

Youth's Choice: Corruption Control, Economic Opportunities and Accountable Leadership

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Nepal's major movements in the past were mainly focused on political rights and socio-economic issues. The recent Gen-Z movement was different in that it was initiated against the cycle of corruption and nepotism. Movements in general are great at prioritizing certain issues but in prioritizing some, a lot of the other issues are often sidelined particularly during the post- movement transition.

In the past few months, the restructuring of leadership within the traditional political parties and the formation of new political parties have gained momentum. Actions against those who caused physical damage during the protests have also intensified. The inquiry commission formed after the movement has stated that it is investigating the incidents of violence and arson during the September protests. The government is also making the necessary technical preparations for the upcoming elections including conducting political dialogue with the political parties.

Although the Gen-Z movement spread across the country, the old tendency of Kathmandu guiding political analysis as the central authority remains unchanged. Analyses from

Kathmandu are often confined to an overall ‘macro’ perspective and exclude the diverse dimensions of the movement which include local contexts and young people’s understandings. Conspiracy theories have dominated post protests discussions with many attempting to place the events of the two days in the context of larger political players. However, the surveys we conducted in the past show that increasing citizen dissatisfaction played a major role in the movement turning into a revolt this time.

The youth seem deeply frustrated by the established political parties. In informal discussions, people are questioning if the revolt was only to hold early elections, or if the issues raised by the movement will be addressed by the new parliament or debating the kind of leadership most likely to emerge from the upcoming elections. Some groups are even raising their voices for a directly elected executive.

Against this background, we held discussions with youth and local political party representatives in seven districts of Madhesh Province. Similarly, perceptions were collected through a short questionnaire from youths in seven districts of Madhesh Province (Parsa, Bara, Rautahat, Sarlahi, Dhanusha, Siraha, Mahottari), as well as Palpa and Rupandehi of Lumbini Province, and Makwanpur and Dolakha districts of Bagmati Province. Of the survey participants, 51.8 percent were from Madhesh Province, 15.3 percent from Bagmati Province, and 32.8 percent from Lumbini Province. In terms of age distribution, 10.2 percent were below 18 years, 35 percent were 18–23 years, 20.4 percent were 24–28 years, 16.8 percent were 29–34 years, and 17.6 percent were above 35 years. The survey included 35.03 percent women and 64.97 percent men.

These discussions and the survey provide important indications of how young people—especially those outside Kathmandu—understand and perceive the post-Gen-Z revolt situation. The main aspirations expressed by them are presented here.

Findings of the Survey

Youth Understanding of the Agenda of the Gen-Z Movement

In the survey, 61.3 percent said that the main agenda of the Gen Z movement was anti-corruption. 26.3 percent said it was because social media had been shut down, 8 percent said it was for political system reform, and 4.4 percent said it was for changing the government. The options such as ending the dominance of certain leaders, putting pressure for constitutional amendment, and others were not mentioned by anyone.

