

A monarchy ruled Nepal for centuries, overseeing a deeply hierarchical society characterized by caste oppression, feudal land relations, and extreme inequality. This order began to fracture in June 2001, when a palace massacre killed King Birendra and much of the royal family, bringing his brother Gyanendra to the throne. But rather than stabilizing the system, Gyanendra's reign intensified popular discontent. In 2005, he dissolved parliament, imposed emergency rule, and curtailed civil liberties, triggering a popular backlash.

The uprising that followed, knows as People's Movement II, was one of the largest mobilizations in Nepal's history. Workers, peasants, and students

defied curfews and state violence, forcing the king to restore parliament. Two years later, in May 2008, the monarchy was formally abolished, and Nepal was declared a federal democratic republic.

During a period when the global left was largely in retreat, Nepal seemed to challenge the dominant trend. The Maoists, emerging from a decade-long armed insurgency, became the largest party in parliament. For many observers, Nepal seemed to demonstrate that revolutionary struggle could still produce historic breakthroughs.

## The Aborted Revolution

The early years of the republic were marked by immense expectations. The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) promised land reform, social equality, and the political empowerment of Dalits, women, and oppressed nationalities. The new state aimed to establish popular sovereignty and demolish centuries of marginalization.

Yet the revolutionary momentum stalled almost immediately. After their strong showing in the 2008 Constituent Assembly elections, the Maoists rapidly shifted from mass mobilization to parliamentary maneuvering. They moved to a terrain in which their opponents, particularly the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML) and the Nepali Congress, were far more entrenched and where external pressures, especially from India, worked decisively to limit any radical transformation.

The CPN-UML, despite its name, had long since abandoned its revolutionary ambitions. An established force beginning in the early 1990s, it was deeply embedded in patronage networks and coalition politics. Constitution writing

dragged on for years as party elites traded ministries and contracts. State institutions gradually absorbed the energy that had overthrown the monarchy. When the Maoists failed to deliver a new constitution during their first tenure, they suffered electoral setbacks, falling behind the UML and the Congress in subsequent polls.

The Maoist-UML merger in 2018 suggested that at least things would be stable for a little while. The unified party had more power than any other left-wing group in Nepal's history because it had a strong majority in parliament. However, instead of bringing about progress, the merger resulted in paralysis. Power struggles followed, and the party quickly broke up, leaving the Left weak and without credibility.

What had occurred was not the completion of a revolution but its premature termination. Insurgents who had mobilized millions were transformed into bureaucrats defending privileges. The monarchy had been overthrown, but the opening it created was closed from within.

### Stagism and Ideological Limits

The ideological framework underpinning this retreat was the doctrine of the two-stage revolution. According to the Maoists, the UML, and much of the parliamentary left, Nepal's immediate task was to complete a bourgeois-democratic transformation by dismantling feudal structures and establishing a republic. Socialism was deferred to an unspecified future.

This theory provided necessary moral and political justification for integration into parliamentary politics and neoliberal development models. Once the monarchy fell, the leadership could present compromise, constitutionalism,

and market-oriented reforms as a necessary stage rather than a betrayal. By postponing socialism indefinitely, they disarmed the very forces that had made revolution possible.

The Maoists' own strategy reflected these limits. While their "people's war," launched in 1996, drew strength from genuine struggles in the countryside, it lacked a clear strategy for challenging capitalism or constructing workers' power in urban centers. Armed struggle became an end in itself rather than a means to socialist transformation. When the battlefield disappeared, so too did any coherent revolutionary horizon.

**A Republic Without Delivery**

The consequences of this aborted revolution are now unmistakable. Nepal's 2015 constitution enshrines an impressive catalog of rights: education, health care, housing, food sovereignty, and democratic freedoms. But in practice, these guarantees remain largely hollow.

Public services were always underfunded and full of corruption. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the system's weakness, causing hospitals to run out of oxygen and turn families away from emergency care. The economy, on the other hand, got worse. Prices went up quickly, wages largely stayed the same, and youth unemployment rose to about 20 percent.

The republic's economic base shifted dramatically after 2008. Agriculture, once the backbone of the economy, declined sharply, pushing millions into distress migration. Today remittances from Nepali workers abroad account for nearly a quarter of GDP, making Nepal one of the most remittance-dependent

countries in the world. Entire villages have been emptied of young people; families survive on wire transfers from the Gulf, Malaysia, and India, while coffins return to Kathmandu’s airport with grim regularity.

