

Gen Z Revolts and Governance Challenges – Lessons for India

Introduction

A new form of political awakening is sweeping across the developing world — led not by seasoned politicians or ideologues but by the young, digitally empowered Generation Z (Gen Z). From Bangladesh and Nepal to Sri Lanka, Madagascar, and beyond, the world is witnessing youth-driven movements against corruption, unemployment, and institutional apathy. These uprisings, characterized by their spontaneity and social-media mobilization, have toppled governments and reshaped governance debates. For India, surrounded by these tremors, the lessons are profound — not only about governance but also about restoring public trust in institutions.



What Is Gen Z and What Are Its Trends?

Gen Z broadly refers to those born between 1997 and 2012, who have grown up in an era of smartphones, social media, and global connectivity.

Unlike earlier generations, Gen Z is

1. **Digitally native** — their opinions are shaped by online discourse.
2. **Politically aware** — they track governance failures through instant news and data.
3. **Values-driven** — transparency, justice, and climate consciousness matter deeply.
4. **Less patient** with institutional inefficiency or corruption.

Globally, Gen Z protests are marked by memes, symbolism, and decentralized leadership. A striking example is the “straw-hat skull” symbol — drawn from the anime *One Piece* — now representing rebellion against corrupt elites in several countries.

Countries Affected by Gen Z Revolts

1. **Bangladesh** — The immediate trigger was the reinstatement of a job quota system that favoured the elite, sparking student-led protests. High unemployment, corruption (TI rank 150), and economic hardship deepened the anger.
2. **Nepal** — A proposed social-media ban ignited protests among youth frustrated with censorship, joblessness (20.8%), and corruption (TI rank 107).
3. **Sri Lanka** — Years of misgovernance, corruption, and economic collapse led to the Aragalaya movement, toppling the Rajapaksa regime. Youth anger against nepotism and inflation drove the revolt.
4. **Madagascar** — Triggered by electricity and water shortages, protests rapidly spread, drawing inspiration from Sri Lanka and Nepal.
5. **Indonesia, Philippines, Kenya, Morocco** — Youth revolts in these countries followed policies that symbolised elite excess — such as salary hikes for politicians or subsidy cuts — reflecting global frustration with unresponsive governance.

Fundamental Causes Behind Gen Z Revolts

Though each uprising had a local trigger, the underlying causes converge into a pattern of structural discontent —

1. **Rampant Corruption** — Transparency International data shows most of these nations rank poorly — between 100 and 150 — indicating weak institutions and rent-seeking behaviour.
2. **Youth Unemployment** — In Sri Lanka and Nepal, over one-fifth of youth are unemployed, creating fertile ground for frustration and protest.
3. **Digital Mobilization** — Social media acts as both a mobilising tool and a mirror reflecting elite privilege. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) become vehicles of protest.

4. **Poor Governance and Service Delivery** – Inadequate electricity, water, healthcare, and education amplify daily suffering and erode legitimacy.
5. **Loss of Faith in Traditional Politics** – Young people view older leaders as detached, dynastic, and corrupt.
6. **Global Economic Stress** – Rising prices, shrinking opportunities, and post-pandemic inequality have worsened the generational divide.

Implications for India

While India has not experienced a Gen Z revolt of this scale, the warning signs are visible.

1. Youth expectations are rising. With over 65% of India's population below 35, governance failures can quickly translate into unrest.
2. Corruption perception remains high. India's TI rank of 96 has stagnated since 2014, and daily bribery persists despite digitisation.
3. Unemployment anxiety is deep. Educated youth face job scarcity, especially in northern states, driving internal migration.
4. Digital activism is growing. Hashtag movements on issues like #FarmersProtest or #ExamReform show how quickly Gen Z can mobilise narratives.

However, India's scale and institutional resilience – a functioning election system, judiciary, and media – act as buffers against sudden collapse.