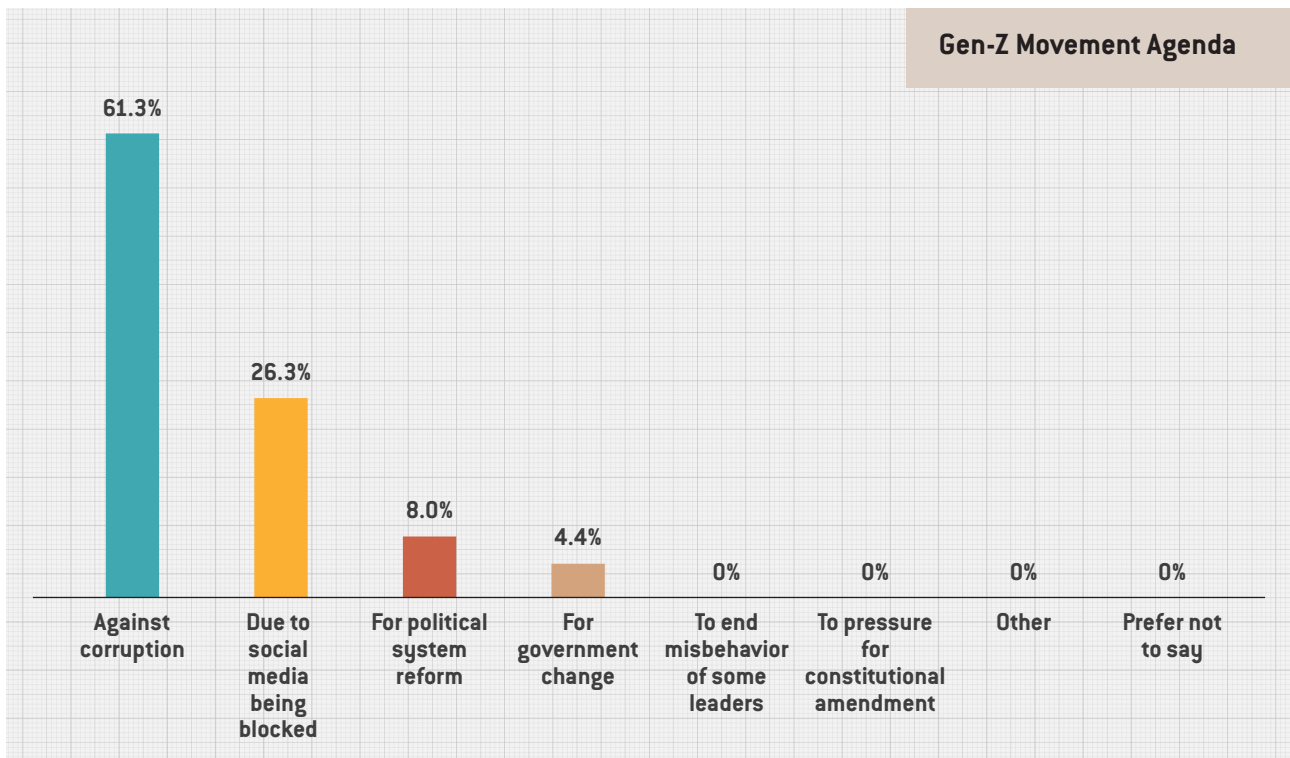


Figure 1: Youth Understanding of the Gen-Z Movement Agenda

Youth Perception of the Agenda of the Gen-Z Movement

In response to the question of how the agenda raised in the Gen-Z movement seemed to them, the highest proportion—60.6 percent—said it was reformative, while 29.2 percent said it was transformative. Likewise, 3.6 percent described it as anarchic, and 2.2 percent said it was negative. Similarly, 2.2 percent responded that they did not know, while another 2.2 percent said they did not want to say.

