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The Gen Z Movement: Digital Mobilisation and its Impact on Nepalese Politics

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Abstract

This paper examines the emergence and impact of the recent Generation Z (Gen Z) youth movement in Nepal, analysing its distinct characteristics within the nation's political landscape. The study identifies the movement as a fundamental, generational shift in civic engagement, contrasting it with previous youth-led political transitions. The analysis reveals that this uprising was not merely a reaction to a government social media ban but a culmination of deep-seated frustrations over institutionalised corruption, economic inequality, and a perceived intergenerational political disconnect. The paper details the pivotal role of digital platforms in mobilising a decentralised, non-partisan, and leaderless movement, most notably through the viral "Nepo Kid" campaign. Furthermore, it assesses the immediate political ramifications, including a ministerial resignation and the reversal of the social media ban. It discusses the challenges posed by the state's violent response and the movement's own lack of formal structure. The research concludes that while the movement's long-term sustainability is uncertain, it has irrevocably altered the dynamics of Nepalese politics, positioning the digitally-native youth as a new and powerful force that demands systemic reform rather than superficial concessions.

Keywords: *Digital mobilisation, Gen Z, Nepalese politics, networked social movements, social media*

1. Introduction

The politics of Nepal, dominated by conventional protests and party-led uprisings, is taking shape in a new form. This transition is symbolised by the rise of a generation that grew up with digital technology, the Generation Z (Gen Z), who have become an influential and unique political mass. In September 2025, Nepal experienced mass protests, which were directly sparked by a government-issued social media ban, but they were the culmination of long-awaited societal frustrations. This paper argues that this 'Gen Z moment' is quite a departure from the preceding youth-led movements that were centralised mainly and party-sponsored (The Times of India, September 9, 2025). The key thesis of this article is that digital platforms have not only been instrumental in mobilising youth but have also transformed the nature, composition and agendas of youth activism in Nepal. Our analysis of this movement provides a window to the broader global trend towards digitally-enabled civic engagement and its implications for democracy, especially in countries where modern communications have become widely available only relatively recently.

1.1. Significance of the Study

The study is of great theoretical and practical value. Conceptually, it adds to the increasing literature on digital activism by way of a disparate case study located in the Global South, where the majority of its population is below 30 years old (UNPFN, 2017). It juxtaposes this digital-native protest with Nepal's earlier models of protest, such as the 1990s Jana Andolan I and 2006's Jana Andolan II, which were built on traditional, party-driven structures. By doing so, it illuminates how the absence of a central leadership and the decentralised nature of digital platforms can create a resilient, yet potentially less sustainable, form of political action. Practically, this study provides a critical analysis of the challenges and opportunities presented by a digitally-empowered citizenry, offering valuable insights for policymakers and civil society organisations aiming to foster more inclusive political engagement.

1.2. Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative research methodology, drawing upon a comprehensive review of scholarly articles, news reports, and social media analysis from the period of the

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protests. The study is an analysis of a single case, the Nepalese Gen Z movement, while also drawing parallels to regional and global trends to provide a broader context. Data from news reports and social media content are analysed to reconstruct the timeline of events, identify key grievances, and understand the dynamics of the protests, including the role of the viral "Nepo Kid" campaign.

1.3. Research Questions

This study will address the following core research questions:

1. How did the unique socio-economic profile and digital nativity of Nepal's Gen Z shape the character of the 2025 movement?
2. In what ways did digital platforms serve as the foundational space for the movement, and how did this reliance on technology influence its decentralised, non-partisan, and leaderless structure?
3. What were the immediate political ramifications of the movement, and what long-term challenges does it face in translating digital mobilisation into sustained institutional change?

1.4. Theoretical Concept

This research is anchored in the theoretical framework of networked social movements, which posits that contemporary protests are increasingly organised not through hierarchical structures but through fluid, decentralised networks facilitated by digital communication technologies (Castells, 2012). Unlike traditional movements, which are often co-opted or suppressed by targeting their leadership, networked movements are more resilient to state repression due to their decentralised nature. This paper will apply this concept to the Nepalese context, arguing that the Gen Z uprising embodies the principles of a networked social movement and, in doing so, challenges the traditional top-down political structures of the nation.

