

Political Awareness, Governance Preference, and Leadership Orientations among Generation Z in Nepal

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Abstract

Generation Z is emerging as a vital political force in Nepal, significantly influenced by digital technologies and social media. They constitute a substantial part of the electorate and future political leadership. Nonetheless, there is a lack of empirical research on their political awareness, governance preference, and opinions on leadership, which is essential for Nepal as it aims to strengthen its federal democratic-republican framework minimising challenges such as political instability and declining public trust in institutions.

This study examined the political awareness and governance preference of Generation Z undergraduate students in Nepal, analyzing variables like gender and academic programme using data from five hundred forty eight (n = 548) students. Results showed moderate political awareness, a preference for parliamentary governance, and youth-oriented leadership. Gender influenced leadership preference slightly, but governance preference had no strong correlations with demographic factors. Notable differences in political awareness were found across academic programs, while semester differences were absent. The findings suggest that generational identity is a key factor in shaping political attitudes, highlighting the need for improved civic education and engagement in Nepal's higher educational institutions.

Keywords: generation Z, governance preference, leadership preference, political awareness, youth participation

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1. Introduction

The emergence of Generation Z as a politically active generation has transformed democratic participation worldwide. Born into an era characterised by digital communication, globalisation, and unprecedented access to information, Generation Z differs substantially from previous generations in the ways political knowledge is acquired, political opinions are formed, and civic participation is expressed (Dalton, 2020). Rather than relying primarily on traditional media, contemporary young citizens increasingly obtain political information through social media platforms, online news, peer networks, and digital communities, resulting in more diverse yet often fragmented political experiences (Loader et al, 2014; Bennett & Segerberg, 2023). The above-mentioned developments have fundamentally altered the processes by which political awareness develops and by which young people evaluate governments, institutions, and political leaders.

Political awareness is a fundamental prerequisite for democratic citizenship, as informed citizens are better equipped to evaluate political institutions, participate in elections, hold governments accountable, and contribute to democratic governance

(Easton & Dennish, 1980). Political awareness encompasses knowledge of political institutions, constitutional principles, public policies, electoral systems, and current political events, as well as individuals' capacity to critically evaluate political information and engage in democratic decision-making (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). Higher levels of political awareness are consistently associated with greater civic participation, stronger democratic values, and increased confidence in political institutions, although these relationships vary across political and cultural contexts (Verba et al., 1995).

Globally, young people have become increasingly visible participants in political processes through electoral participation, social movements, digital activism, climate campaigns, and issue-based advocacy (Twenge, 2023). Research from Europe, North America, and Asia suggests that Generation Z demonstrates considerable interest in issues relating to social justice, transparency, environmental sustainability, human rights, and democratic accountability despite often expressing dissatisfaction with conventional political institutions (Norris, 2011; Dalton, 2020). Rather than indicating political disengagement,

this shift reflects changing forms of participation, in which young citizens favor more direct, participatory, and digitally mediated political engagement.

Within South Asia, youth political participation has become increasingly significant because the region possesses one of the world's youngest populations. Countries including India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal continue to experience rapid social transformation driven by urbanisation, technological expansion, educational development, and increased political pluralism (Cohen, 1988). However, political participation among young people remains constrained by unequal access to civic education, political polarization, economic insecurity, and limited institutional opportunities for meaningful engagement (UNDP, 2022). Consequently, understanding how young citizens perceive political systems and leadership has become an important area of research for strengthening democratic governance across the region.

Nepal presents a particularly important context for examining Generation Z political attitudes. Since the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal in 2015, the country has undergone significant political restructuring through the establishment of a federal democratic

republic. Despite constitutional reforms, Nepal continues to face challenges related to political instability, frequent government changes, declining public confidence in political institutions, corruption, governance effectiveness, and youth outmigration (Subedi & Thapa, 2023). Simultaneously, young people constitute a substantial proportion of the electorate and increasingly demand greater political representation, accountability, transparency, and opportunities to participate in decision-making. The growing prominence of youth-led political campaigns and independent candidates further illustrates changing political expectations among younger generations (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017).

Universities occupy a particularly influential position in shaping political awareness because higher education institutions provide opportunities for civic learning, critical thinking, leadership development, and exposure to diverse political perspectives (Downs, 1957). Academic programs, peer interactions, extracurricular activities, and institutional environments collectively influence students' political attitudes and democratic engagement. Nevertheless, empirical evidence regarding whether academic disciplines

or stages of university education significantly influence political awareness remains inconsistent across previous studies.

Although international scholarship has expanded considerably on youth political participation and digital political engagement, relatively little empirical research has examined political awareness, governance preference, and leadership preference among Generation Z in Nepal. Existing Nepalese studies have frequently focused on electoral participation, youth unemployment, migration, or general civic engagement while paying comparatively less attention to governance preference and perceptions of political leadership (Acharya, 2024). Furthermore, few studies have investigated whether demographic variables, academic background, political awareness, and political participation significantly shape governance and leadership preference among university students. These gaps limit both theoretical understanding and evidence-based policymaking concerning youth political development in Nepal (Subedi & Thapa, 2023; UNDP Nepal, 2014).