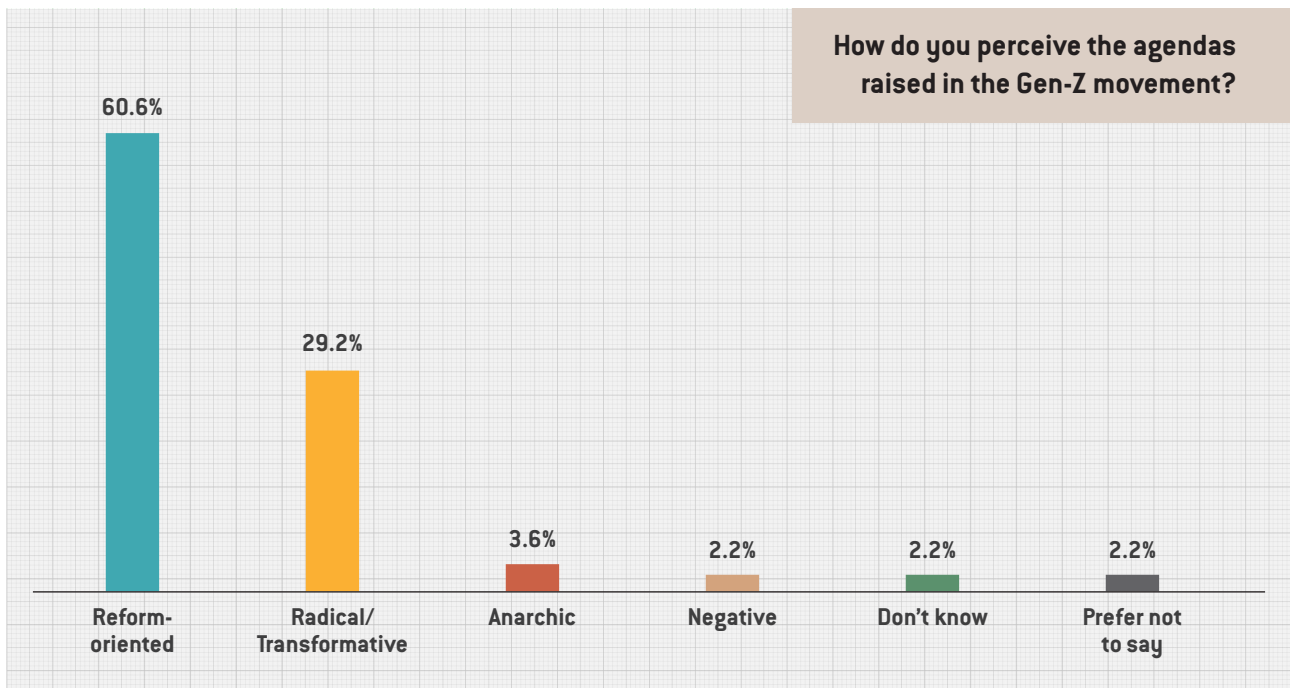


Figure 2: Youth Perception of the Gen-Z Movement Agendas

Youth Perceptions on What the Interim Government Should Do to Address the Movement's Agenda

Regarding the question of what the interim government should do to address the agenda of the movement, the highest proportion—50.4 percent—answered that there should be immediate investigation into corruption scandals. Similarly, 35.8 percent said that the government should focus on holding elections, while 8.8 percent responded that those involved in the incidents of September 8 and 9 should be prosecuted. Likewise, 4.4 percent said that the shooting incident of September 8 should be investigated and those involved should be prosecuted. A total of 0.6 percent responded with “other.”

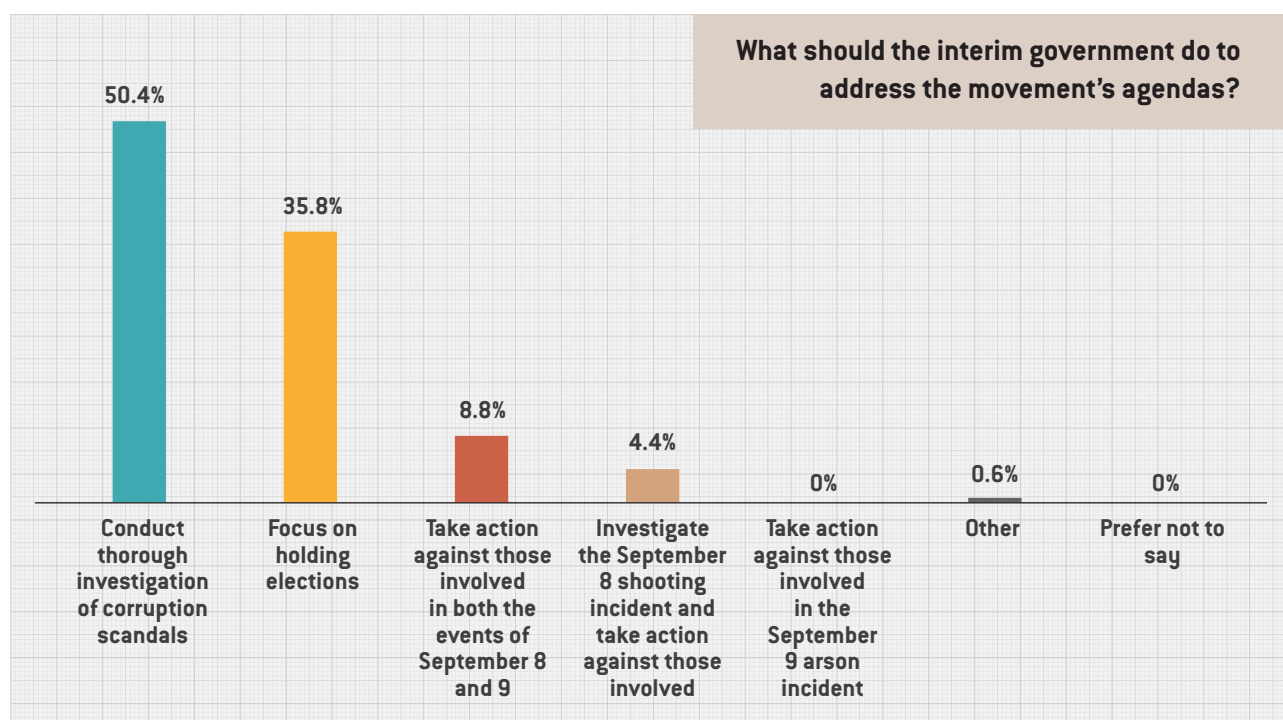


Figure 3: Youth Perception on Actions Interim Government Should Take to Address the Movement's Agendas

Youth Perception on Future Changes Resulting from the Gen-Z Movement

Of the respondents, 47.4 percent said they are optimistic about the Gen-Z movement bringing positive changes in the coming days, and 27 percent said they are very optimistic. A total of 74.4 percent of youths are optimistic that the Gen-Z movement will bring positive changes in the future. Likewise, 14.6 percent said they are neither hopeful nor hopeless. Similarly, 7.3 percent said they are not optimistic, and 1.5 percent said they are not optimistic at all. Thus, the total proportion of those who are not optimistic is 8.8 percent. Additionally, 0.7 percent said they do not know, and 1.5 percent said they do not want to say.