Why India's Case Is Unique

1. **Strong Democratic Framework** – India's vibrant democracy allows dissent within the system – protests are often institutionalized rather than revolutionary.
2. **Absorptive Capacity of Politics** – Youth discontent finds expression through electoral politics, civil-society engagement, and social movements rather than regime change.
3. **Federalism as a Safety Valve** – State governments provide alternative models of governance (e.g., Kerala's local governance, Gujarat's industrialization, Tamil Nadu's welfare schemes).
4. **Digital Public Infrastructure** – Platforms like *Aadhaar*, *UPI*, and *Digi Locker* have improved transparency, even if corruption hasn't vanished.
5. **Migration as Pressure Relief** – Interstate mobility offers economic escape valves, preventing mass youth stagnation seen in smaller nations.

Concerns and Risks

Despite these strengths, several red flags remain –

1. Persistent petty corruption in local offices, police, and judiciary.
2. Institutional fatigue – slow justice delivery and politicisation of bureaucracy.
3. Information manipulation – disinformation on social media can convert discontent into polarisation.
4. Economic inequalities – regional and caste disparities fuel alienation.
5. Crisis of trust – when transparency erodes, even reform efforts are doubted.

If ignored, these could trigger localised unrest or a trust deficit between youth and the state.

Role of Institutions

Institutions remain the of first line defence against political breakdown.

1. **Election Commission** – Must ensure fair competition and transparency in political funding.
 2. **Judiciary** – Needs to uphold rule of law without delay or bias.
 3. **Media and Civil Society** – Should act as watchdogs, not echo chambers.
 4. **Anti-Corruption Agencies** – CVC, CBI, and Lokpal must act independently and decisively.
- Strengthening these institutions will reduce the perception that corruption is "inevitable."

Role of the Government

1. **Youth Employment Focus** – Expanding apprenticeship programs, start-up incentives, and skilling schemes under *PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana*.
2. **Transparency in Political Funding** – Replace opaque mechanisms like *electoral bonds* with publicly auditable systems.

3. **Digital Governance** – Expand e-governance with grievance redressal tools accessible at local levels.
4. **Social Media Engagement** – Use official digital channels to build trust and counter misinformation.
5. **Strengthen Education and Values** – Civic education should cultivate ethical citizenship, reducing susceptibility to populism.

Historical Lessons

India's past shows that youth discontent can transform into reform movements when channelled positively.

JP Movement (1974) – Began as a student protest against corruption and evolved into a major democratic reform.

Anna Hazare Movement (2011) – Sparked the Lokpal Act and re-energised public debate on accountability. The lesson is clear – youth anger must be harnessed, not suppressed.

Conclusion

Gen Z uprisings across the world represent a generational demand for honesty, opportunity, and responsive governance. Their revolts are not merely against individual leaders but against systems that ignore accountability. For India, this is a moment for introspection – to reform institutions, tackle everyday corruption, and create genuine employment opportunities. If India can bridge the gap between governance and aspiration, it will avoid unrest and instead transform its youthful energy into a force for nation-building and democratic renewal.

Main Practice Question

1. "Global Gen Z revolts reflect a new era of digitally-driven accountability movements. What lessons can India draw from these youth-led uprisings in strengthening governance and combating corruption?" (250 words)

Answering Guidelines

1. Introduction (40–50 words) – Define Gen Z and briefly mention recent youth-led revolts (Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Madagascar). State the core idea – youth frustration over corruption, unemployment, and poor governance.

2. Body (150–170 words)

A. Global Overview

1. Mention common causes – corruption, joblessness, poor governance, digital mobilisation.
2. Highlight Transparency International data showing poor corruption scores.

B. Lessons for India

1. Strengthen anti-corruption institutions (Lokpal, CVC, Judiciary).
2. Improve employment and skill training schemes.
3. Foster digital transparency (open data, e-governance).
4. Promote civic education and youth engagement in policy-making.
5. Ensure transparency in political funding and ethical governance.

3. Conclusion (30–40 words) – Conclude with the idea that India must harness Gen Z's energy for reform, not revolution. "A government that listens to its youth prevents rebellion and builds renewal."