The present study addresses these gaps by examining political awareness, governance preference, and leadership

preference among Generation Z university students. Using survey data collected from 548 undergraduate students, the study explores the relationships among demographic characteristics, political awareness, governance preference, and leadership orientations. The statistical analyses demonstrate that most respondents possess moderate political awareness, exhibit a preference for parliamentary governance, strongly support youth-oriented leadership, and show relatively limited variation across demographic and educational characteristics (UNDP, 2014). However, gender significantly influences leader preference and academic programme is associated with differences in political awareness. The above-mentioned findings provide important insights into the evolving political attitudes of Nepalese youth and contribute empirical evidence to contemporary debates concerning democratic participation and generational political change. The above-mentioned interpretations are grounded in the statistical analyses reported in the uploaded dataset (Subedi & Thapa, 2023).

Nepal's democratic consolidation depends substantially on the political engagement of younger citizens. However, despite Generation Z

representing a significant proportion of the country's population and future electorate, relatively little is known about their political awareness, governance preference, and leadership orientations (Downs, 1957). Existing research has rarely examined these dimensions simultaneously or assessed whether demographic and educational characteristics influence these political attitudes. Without such evidence, policymakers, universities, and political institutions lack a comprehensive understanding of how Nepalese youth perceive democratic governance and political leadership (Acharya, 2024).

Based on the research problems of this study, the following research questions were generated: what is the level of political awareness among generation Z university students?, which governance system is most preferred by generation Z students?, what type of political leadership orientation do generation Z students prefer?, does gender significantly influence governance and leadership preference?, do academic programs, political awareness, political participation, and semester significantly influence political awareness, governance preference, or leadership preference?

The purpose of this study was to examine

the political awareness, governance preference, and leadership preference of Generation Z university students in Nepal, and to determine whether demographic characteristics, academic program, semester of study, and political awareness and participation significantly influence governance and leadership preference.

This study intends to assess the level of political awareness among Generation Z university students in Nepal, identify students' preferred forms of democratic governance, examine students' preference regarding political leadership, determine whether gender, academic programme, political awareness, political participation, and semester of study significantly influence governance and leadership preference, and Compare political awareness across academic programs and semesters of study.

Based on the objectives of this research, the hypotheses are:

H₁: Gender is significantly associated with governance preference.

H₂: Gender is significantly associated with leader preference.

H₃: Academic program is significantly associated with governance preference.

H₄: Political awareness is significantly

associated with governance preference.

H₅: Political awareness is significantly associated with leadership preference.

H₆: Political participation is significantly associated with leader preference.

H₇: There is significant difference in political awareness score across academic programs.

2. Literature review

Political awareness among young people has become an increasingly important area of inquiry because informed citizens are fundamental to democratic governance. Political awareness encompasses knowledge of political institutions, electoral processes, constitutional rights, public policies, and current political events, as well as the ability to critically evaluate political information and participate meaningfully in democratic decision-making (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). In the digital era, Generation Z has developed political awareness through diverse information channels, including social media, online news platforms, educational institutions, peer interactions, and civic organisations. Unlike previous generations, Generation Z acquires political knowledge in highly networked environments where information is abundant but varies considerably in

credibility. Consequently, researchers increasingly recognise that political awareness extends beyond factual knowledge to include political efficacy, civic responsibility, and democratic values (Dalton, 2020).

Recent empirical evidence demonstrates that Generation Z exhibits political engagement that differs from previous generations. Rather than expressing political apathy, young citizens increasingly participate through issue-based campaigns, online activism, community volunteering, and digital advocacy. Studies conducted across Europe and North America indicate that Generation Z tends to value transparency, accountability, environmental sustainability, social justice, and participatory governance more strongly than conventional partisan politics (Loader et al., 2014; Theocharis & van Deth, 2017). Social media has substantially expanded opportunities for political learning and civic participation while simultaneously exposing young people to misinformation, ideological polarization, and selective information consumption. Consequently, political awareness among Generation Z develops through complex interactions between educational institutions, family influences, peer networks, and digital media ecosystems (Dalton, 2020).

Within South Asia, political awareness among university students has received increasing scholarly attention because the region possesses one of the world's youngest populations. Research conducted in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka consistently demonstrates that higher education contributes positively to civic engagement and democratic participation by promoting critical thinking, political discussion, and exposure to diverse viewpoints. However, these studies also reveal that educational attainment alone does not guarantee high levels of political awareness, as socio-economic conditions, family political socialization, media consumption, and institutional trust substantially influence political attitudes (UNDP, 2022). The above-mentioned findings suggest that political awareness should be understood as a multidimensional process shaped by both formal education and broader social experiences.