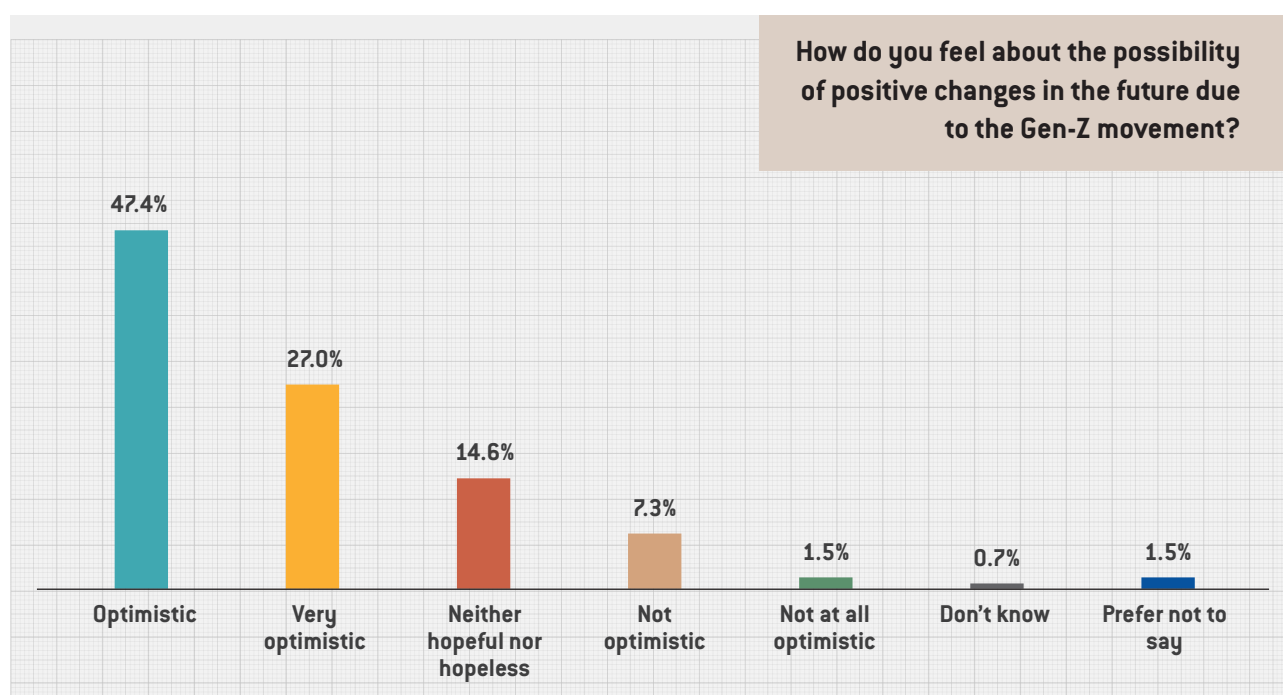


Figure 4: Youth Perception on Future Changes Due to the Gen-Z Movement

Youth Perception on the Agenda the New Parliament Should Prioritize

In response to the question of what the newly elected Parliament should prioritize, 81 percent said controlling corruption. Likewise, 10.2 percent said employment and opportunity creation, 5.1 percent said constitutional amendment, and 2.9 percent said creating an environment for entrepreneurship. Similarly, 0.8 percent said they did not want to say.