2. Findings and Discussions

2.1. The Rise of a New Political Generation

2. 1.1. Profile of the Nepalese Gen Z

Nepal's demographic composition is heavily skewed towards its youth, with 40.3% of the total population under the age of 30, and the youth category (ages 15-24) alone constituting approximately 28% of the populace. This generation stands apart from previous cohorts in several critical ways. Having been born after the 2006 People's Movement, they have no lived memory of the monarchy and have come of age in a period of heavy technological development (The Rising Nepal, September 9, 2025). They are the most highly educated generation in the nation's history, with an introductory literacy rate of 81% among the 15-29 age group (UNPFN, 2017). This high educational success, however, is juxtaposed against an immensely worrying economic context: the youth unemployment rate today stands at 19.2% (compared to a national average of 2.7%) (Sharma, 2025).

It is a heady combination of higher education, cosmopolitanism and still-limited economic opportunity. The aspirations of this generation for faster progress, accountability, and constructive solutions to immediate issues are often forced up against the stark reality of entrenched corruption and political impasse (The Rising Nepal, September 9, 2025). The sharp visual contrasts between their financial woes and the extravagant lifestyles of Nepo Kids (children of politicians and wealthy individuals) only add weight to the fire (The Times of India, September 9, 2025). Instead, the probable cause of this surge is that these 'nepo kids', who are ostentatiously posting images and videos on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok of themselves driving expensive cars or cruising in international destinations, made a prior fuzzy notion of governmental corruption for Nepal's everyman concrete people who were otherwise left to either work manual labor abroad (like most) to survive needs review (The Timesof India, 2025). This combination of economic disempowerment and moral anger provides a potent and readily mobilisable constituency for political transformation.

2.1.2. The Role of Digital Media as a Political Space

Digital media is not merely a tool for the Gen Z movement but is a foundational element that shapes its very form. In contrast to past movements that were organised through traditional media and centralised political party structures, this uprising is rooted in the digital ecosystem of smartphones and social media platforms (Nepal News, September 9, 2025). Platforms like TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and Reddit serve as the primary venues for political discourse, content creation, and real-time coordination (Nepal News, September 9, 2025). This digital reliance has given the movement an unprecedented level of immediacy, reach, and resilience.

The movement is decentralised and horizontal (detractors might say "leaderless"), a byproduct of its digital formation. Being non-centralised, young people associated with the movement are less vulnerable to state surveillance, repression, or co-option strategies traditionally used against party-affiliated youth wings (Nepal News, September 9, 2025). At times when the government tried to ban social media, the main spark for the protests, many protesters bypassed the ban with virtual private network (VPN) and end-to-end encrypted messaging apps, testing the adaptability of the digitally native generation (Khadka, 2025). This transformation also amounts to a radical recasting of the political actor, moving beyond conventional power politics and toward a more street-level form of civic participation, namely, one that is in-your-face in challenging the monopoly of established parties.

2.1.3. The 'Nepo Kid' Campaign: From Digital Outrage to Battles in the Real World

The "Nepo Kid" campaign is an illustration of how Generation Z activism is translating digital outrage into on-the-ground action. What started as an Internet trend on TikTok and Reddit with hashtags like #PoliticiansNepoBabyNepal sheds the patina of patriotism from these political and influential power elite to expose their children's over-the-top lifestyles (The Times of India, September 9, 2025). These videos and updates, successively pieced together, created a simplistic yet emotion-evoking

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visual arc that contrasted the wealth of the few with the poverty of the many, transforming a general complaint about corruption into an individualised, publicly shared account (The Times of India, September 9, 2025).

This campaign demonstrated the unique power of digital content to resonate with a mass audience. It effectively bypassed the need for dense political theory or party rhetoric, instead using the universal language of visual storytelling to galvanise a collective consciousness. When the government's social media ban threatened to silence this digital megaphone, this outrage had been simmering online. It spilt onto the streets, with youths demanding accountability from political families and a repeal of the ban (The Times of India, September 9, 2025). This progression highlights how a purely digital campaign can become the primary driver of a real-world protest, demonstrating that for this generation, the line between online and offline political action has become irrevocably blurred.