Research on Nepalese youth has similarly identified changing patterns of political participation since the country's democratic transition. Following the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal in 2015, universities have increasingly become important spaces for civic learning and political discussion. Nevertheless, previous studies suggest

that many university students remain only moderately informed about constitutional arrangements, governance structures, and public policy despite expressing considerable interest in political change (UNDP & UNICEF, 2023). Civic education programs within higher education remain uneven across institutions, resulting in differences in political literacy among students from various academic backgrounds. Consequently, scholars have argued that strengthening political education within universities represents an important strategy for consolidating democratic citizenship in Nepal (Acharya, 2024).

Governance preference is another important dimension of political behaviour, as citizens' evaluations of alternative governance systems reflect broader perceptions of democratic legitimacy, institutional effectiveness, and political accountability. Comparative political research indicates that preference for parliamentary, presidential, or semi-presidential systems are influenced by historical experience, constitutional traditions, institutional performance, political trust, and perceived governmental effectiveness rather than demographic characteristics alone (Lijphart, 2012). Young citizens frequently evaluate governance

systems pragmatically, emphasising transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and policy effectiveness rather than institutional design itself (Bhattra, 2024).

Recent comparative studies have shown that younger generations increasingly prioritise governance quality over ideological commitments. Research from several emerging democracies suggests that young people are more concerned with government performance, corruption control, employment opportunities, and public service delivery than with constitutional structures alone (Dalton, 2020). Consequently, governance preference often remain relatively stable across demographic groups because evaluations are shaped primarily by perceptions of governmental effectiveness rather than personal characteristics. Such findings align with evidence indicating that political awareness does not necessarily determine support for particular governance systems, as institutional preference often emerge from broader social and political experiences (Bista, 2019).

Leadership preference has become another central topic in contemporary political science as younger generations increasingly demand

greater representation of youth in political institutions. Numerous empirical studies find that Generation Z expresses greater confidence in younger political leaders perceived as more innovative, technologically competent, transparent, and responsive to societal needs. Younger leaders are frequently associated with reform-oriented governance, digital communication, collaborative leadership, and reduced political polarisation (Acharya, 2024). Conversely, traditional political elites are sometimes perceived as less responsive to contemporary social and economic challenges (Eagly & Carli, 2008). The above-mentioned changing perceptions have encouraged political parties worldwide to recruit younger candidates and incorporate youth issues into their policy agendas.

Empirical evidence also suggests that gender can influence perceptions of political leadership. Several international studies report that female university students often demonstrate stronger support for collaborative, inclusive, and transformational leadership styles than their male counterparts. Women frequently express greater support for political reform, participatory governance, and leadership diversity, whereas male respondents sometimes

demonstrate relatively greater acceptance of traditional leadership structures. Nevertheless, these gender differences are generally modest, indicating that broader generational experiences often exert stronger influence than gender alone (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Academic discipline represents another factor that may influence political awareness. Research conducted across higher education institutions indicates that students enrolled in the social sciences, political science, law, and the humanities frequently report higher levels of political knowledge than students enrolled in technical or professional programs because their curricula provide greater exposure to civic issues, governance, and public policy (Theocharis & van Deth, 2017). However, more recent investigations demonstrate that disciplinary differences have become less pronounced because digital media allows students across all academic fields to access political information independently. Consequently, curriculum differences explain only a modest proportion of variation in political awareness, while extracurricular activities, media exposure, and personal political interest remain more influential determinants

(Bhatta & Karki, 2024).

Political participation has consistently been regarded as an important predictor of political knowledge and democratic engagement. Classical models suggest reciprocal relationships between participation and political awareness; whereby politically active individuals acquire greater political knowledge while increased knowledge encourages further participation. However, recent studies of Generation Z indicate that political participation increasingly occurs through informal channels, such as online activism, issue advocacy, and community engagement, rather than through traditional party politics. Accordingly, participation may not necessarily align with preference for particular governance systems or political leaders, because different forms of participation serve distinct civic purposes (Subedi & Thapa, 2024).

Collectively, previous empirical studies suggest several consistent patterns. First, Generation Z generally demonstrates moderate to relatively high political awareness but increasingly acquires political knowledge through digital environments rather than conventional political institutions (Bennelt & Segerberg, 2023). Second, young citizens broadly support democratic

participation and transparent governance, while evaluating governance systems primarily by institutional effectiveness. Third, youth-oriented leadership receives substantial support across many national contexts because younger leaders are perceived as representing innovation, inclusion, and future-oriented governance. Finally, demographic characteristics explain only a limited amount of variation in political attitudes, whereas political socialisation, civic engagement, institutional trust, and generational experiences exert considerably greater influence (UNDP, 2022).