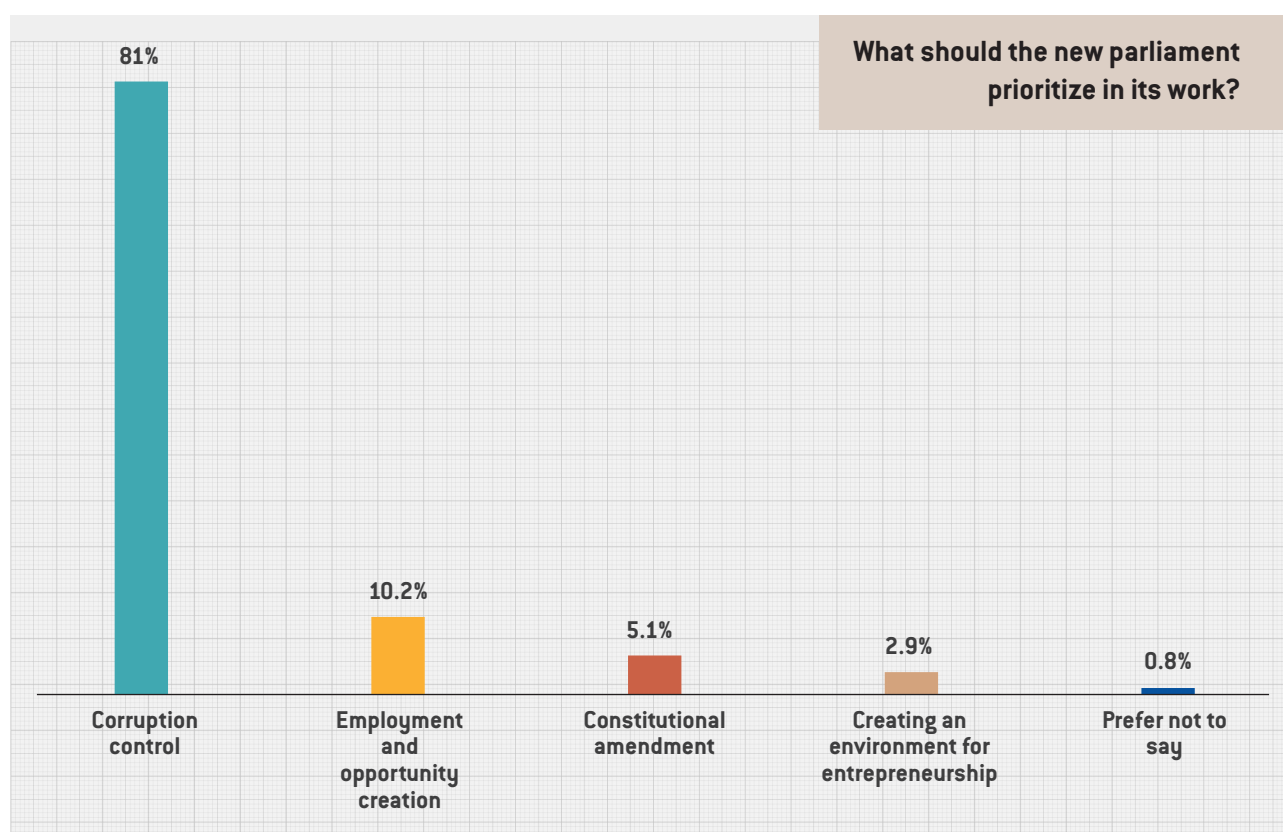


Figure 5: Youth Perception on Agendas the New Parliament Should Prioritize

Youth Perception on What the Gen-Z Groups Should Do Next

In response to the question of what the Gen-Z groups should do now, 77.4 percent said that they should continue to monitor the government and political parties as a civic group to ensure that the issues raised by the movement are addressed. A total of 10.2 percent said that they should form a political party and contest elections, while 8.8 percent said that they should join existing political parties according to their preference and engage in electoral and political activities. Likewise, 2.2 percent mentioned “other,” and 1.4 percent said they did not want to say.