The table below provides a historical context for the Gen Z movement by comparing it to two of Nepal's most significant youth-led political transitions.

Movement Name	Primary Goal	Primary Mobilisation Method	Leadership Model	Immediate Outcome
Jana Andolan I (1990).	Restoration of multi-party democracy	Political party student wings, civil society organisations	Centralised, party-affiliated	Establishment of a multi-party democracy and a new constitution
Jana Andolan II (2006).	Abolition of the monarchy, establishment of a republic	Political party student wings, civil society organisations	Centralised, party-affiliated	Abolition of the monarchy, the peace process, and the new constitution in 2015
Gen Z Movement (2025).	End to institutional corruption, lifting of social media ban	Digital platforms (TikTok, Reddit, Instagram), decentralised networking	Decentralised, "leaderless"	Resignation of Home Minister, lifting of social media ban

3. The 2025 "Gen Z Moment": Triggers, Demands, and Confrontation

3.1. The Social Media Ban as a Catalyst

The immediate trigger for the mass protests was the Nepalese government's decision to impose a ban on 26 social media platforms on September 4, 2025.[7] The government's official justification for the ban was that the platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, X, and YouTube, had failed to comply with a new law that required them to register with the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology and appoint local representatives. Government officials argued the regulations were necessary to combat hate speech, fake news, and online crime (The Guardian, September 9, 2025).

However, the youth and rights groups perceived the ban not as a regulatory measure but as a blatant act of censorship and an "authoritarian attitude" (The Guardian, September 9, 2025). For a generation that communicates, conducts business and politics through these platforms, the ban was an outright attack on their fundamental rights (Khadka, 2025). The country's past restrictions on online platforms, including an earlier ban on Telegram and TikTok, helped fortify that perception (The Economic Times, 2025). The ban thus became a potent metaphor for the government's indifference to the digital world of today's youth and its readiness to apply coercive measures in suppressing digital dissent. It was the "catalyst" that transmuted a long-brewing, though inert, indignation to an active protest on the streets (The Times of India, September 9, 2025).

3.2. Articulating the Demands

The trigger for the protests was the ban on social media, but it was clearly not the only cause of public fury. Moreover, their age appeared to be an asset, one young protester named Yujan Rajbhandari said: "The social media ban sparked us, but we are not here only because of that. We want to fight against entrenched corruption in Nepal (The Economic Times, 2025). Other demonstrators voiced frustrations over "dwindling economic opportunities" and the government's "authoritarian attitude" (The Economic Times, 2025). Protesters carried placards with slogans like "youths against corruption" and demanded accountability from political families (The Guardian, September 9, 2025).

The Gen Z movement thus functioned as a cohesive vessel for a variety of broader discontents. The "Nepo Kid" campaign had already provided a clear, visual metaphor for the corruption and inequality that had plagued the country for years (The Times of India, September 9, 2025). When the social media ban was imposed, it served as a unifying grievance that allowed these long-simmering frustrations to converge into a single, apparent protest. This dynamic illustrates that the youth's demands were not about a single policy but about a fundamental rejection of the entire political system and its failure to deliver on promises of prosperity, transparency, and federalism (Khadka, 2025).

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3.3. The Dynamics of the Protest

The demonstrations, labelled the "Gen Z protest," quickly swelled to tens of thousands of young people, many of whom were still in their school uniforms, gathered in Kathmandu and other cities. Protests began with a display of national unity, as demonstrators waved the national flag and sang the national anthem (The Economic Times, 2025). The situation took a violent turn when protesters breached barricades and attempted to storm the Parliament building in Kathmandu (The Guardian, September 9, 2025).

The state's response was a swift and deadly crackdown. Security forces, using live ammunition, rubber bullets, tear gas, and water cannons, indiscriminately fired on the crowds. The violence resulted in the deaths of at least 19 protesters and left hundreds more injured (The Guardian, September 9, 2025). The government imposed curfews in areas of unrest, but the deaths only intensified the public's anger, causing protests to continue even after the social media ban was lifted (Khadka, 2025). The violent crackdown transformed the protests from a civil expression of dissent into a human rights crisis, drawing strong condemnation from international bodies like the UN and Amnesty International, which called for an independent investigation into the use of lethal force (The Guardian, September 9, 2025). This state violence risked further alienating the youth and potentially cementing the government's image as authoritarian and hostile.