Despite the above mentioned advances, important research gaps remain. Few studies have simultaneously examined political awareness, governance preference, and leadership preference within a single analytical framework among Nepalese university students. Moreover, limited evidence exists on whether political awareness significantly influences governance preference or whether academic program and semester of study meaningfully contribute to political awareness. The present study addresses these gaps by integrating descriptive analyses, chi-square tests, and ANOVA to examine multiple dimensions of Generation Z political

behaviour within Nepal's evolving democratic system. The statistical findings indicating moderate political awareness, widespread support for youth-oriented leadership, and limited demographic differences provide an important contribution to the growing literature on youth political behaviour in emerging democracies.

Theoretical foundation

This study is anchored in four complementary theoretical perspectives: Political Socialisation Theory, the Civic Voluntarism Model, Generational Theory, and Rational Choice Theory.

Political Socialisation Theory explains how individuals acquire political values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours through interactions with family, educational institutions, peer groups, media, and political organisations (Easton & Dennis, 1980). Universities are among the most influential agents of political socialisation because they encourage critical thinking, civic discussion, and democratic participation. The finding show that most respondents demonstrated moderate political awareness suggests that political socialisation among Generation Z is ongoing and influenced by multiple institutional and social contexts rather than by formal education alone (Lijphart, 2012).

The Civic Voluntarism Model proposed by Verba et al. (1995) argues that political participation depends on resources, psychological engagement, and recruitment networks. Individuals participate politically when they possess sufficient civic skills, political interest, and opportunities for engagement. The absence of significant relationships between political participation and leadership preference observed in this study indicates that participation alone may not determine political attitudes among Generation Z. Instead, broader generational experiences and civic values appear to shape leadership preference more strongly.

Generational Theory, proposed by Mannheim (1952), suggests that individuals born in similar historical periods develop common political values because they collectively experience major social, technological, and political transformations. Generation Z has grown up during rapid technological advancement, digital communication, globalization, and democratic transition. The above-mentioned shared experiences contribute to common expectations regarding transparency, accountability, innovation, and youth representation. The overwhelming support for youth-oriented leadership identified in this study aligns closely

with Generational Theory, indicating that generational identity influences political preference more strongly than demographic characteristics such as gender or academic program.

Rational Choice Theory posits that citizens evaluate political institutions based on expected benefits, institutional performance, and policy outcomes (Downs, 1957). Governance preference, therefore, reflect reasoned evaluations rather than purely ideological commitments. The finding that parliamentary governance received the greatest support suggests that respondents evaluated governance systems by perceived effectiveness within Nepal's constitutional context rather than by demographic characteristics alone.

Together, the above-mentioned four theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how political awareness develops, how governance preference emerge, and why Generation Z demonstrates strong support for youth leadership despite relatively limited demographic variation.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework highlights that gender, academic programme, and semester of study are background characteristics that may influence political awareness (Dekker et al.,

2020). Political awareness, together with political participation, is expected to shape students' preference for governance and leadership. Governance preference is conceptualised as respondents preferred democratic system (parliamentary, presidential, or prime ministerial), whereas leadership preference represents support for traditional or youth-oriented political leadership.

The framework also assumes that political awareness mediates the relationship between educational experiences and political attitudes. Although academic programs may provide different opportunities for civic learning, political awareness ultimately develops through broader political socialisation processes that include media exposure, peer interaction, family influence, and institutional experiences. Similarly,

leadership preference are expected to emerge from generational values emphasising innovation, representation, and democratic accountability.

Conceptual framework figure for the manuscript

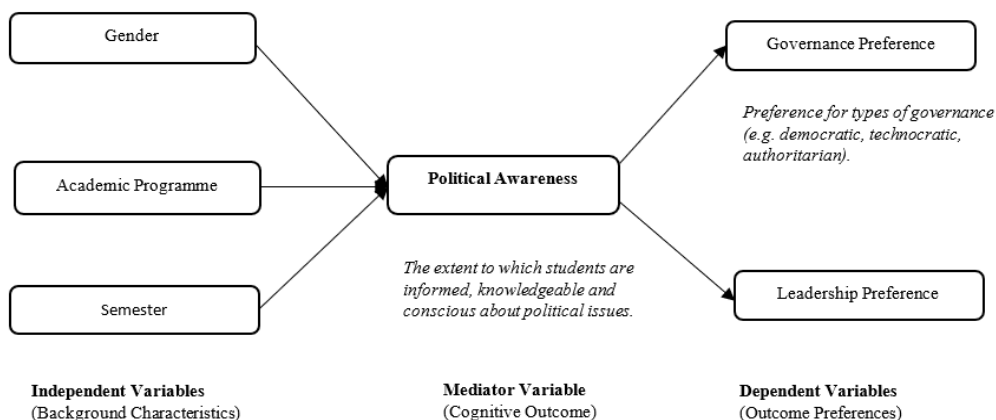
This framework aligns directly with the statistical analyses reported in the study, including the chi-square tests, ANOVA, and post hoc comparisons, and provides a theoretically coherent basis for interpreting the relationships among demographic characteristics, political awareness, governance preference, and leadership preference.