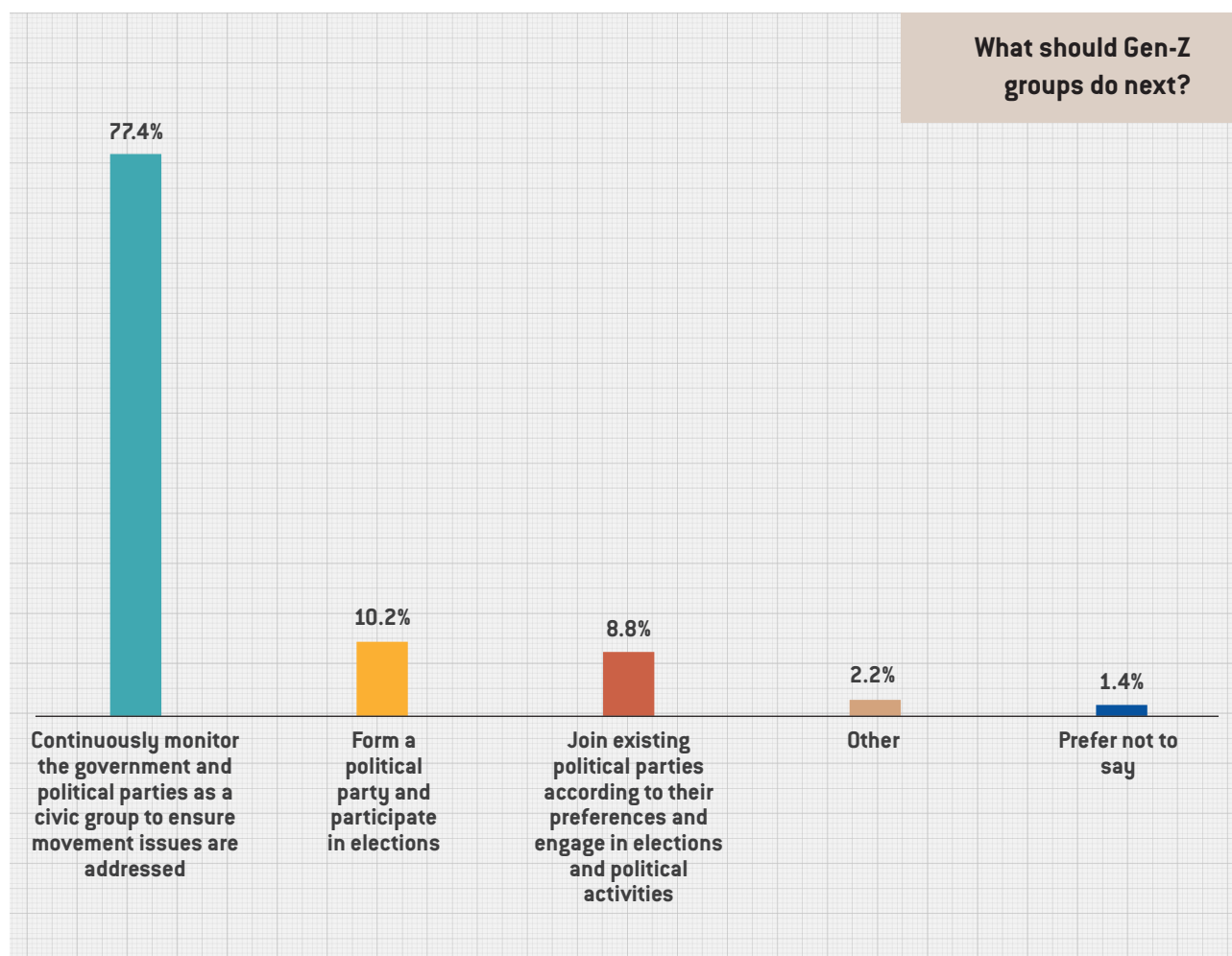


Figure 6: Youth Perception on Actions Gen-Z Groups Should Take Next

Youth Perception of the Strength of Different Political Forces in the Upcoming Election

In response to the question of which political force is likely to be strong in the upcoming election, the highest—31.4 percent—answered independent candidates. Likewise, 24.8 percent said old political parties, and 24.1 percent said the parties registered after the Gen-Z movement. The proportion of those who said newly formed political parties registered before the Gen-Z movement was 11.7 percent. A total of 7.3 percent said “other,” while 0.7 percent said they did not want to say.