The following table provides a chronological summary of the key events:

Date	Event	Details
September 4, 2025	The government imposes a social media ban.	Twenty-six platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, X, and YouTube, are blocked for non-compliance with new regulations.
September 8, 2025	Mass protests erupt nationwide.	Tens of thousands of young people take to the streets, demanding an end to corruption and the lifting of the ban.
September 8, 2025	Protests turn violent	Clashes with police erupt as protesters attempt to storm the Parliament building in Kathmandu.
September 8, 2025	Deadly crackdown by security forces	Police use live rounds, tear gas, and rubber bullets, resulting in at least 19 deaths and hundreds of injuries.
September 8, 2025	Home Minister Ramesh Lekhak resigns	Lekhak steps down on "moral grounds" following the violence.
September 8, 2025	Government lifts social media ban.	At an emergency cabinet meeting, the ban is reversed in response to the protests.
September 9, 2025	Protests continue	Demonstrations resume despite the ban being lifted, with protesters demanding the Prime Minister's resignation.

4. Impact on the Nepalese Political Landscape

4.1. Immediate Political Ramifications

The Gen Z movement had a swift and tangible impact on the Nepalese political establishment. The most immediate political ramifications were the resignation of Home Minister Ramesh Lekhak on "moral grounds" and the government's reversal of the social media ban (The Guardian, September 9, 2025). The government's decision to lift the ban just days after its imposition, in an emergency cabinet meeting, was an apparent concession to the youth-led unrest, as reported by The Times of India (September 9, 2025).

However, the power of the movement would reach beyond these initial compromises. The more deeply rooted crisis of trust and legitimacy was indicated by the persistent nature of protests following the lifting of the ban, with chanting for the Prime Minister's resignation, which continued after it had been revoked. The youth were not content with a symbolic policy reversal but called for accountability of the dead and changing the system that the ban represented (Khadka, 2025). This response demonstrated that the old political playbook of offering reactive concessions to quell unrest was no longer sufficient to address the core grievances of a generation that demands fundamental systemic change.

4.2. Challenges to Traditional Party Structures

The Gen Z movement's impact on Nepalese politics is most pronounced in its challenge to traditional political party structures. Historically, youth activism in Nepal has been channelled through party-affiliated youth wings and student unions, which often serve as a means of recruitment and control for the larger parties (Snellinger, 2028, pp. 1043–1075). The 2025 protests, however, were characterised by their "organic and leaderless" nature, operating on a decentralised, horizontal model that was not beholden to any political ideology or party allegiance (Nepal News, September 9, 2025).

This model represents a direct rejection of the patronage and clientelism that have long defined Nepalese political parties. Existing youth-led civic organisations have often struggled to engage their peers, as their primary agenda has been perceived as gathering resources for themselves rather than serving their

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communities (Kharal, August 21, 2021). The Gen Z-led movement, in contrast, picked up where the traditional — yet often wayward — protests left off and turned into a unified front against an unsupportive system; one that runs on frustration (Nepal News, September 9, 2025). This decentralised model's success is a long-term threat to the traditional parties, because it implies that the influence of those parties over the country's single largest demographic is waning and because novel, more promiscuous expressions of political participation are emerging in order to contest their monopoly over civic action.

4.3. Intergenerational Political Disconnect

The political reaction to the Gen Z protest revealed a striking divide between generations. In the aftermath of protests, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli had downplayed them, attributing the "ambiguity between thinking of our Gen-Z generation" and a "lack of sufficient information" (The Times of India, September 9, 2025). He added that the youth were not "mature in their thinking" (Shamim, September 9, 2025). This perspective framed the movement not as a legitimate political force but as a naive and misinformed group to be managed, a position that reflects a traditional, top-down view of authority.