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to investigate Generation Z undergraduate students' political awareness, governance preference, and leadership orientations

Figure 1

Conceptual framework of the study



Source: Based on Dekker et al. (2020)

in Nepal. A quantitative approach was adopted because it facilitates the objective measurement of attitudes, perceptions, and behavioural tendencies through standardised instruments and enables statistical examination of relationships among variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The cross-sectional design was considered appropriate because data were collected from respondents at a single point in time, allowing the assessment of political awareness and preference across different demographic and academic characteristics without manipulating any study variables (Bryman, 2021). The study was guided by the positivist research paradigm, which assumes that political attitudes and behavioural preference can be objectively measured, quantified, and generalised using empirical evidence and statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Population and sample

The study population comprised Generation Z undergraduate university students enrolled in higher education institutions in Nepal. Generation Z generally refers to individuals born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s and represents a cohort that experienced political socialisation during an era of democratic transition, rapid technological advancement,

and extensive digital communication (Twenge, 2023). Undergraduate students were selected because educational institutions serve as important environments for civic learning, democratic engagement, leadership development, and political participation. The target population included students enrolled in six academic programmes: Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), Bachelor of Computer Application (BCA), Bachelor of Hotel Management (BHM), Bachelor of Engineering in Civil Engineering, Bachelor of Engineering in Electrical and Electronics Engineering, and Bachelor of Engineering in Computer Engineering. Students from the first to the eighth semester were included to capture perspectives from different stages of university education. A total of 548 valid respondents participated in the study. Completed questionnaire was screened for completeness and consistency before data entry, and only fully completed questionnaire was included in the final statistical analyses.

Sampling technique

A stratified convenience sampling technique was employed to recruit study participants. Initially, students were stratified by academic program and semester to ensure representation across

different disciplines and levels of study. Subsequently, respondents who satisfied the inclusion criteria and voluntarily agreed to participate were selected using convenience sampling within each stratum. Although probability sampling is preferable for maximising external validity, stratified convenience sampling was considered appropriate due to institutional accessibility, time constraints, and the need to obtain adequate representation across multiple academic programs (Etikan & Bala, 2017).

Research instrument

Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire developed from prior empirical studies and established theoretical frameworks on political awareness, democratic governance, political participation, and leadership preference. The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first section collected demographic information, including age, gender, academic programme, and semester. The second section measured political awareness through items assessing respondents' knowledge of political institutions, constitutional principles, democratic processes, elections, and current political affairs. Responses to these items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly

disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Individual item scores were aggregated to obtain a composite political awareness score, which was subsequently categorised into low, moderate, and high levels for descriptive and inferential analyses.

The third section assessed respondents' governance preference by asking them to indicate their preferred system of government among three categories: parliamentary, presidential, and prime ministerial. The fourth section examined leadership preference and political participation by measuring respondents' support for traditional and youth-oriented political leadership and their previous involvement in political activities. The use of categorical response options for governance preference, leadership preference, and political participation enabled the appropriate application of chi-square tests of independence.

Validity and reliability of the instrument

The questionnaire was reviewed by experts in political science, governance, and educational research to establish content validity (Adhikari, 2022). The experts evaluated the relevance, clarity, comprehensiveness, and appropriateness of each questionnaire item in relation to the study objectives.

Their recommendations resulted in revisions that improved wording, eliminated ambiguity, and strengthened content coverage (Polit & Beck, 2008). Construct validity was supported by developing questionnaire items grounded in established theoretical perspectives, including Political Socialisation Theory, the Civic Voluntarism Model, Generational Theory, and Rational Choice Theory.

Prior to the main survey, the questionnaire was pilot tested with respondents whose characteristics were similar to those of the target population. Feedback obtained during the pilot study was used to improve the instrument's clarity and organisation. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with values of 0.70 or above considered acceptable for research purposes (Hair et al., 2010; Adhikari & Adhikari Rajak, 2024).

Data collection procedure

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the relevant university authorities before the commencement of data collection. Eligible students received an explanation of the study objectives, procedures, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality of responses, and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without

penalty. After obtaining informed consent, questionnaires were distributed during scheduled academic sessions and collected immediately after completion to maximize the response rate and minimize missing data. Completed questionnaires were reviewed for completeness and coding accuracy before being entered into IBM SPSS Statistics for analysis.

Ethical considerations

The study complied with internationally accepted ethical principles governing research involving human participants. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents before questionnaire administration. Participants were assured that their identities would remain anonymous and that all information collected would be used exclusively for academic research purposes. No personally identifiable information was recorded, thereby protecting participants' privacy and confidentiality. The study adhered to the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, justice, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity in accordance with internationally recognised research ethics guidelines (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Data analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS

Statistics (Version XX). Prior to statistical analysis, the dataset was screened for completeness, coding accuracy, missing values, and inconsistencies. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and 95% confidence intervals, were computed to summarise respondents' demographic characteristics, political awareness, governance preference, leadership preference, and political participation.