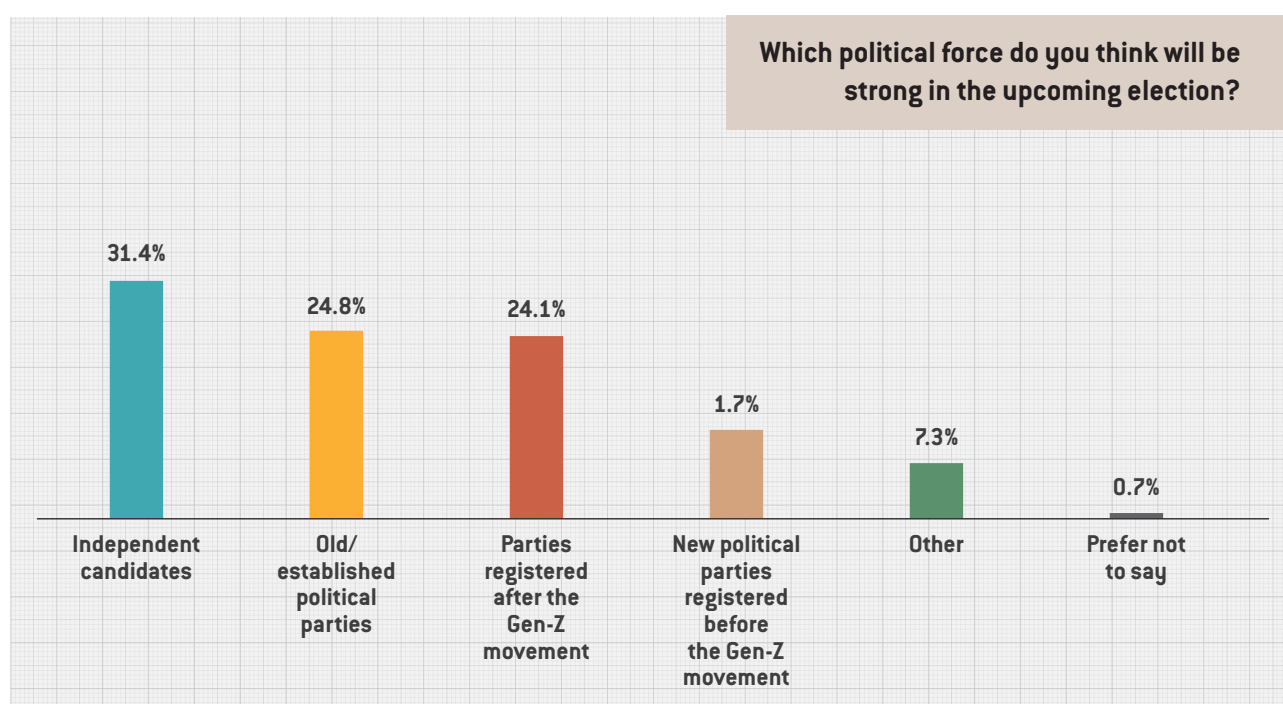


Figure 7: Youth Perception on the Strength of Different Political Forces in the Upcoming Election

Youth Choice of Political Force in the Upcoming Election

In response to the question of which political party they would like to vote for in the upcoming election, the highest—40.1 percent—answered independent candidates. Likewise, 26.3 percent said parties registered after the Gen-Z movement, and 8.8 percent said newly registered political parties before the Gen-Z movement. A total of 2.9 percent said old political parties. Those who said “other” accounted for 21.2 percent, while 0.7 percent said they did not want to say.