In stark contrast, other political figures, such as Kathmandu Mayor Balendra Shah, a non-traditional leader, validated the movement's spontaneity and legitimacy. Shah's statement that "This rally is clearly a spontaneous movement of Gen-Z, for whom even I may seem old. Their voices must be heard," acknowledged the novel and powerful nature of the uprising (Khadka, 2025). This divergence in rhetoric illustrates the widening chasm between an older political elite that relies on traditional methods of control and a new generation of leaders who recognise that civic power is now being forged in new, non-traditional ways. The failure of established leaders to genuinely understand and engage with the youth's digitally-native concerns will likely accelerate the decline of their own political legitimacy.

5. Challenges to Sustainability and Institutionalisation

5.1. The State's Response and the Use of Force

The government's violent crackdown is the most significant challenge to the movement's long-term sustainability. The police's use of lethal force, which resulted in at least 19 deaths, was condemned as a grave violation of international human rights law by organisations such as Amnesty International and the UN Human Rights Office. The state's repressive response, including the imposition of curfews and the deployment of the army, created a dangerous precedent and demonstrated its willingness to use violence to defend the political status quo (The Guardian, September 9, 2025). While the crackdown initially intensified public anger, it also raised the stakes of participation, potentially discouraging future mass mobilisations and forcing the movement to re-evaluate its reliance on physical street presence. The government's actions highlight the fragility of Nepal's democracy and the structural violence that underpins the political system, compelling the youth to seek new ways to exert pressure without risking their lives.

5.2. The Absence of Formal Structure

While the decentralised nature of the Gen Z movement made it resilient against traditional political co-optation, it may also be its most significant long-term limitation. Without a formal structure, the movement lacks a unified leadership and a cohesive institutional framework to translate its popular will into tangible, lasting policy outcomes (Nepal News, September 9, 2025). While digital outrage can prompt immediate, reactionary concessions such as lifting the social media ban, enacting and monitoring systemic reforms requires sustained engagement with the formal political process (The Times of India, September 9, 2025). The research indicates that young people often lack the knowledge of complex legal procedures required to form and run formal civic organisations (Kharal, August 21, 2021).

This creates a dilemma: a decentralised model is powerful for spontaneous protest but may be ineffective for long-term institutional change. The movement risks becoming a "fleeting moment" of powerful but ephemeral outrage rather than a lasting shift in the nation's political trajectory (Nepal News, September 9, 2025). The central challenge for the Gen Z movement is to bridge this gap, creating a model that can both maintain its grassroots, decentralised power and develop the institutional capacity to influence policy and hold the government accountable over the long term.

5.3. Socio-Economic and Structural Barriers

The Gen Z protests are a manifestation of deeper, pre-existing structural barriers that hinder youth political engagement in Nepal. The pervasive issue of high youth unemployment drives many young Nepalis to migrate abroad for work, creating a large diaspora that is geographically disconnected from domestic politics but reliant on digital platforms to maintain ties with family (Sharma, 2025). The social media ban directly impacted this population, further highlighting the government's disconnect from the lived realities of its citizens (The Washington Post, September 9, 2025).

Beyond the economic frustrations, structural barriers within the political system itself limit youth participation. These include high age requirements for holding key political positions, such as the minimum age of 45 for some constitutional appointments (Sharma, 2025). There is also a reluctance by older political leaders, many of whom have been in power for decades, to share authority and mentor younger generations (Sharma, 2025). Without these pathways to power and the soft skills needed for meaningful civic engagement, which are often lacking in the public education system, young people are forced to express their frustrations through informal channels like street protests, as they are barred from formal ones (Sharma, 2025). For the movement to evolve from a reactive protest to a sustainable force, these deep-seated institutional and socioeconomic issues must be addressed.

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6. Future Trajectories and Broader Implications

6.1. Is This a Fleeting Moment or a Lasting Shift?

The long-term impact of the Gen Z movement hinges on its ability to evolve from a reactive force to a sustained, influential agent for institutional reform. The government's immediate response—lifting the ban and forming an investigation committee—is a standard bureaucratic manoeuvre designed to quell public outrage and bet on the movement's ephemeral nature (The Times of India, September 9, 2025). The decentralised model of the movement, while resilient against co-optation, may struggle to maintain its momentum and translate its popular support into tangible political power without a formal structure or a cohesive, long-term strategy (Nepal News, September 9, 2025).