Pearson's chi-square test of independence was employed to examine associations between categorical variables, including gender and governance preference; gender and leadership preference; academic program and governance preference; political awareness and governance preference; political awareness and leadership preference; and political participation and leadership preference. Statistically significant associations were identified, Cramer's V was calculated to estimate the strength of the relationships. Effect sizes were interpreted according to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, whereby values of approximately 0.10, 0.30, and 0.50 indicate small, medium, and large associations, respectively.

Differences in mean political awareness scores across academic programs and

semesters were examined using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Before conducting ANOVA, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was assessed using Levene's test. Where this assumption was satisfied, standard ANOVA procedures were applied. For statistically significant ANOVA results, eta squared (η^2) was calculated to estimate the proportion of variance in political awareness explained by the independent variable. Statistical significance for all analyses was determined at a two-tailed alpha level of **0.05**. The combination of descriptive and inferential statistical techniques enabled a comprehensive examination of Generation Z students' political awareness, governance preference, and leadership orientations across demographic and educational characteristics.

4. Results

This paper presents the results in different tables and graphical images.

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 1

Demographics of respondents

	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Age Group		
18 - 20	278	50.7
21 -23	242	44.2
24 – 25	28	5.1
Gender		
Male	292	53.3

Female	256	46.7
Academic Programme		
BBA	216	39.4
BHM	59	10.8
BCA	180	32.8
BE (Civil)	44	8.0
BE (E&E)	8	1.5
BE (Computer)	41	7.5
Semester		
First	102	18.6
Second	8	1.5
Third	171	31.2
Fifth	105	19.2
Sixth	4	0.7
First	102	18.6
Second	8	1.5
Total	548	100.0

The study involved 548 respondents, with the majority in the 18–20 age group (50.7%), followed by those aged 21–23 years (44.2%), and only 5.1% aged 24–25 years. This distribution indicates that the sample is heavily concentrated among younger members of Generation Z, reflecting the typical age structure of undergraduate students. The dominance of respondents under age 23 suggests that the findings primarily represent the political perceptions and preference of early-adulthood youth, who are often in a formative stage of political socialization and identity development (see Table 1).

Female respondents constituted a slightly larger proportion of the sample (53.3%) compared to male respondents (46.7%). The relatively balanced

gender distribution enhances the study's representativeness and enables meaningful comparisons between male and female students on political awareness, leadership preference, and governance choices (see Table 1)

The largest proportion of respondents was enrolled in BBA (39.4%) and BCA (32.8%) programs, while students from engineering disciplines represented a smaller proportion of the sample. This distribution indicates that the findings are influenced primarily by students from management and computing backgrounds. Differences in academic exposure, curriculum content, and civic engagement opportunities across disciplines may contribute to variations in political awareness and governance preference.

Most respondents were from the third semester (31.2%), followed by the fifth semester (19.2%) and first semester (18.6%). The very small representation of sixth-semester students (0.7%) suggests caution in interpreting semester-specific findings, as unequal group sizes may affect statistical precision. Nevertheless, the inclusion of students from multiple academic stages provides a broader understanding of political attitudes across different levels of university

Table 2

Political awareness level

Level of awareness	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Low	103	18.8
Moderate	328	59.9
High	117	21.4
Total	548	100.0

experience (see Table 1).

The findings reveal that the majority of respondents (59.9%) demonstrated a moderate level of political awareness, while 21.4% showed high awareness and 18.8% exhibited low awareness. This pattern suggests that although most Generation Z students possess a basic understanding of political affairs, relatively fewer have reached a highly informed level of political engagement. The predominance of moderate awareness may indicate that students are exposed to political information through media and educational institutions but may not consistently engage in deeper political analysis or participation.

From a broader perspective, the findings imply that Generation Z students are not politically indifferent; rather,

they possess an intermediate level of political consciousness that could be enhanced through civic education initiatives, political literacy programs, and opportunities for active participation (see Table 2).

Governance preference

Among the respondents, the parliamentary system emerged as the most preferred form of government (38.1%), followed by the presidential system (31.9%) and the prime ministerial system (29.9%). Although the parliamentary system received the highest support, the relatively small differences among the three options indicate that no single governance model overwhelmingly dominates students' preference (see Table 3).

The results show that the parliamentary

Table 3

Gender-wise governance preference

Gender	Governance type			Total	Chi-square
	Parliamentary	Presidential	Prime Ministerial		
Male	93(16.97%)	78(14.23%)	85(15.51%)	256(46.72%)	2.46 (0.29)
Female	116(21.17%)	97(17.7%)	79(14.42%)	292(53.28%)	
Total	209(38.14%)	175(31.93%)	164(29.93%)	548(100%)	

Table 4

Gender wise leadership preference

Gender	Leadership type		Total	Chi-square
	Tested	Untested		
Male	18(3.28%)	238(43.43%)	256(46.72%)	5.559 (0.018)
Female	8(1.46%)	284(51.82%)	292(53.28%)	
Total	26(4.74%)	522(95.26%)	548(100%)	

system was the most preferred governance model, selected by 38.1%, followed by the presidential and Prime Ministerial systems with 31.9% and 29.9% of individuals, respectively (see Table 3).