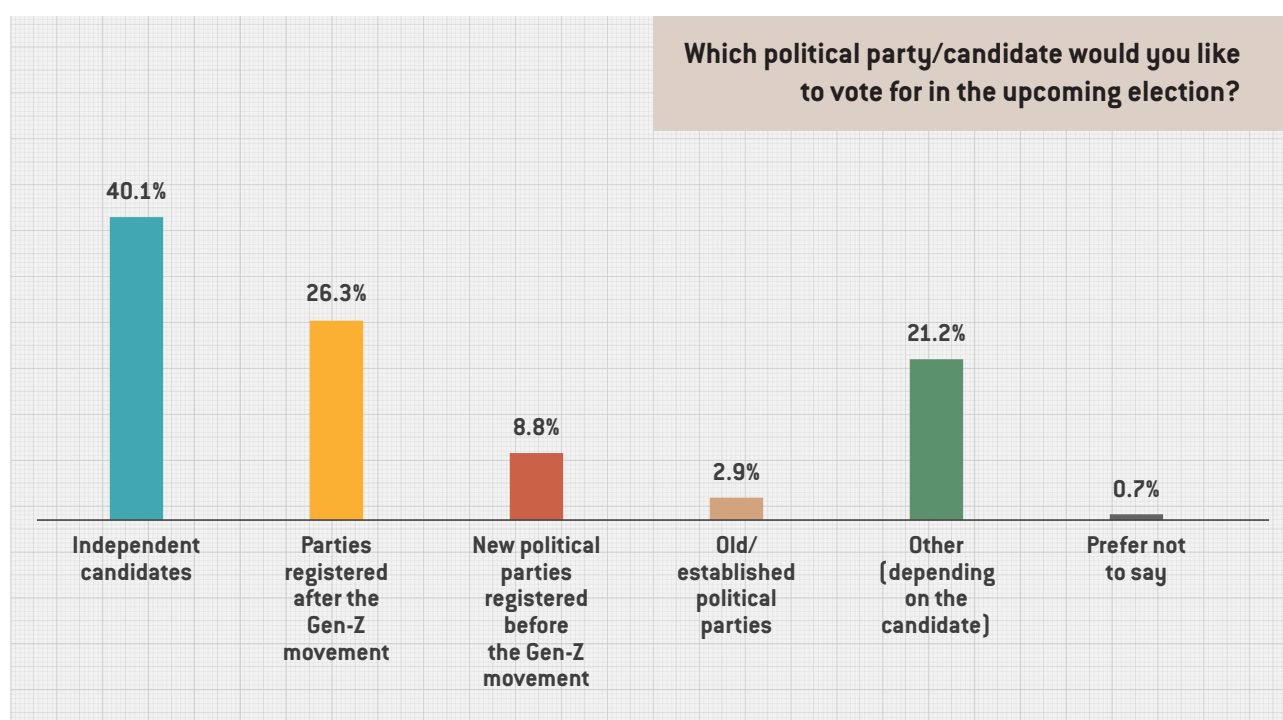


Figure 8: Youth Preference for Political Forces in the Upcoming Election

Discussion

A strong public opinion has existed for years that corruption is an obstacle to the progress of Nepali society. Previous citizen surveys have also identified corruption as a major problem. According to a survey conducted in Gandaki Province on public service and good governance, more than 90 percent of citizens believe that political leadership has abused power, position, and authority, protected corrupt individuals, favored their close associates while in government, and colluded with other political parties in major corruption cases. Similarly, 76 percent of citizens believe that government contracts are given to close associates, 86.5 percent believe nepotism and favoritism dominate government appointments, and 92.9 percent believe that appointing close associates over competent individuals in public positions does not result in effective work.

The results of another survey on Madhesh, Lumbini Province, and the Kathmandu Valley, are similar. According to the survey, 92.9 percent believe that political leadership has abused power and position, 93.2 percent believe close associates are favored while in government, 91.3 percent believe government contracts are given to party workers and supporters, 91.8 percent believe appointing close associates over competent individuals in public positions has not resulted in effective work, 89.9 percent believe nepotism and favoritism dominate government appointments, 89.1 percent believe political leaders protect corrupt individuals, and 90.2 percent believe political parties collude in major corruption cases. Over the past decade, the dominance of the same type of political leadership is commonly understood to have strengthened the cycle of corruption.

The Gen-Z movement has raised this issue prominently. Nearly two-thirds of the youth approached in the survey reported corruption as the main agenda of the Gen-Z movement. As for addressing the movement's demands, youth believe the interim government should conduct rapid investigations into corruption scandals and focus on elections. Similarly, 81 percent of youth say that the new parliament should prioritize controlling corruption, showing that the question of who can/will control corruption ranks uppermost in today's youth.

The youth are also positive about the agendas raised in the Gen-Z movement. The fact that 60.6 percent consider the movement reformative and 29.2 percent consider it transformative shows they view the movement as a positive event. Furthermore, 74.4 percent of youth are optimistic that the Gen-Z movement will bring positive changes in the future.

To address the issues raised by the movement, 77.4 percent of respondents said the Gen-Z groups should continuously monitor the government and political parties as a civic group, while only 10.2 percent said they should form a political party and contest elections. This shows that youth want the Gen-Z movement to strengthen the civic voice against any irregularities rather than directly entering politics themselves.

After the Gen-Z movement, perspectives on pluralism and political parties appear to have developed differently. Youth express frustration that political party cadres and elected representatives are more accountable to party leadership than to citizens. This may explain the growing inclination toward independent candidates. Nearly one-third believe independent candidates will be strong in the upcoming elections, and 40.1 percent say they would vote for one.

Young people feel that the elected representatives so far have been unable to raise citizens' issues in the parliament or hold their leadership accountable. Many firmly believe that the representatives should not serve the interests of only a few leaders. This is the basis for their belief that a directly elected executive would be accountable to citizens than the party leadership. The appeal of independent candidates is further strengthened by the perception that independent mayors can carry out their duties towards their constituencies without direct political party interference.

However, youth are also open to making their decision based on the candidates that are fielded by the parties. At the local level, youth who participated in the Gen-Z movement are observing how the new political scenario develops. They plan on deciding their involvement based on how new political parties or groups emerge. In the survey, 21.2 percent said they have not yet decided which side to vote for, indicating that they prefer to judge candidates rather than parties. While some youth favor parties registered after the Gen Z movement, others are keen to support the newer parties from the previous elections. However, there is a marked lack of interest in the traditional established parties amongst this group. Youth are wary that the traditional parties if they gain a majority, may exact revenge on the protesters.

Youth are seeking leadership that can control corruption, create economic opportunities, and formulate policies accountable to citizens. The process of searching for options continues—but the question of whom to trust remains open.



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