The historical precedent of youth wings being co-opted into traditional party politics makes this a critical juncture (Snellinger, 2018). The non-partisan nature of the Gen Z movement resists this traditional co-optation. However, without an alternative pathway, it risks fragmentation and may fail to create a unified front against a well-entrenched political elite. The future of Nepalese politics will be defined by whether this generation can transform its digital power and street presence into a new, more effective model of sustained political engagement that can either navigate or overcome the deeply entrenched structural barriers to a more inclusive democracy.

6.2. Parallels with Regional and Global Trends

The Nepalese youth movement is not an isolated event but a local manifestation of a global and regional phenomenon of generational awakening. The grievances of Gen Z in Nepal, corruption, economic stress, and authoritarianism, are shared with their counterparts in neighbouring countries like Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The success of youth-led movements in these nations, which led to the removal of governments, serves as both a template and a source of inspiration for Nepali youth, demonstrating that change is possible (The Washington Post, September 9, 2025).

This regional convergence of grievances and tactics suggests that a new, digitally empowered generation is challenging the prevailing political-security order across South Asia (Basnyat, 2025). The Nepalese case study, therefore, offers valuable insights into the dynamics of this broader trend, highlighting the power of digital platforms to forge a transnational political consciousness. The trajectory of this movement will likely provide a blueprint for, and draw inspiration from, similar movements elsewhere in the region and beyond.

6.3. Recommendations for Fostering Youth Political Engagement

To ensure the long-term stability of Nepal's young democracy and to harness the political potential of its youth, it is imperative to address the structural and institutional barriers to their participation. The protests have demonstrated the immense energy and creativity of Nepal's youth. However, if this energy is not channelled into productive institutional avenues, it will continue to manifest as disruptive, informal protest (Acharya, 2024).

Recommendations for fostering continuous youth involvement include:

- **Reforming Legal Frameworks:** Lowering the minimum age requirements for running for provincial and federal positions would allow a larger segment of the youth population to participate in formal politics (**Sharma, 2025)**.
- **Creating Supportive Frameworks:** The government could launch paid internships for graduates in policymaking, while political parties should allocate budgets to increase youth participation (**Sharma, 2025)**.
- **Fostering Intergenerational Dialogue:** Established civil society organisations (CSOs) must work with local youth groups in a "bottom-up manner" to convene policy dialogues and public hearings, ensuring that the youth's voices are heard and that their political energies are translated into concrete policy outcomes (Kharal, August 21, 2021).
- **Cultivating Mentorship:** Older political leaders must overcome their reluctance to share power and instead act as mentors, guiding young leaders in navigating the complexities of political dynamics and encouraging ethical governance (Sharma, 2025).

Only by moving from a position of defence and repression to one of inclusion and collaboration can Nepal's political establishment truly secure a progressive and stable future.

7. Conclusion

The Gen Z movement in Nepal, while a response to a singular event, represents a powerful new chapter in the nation's political evolution. This uprising, with its digitally native character and decentralised structure, has fundamentally altered the terrain of Nepalese politics, challenging the traditional hierarchies of power and legitimacy. It has been demonstrated that a new generation will no longer be satisfied with the politics of patronage, broken promises, and institutionalised corruption. The movement's capacity for obtaining immediate concessions, such as a ministerial resignation in the other country involved and the reversal of one of that government's central policies, is evidence that digital rage can now or soon will be transformed into real political clout.

However, there are formidable challenges ahead for the cause. The state's heavy-handed reaction and the movement's own lack of structure also make it fair to ask serious questions about its long-term viability and ability to effect transformational, structural change. A profound intergenerational disconnect is taking place, with the leadership's leading lights dismissing millennials' complaints and grievances, while doing nothing to alleviate the deepening crisis of legitimacy. However, the Gen Z movement has indeed heralded a new chapter in Nepal's democratic path. The youth of today are not just the leaders of tomorrow; they

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are change-makers today. How the political establishment addresses this emerging reality will determine where Nepalese politics will head next – whether it continues to perceive "the youth" as a threat to be controlled or an unstoppable force that requires emancipation.

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