Although minor variations exist in the distribution of preference across genders, these differences are not large enough to conclude that male and female students systematically differ in their preferred governance systems. This finding suggests that governance preference among Generation Z students are likely shaped by factors other than gender, such as political knowledge, ideological beliefs, social experiences, or exposure to political discourse. In practice, the results indicate that governance preference are relatively uniform among

male and female respondents (see Table 3).

The analysis found a statistically significant association between gender and leader preference. A closer examination of the cross-tabulation shows that female respondents exhibited stronger support for young leaders compared to male respondents. While support for traditional leaders remained low across both genders, males showed a greater preference for traditional leadership than females (see Table 4).

This finding implies that gender may influence perceptions of political leadership. Female students appear more inclined toward youthful leadership, potentially reflecting greater openness to innovation, change, and generational representation in politics.

Table 5

Gender-wise support for leadership categories

Gender	Leadership type			Total	Chi-square
	Tested	Both category	Untested		
Male	11(2.01%)	73(13.32%)	172(31.39%)	256(46.72%)	4.186 (0.123)
Female	5(0.91%)	97(17.7%)	190(34.67%)	292(53.28%)	
Total	16(2.92%)	170(31.02%)	362(66.06%)	548(100%)	

Note: Cramer's $V = 0.1$

Table 6

Program-wise governance preference

Programme	Governance type			Total	Chi-square
	Parliament	Presidential	Prime ministerial		
BBA	96(17.52%)	65(11.86%)	55(10.04%)	216(39.42%)	18.19 (0.13)
BHM	21(3.83%)	18(3.28%)	20(3.65%)	59(10.77%)	
BCA	65(11.86%)	61(11.13%)	54(9.85%)	180(32.85%)	
BE (Civil)	9(1.64%)	13(2.37%)	22(4.01%)	44(8.03%)	
BE(E&E)	1(0.18%)	3(0.55%)	4(0.73%)	8(1.46%)	
BE (Computer)	17(3.1%)	15(2.74%)	9(1.64%)	41(7.48%)	
Total	209(38.14%)	175(31.93%)	164(29.93%)	548(100%)	

The results show that the effect size is small, indicating that although the relationship is statistically significant, gender explains only a modest proportion of variation in leader preference (see Tables 5).

Gender and leadership support

The results indicate no statistically significant association between gender and leadership support categories. Both male and female respondents predominantly supported youth-oriented leadership, suggesting a broad consensus among Generation Z students regarding the importance of youth participation in political leadership. The lack of

significant differences implies that support for youth-oriented leadership transcends gender boundaries (Table 5). The chi-square test found no significant association between academic programs and governance preference. Students from management, computing, hospitality, and engineering programs exhibited broadly similar patterns of governance preference. Although certain programs showed slightly higher support for particular governance systems, these variations were insufficient to establish a statistically meaningful relationship. This finding suggests that academic specialisation does not substantially

Table 7

Political awareness and governance preference

Political awareness	Governance type			Total	Chi-square
	Parliamentary	Presidential	Prime ministerial		
Low	38(6.93%)	28(5.11%)	37(6.75%)	103(18.8%)	3.76 (0.438)
Moderate	122(22.26%)	113(20.62%)	93(16.97%)	328(59.85%)	
High	49(8.94%)	34(6.2%)	34(6.2%)	117(21.35%)	
Total	209(38.14%)	175(31.93%)	164(29.93%)	548(100%)	

Table 9

Political awareness and leader preference

Political awareness	Leadership type			Total	Chi-square
	Traditional	Mixed	Youth oriented		
Low	3(0.55%)	34(6.2%)	66(12.04%)	103(18.8%)	5.629 (0.229)
Moderate	6(1.09%)	103(18.8%)	219(39.96%)	328(59.85%)	
High	7(1.28%)	33(6.02%)	77(14.05%)	117(21.35%)	
Total	16(2.92%)	170(31.02%)	362(66.06%)	548(100%)	

influence students' preference regarding national governance structures (see Table 6).

No significant association was observed between political awareness and governance preference. This finding indicates that students with low, moderate, and high political awareness tend to exhibit similar preference regarding governance systems. Increased awareness does not necessarily translate into support for a particular political structure. The result suggests that governance preference may be influenced more strongly by personal beliefs, cultural context, or political experiences than by awareness alone (see Table 7).

The analysis revealed no statistically significant association between political awareness and leadership support. Students across all levels of awareness displayed a strong tendency to support youth-oriented leadership. This suggests that support for younger political leaders is widespread among Generation Z and does not depend on an individual's level of political knowledge (see Table 8).