This remittance economy has reduced extreme poverty, but it has entrenched dependency and inequality. It has reshaped Nepal’s class structure, producing a vast diaspora and a precarious, informal urban workforce, while the state remains incapable of generating dignified employment at home.

### Unfinished Emancipation

The republic also failed to fulfill its promises of social emancipation. Caste discrimination persists, women face systemic inequality, and Adivasi communities remain marginalized. A state meant to empower the excluded has been captured by recycled elites.

As service delivery failed, repression escalated with the harassment of journalists, surveillance of activists, and violent suppression of protests. The political class increasingly turned to nationalist diversions, blaming “foreign hands” for unrest rather than recognizing domestic failures. It is true that imperial powers seek influence in Nepal; however, such narratives were excuses to evade accountability for hunger, unemployment, and disillusionment.

It is against this backdrop that the Gen Z uprising erupted.

The uprising has already challenged Nepal’s political landscape, forcing the resignation of a prime minister and exposing the fragility of elite consensus. Whether this energy can be organized into lasting transformation remains an

open question.

After clearing the barricades and resolving the immediate confrontation, Nepal moved into a new uncertainty. The uprising culminated in neither a seizure of power nor the construction of alternative institutions from below. Instead it forced an abrupt reorganization of the existing political field. Following the dissolution of the parliament, the public intensely scrutinized the appointment of an interim government and scheduled elections. The question shifted from why the system had failed to how the post-uprising moments would be channeled.

The limitations of the movement were quickly exposed as the Gen Z uprising proved that while it could certainly cause trouble, it didn't have any long-lasting organizational forms that could turn street power into a clear political project. After the vacuum was created, established parties quickly changed, absorbed, or neutralized the energy of the revolt. Instead of a clear break from the past, there was a contentious process of political reorganization.

At the same time, forces long marginalized in post-2008 Nepal began to reappear. Royalist and right-wing movements, which had found little purchase in national politics since the monarchy was abolished, saw their chance to regain power. While their return did not mean the start of a real restoration project, it did show how much the moral authority of the post-monarchy order had faded. With the focus in the country returning to electoral politics, the months after September unfolded as a time of uncertainty and experimentation: communist parties coming together under the banner of unity, centrist groups fighting to reinvent themselves, and the Gen Z movement facing the limits of being spontaneous without being organized.

The struggle moved from the streets to ballots, conventions, mergers, and leadership contests, without resolving the deeper social crisis that had ignited the uprising in the first place.

### The Post-Uprising Politics

On September 12, an interim government under former chief justice Sushila Karki was installed, with general elections scheduled for March 5, 2026. Legal challenges to the parliament's dissolution were postponed until after the election. What at first looked like an open-ended break with the status quo quickly turned back into another election timetable. The focus on restoring procedural normalcy did not address the structural problems that caused the initial revolt; instead it limited the range of political options to the well-known areas of party competition and coalition math.

The Gen Z movement itself has struggled to navigate this transition. Its largely leaderless character, which enabled rapid expansion, has also limited its capacity to negotiate, strategize, or articulate a shared program. Several demands raised during the protests, including sweeping constitutional changes and a directly elected executive, lie beyond the mandate of any interim authority, while others risk flattening hard-won gains around federalism and inclusion. The uprising thus revealed not only the depth of popular anger but also the absence of institutions capable of sustaining it beyond the streets.

The most consequential response to the uprising has come from within the established left itself. In late 2025, nine left parties, led by the Maoists and including the CPN (Unified Socialist) along with several smaller communist and socialist formations, announced their merger into a new Nepali

Communist Party. The unification was a reaction to the Gen Z uprising, justified using Marxist-Leninist rhetoric, political stability, good governance, and national challenges. But this reorganization is less about renewing socialist politics and more about protecting political strength before the March 2026 elections. The aim is to regain control over a left-wing landscape that the mass revolt has shaken.

In a general scenario of unresolved political crisis, the uprising reflected disillusionment with a political system that offered no solutions to people's material concerns and highlighted a historical reckoning with missed opportunities for transformation. However, the current trends hold little promise, revealing a system that manages crises without resolving underlying issues.

Nepal thus stands at a crossroads, where one path leads toward the restoration of an exhausted political arrangement, occasionally punctuated by explosions of discontent. Another opens the possibility, still fragile and uncertain, of renewing the revolutionary promise that was indefinitely deferred after 2008: a political agenda based upon social equality, democratic control, and collective power rather than elite accommodation.

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