The findings show that students who actively participate in political activities and those who do not participate exhibited nearly identical preference regarding traditional versus young leaders. Therefore, participation in political activities does not appear to influence respondents' generational leadership preference. The extremely

Table 10

Political participation and leader preference

Political participation	Leader type		Total	Chi-square
	Traditional	Young		
No	20(3.65%)	405(73.91%)	425(77.55%)	0.06 (0.937)
Yes	6(1.09%)	117(21.35%)	123(22.45%)	
Total	26(4.74%)	522(95.26%)	548(100%)	

Table 11

One-way ANOVA for political awareness by academic programme

Program	Number of participants	Mean (95% CI)	SD	F-statistics
BBA	216	3.36(3.23,3.49)	0.997	2.818 (0.016)
BHM	59	3.76(3.44,4.08)	1.236	
BCA	180	3.59(3.41,3.78)	1.272	
BE(Civil)	44	3.89(3.51,4.26)	1.224	
BE(E&E)	8	3.63(2.63,4.62)	1.188	
BE(Computer)	41	3.85(3.4,4.3)	1.424	
Total	548	3.56(3.46,3.66)	1.184	

high p-value (0.937) indicates a virtually non-existent relationship between these variables (see Table 9).

The ANOVA results indicate a statistically significant difference in mean political awareness scores among students from different academic programs (see Table 10).

Students enrolled in engineering programs, particularly Civil Engineering, reported higher levels of political awareness, whereas BBA students reported the lowest.

This indicates a small effect size (2.5%), meaning that the academic program explains only a small proportion of variance in political awareness.

Since p-value=0.535, which is greater than $\alpha=0.05$, H_0 is accepted, and H_1 is rejected. Hence, we conclude that there is no significant difference in the means of political awareness across semesters (see Table 11).

Although sixth-semester students reported the highest mean awareness score ($M = 4.25$), and eighth-semester

Table 12

One-way ANOVA for political awareness level by academic program semesters

Program	Number of participants	Mean (95% CI)	SD	F-statistics
First Semester	102	3.48(3.26,3.7)	1.141	2.818 (0.016)
Second Semester	8	4(2.91,5.09)	1.309	
Third Semester	171	3.61(3.43,3.8)	1.238	
Fifth Semester	105	3.51(3.3,3.73)	1.128	
Sixth Semester	4	4.25(2.73,5.77)	0.957	
Seventh Semester	78	3.68(3.38,3.98)	1.314	
Eighth Semester	80	3.44(3.2,3.67)	1.054	
Total	548	3.56(3.46,3.66)	1.184	

students reported the lowest ($M = 3.44$), these differences were not statistically significant.

This suggests that progression through university semesters does not automatically lead to increased political awareness. Political awareness may instead be influenced by external factors such as media exposure, family background, social networks, and personal political interest. Furthermore, Levene's Test was non-significant ($p = 0.249$), confirming that the homogeneity of variance assumption was satisfied and that the ANOVA results are reliable (see Table 12).

The findings demonstrate that Generation Z students generally possess a moderate level of political awareness and exhibit a strong preference for youth-oriented leadership. Gender significantly influences leader preference, while governance preference remain largely independent of gender, academic program, political awareness, and political participation. Political awareness differs slightly across academic programs but remains consistent across semesters. At last, the results suggest that generational identity and youth representation are more influential in shaping political attitudes than demographic or educational

characteristics.

5. Discussion

The present study investigates the political awareness, governance preference, and leadership orientations of Generation Z university students in Nepal. Findings indicate a moderate level of political awareness among respondents, who favour parliamentary governance and show strong support for youth-centered political leadership. Notably, gender influences leadership preference but not governance preference, while political awareness varies modestly by academic program but not by semester. The moderate level of political awareness suggests potential for increased civic engagement, shaped by factors such as media exposure and personal interest, rather than solely by formal education.

The respondents' preference for parliamentary governance reflects confidence in democratic institutions amidst political instability, aligning with studies showing that young citizens prioritize effectiveness and accountability over ideological commitments. Furthermore, there is a significant preference for youth leaders, emphasizing a generational shift towards expectations for innovation and responsiveness in political leadership.

Importantly, gender shapes perceptions of leadership, with female students favouring collaborative leadership styles more than their male peers. However, neither political awareness nor participation significantly correlates with governance or leadership preference, suggesting that personal experiences and generational values are more influential than educational background.

The study also observed differences in political awareness across academic programs, with Civil Engineering students being the most politically aware; however, these differences have a modest impact. Additionally, academic progression does not significantly enhance political awareness, emphasising that political socialization occurs through various social institutions.

In summary, generational identity plays a more substantial role in shaping political attitudes than demographic factors, underscoring the need for enhanced civic education and opportunities for youth engagement in democratic processes in Nepal.

6. Conclusion

This study examines the political awareness, governance preference, and leadership orientations of Generation Z university students in Nepal, based on a survey of 548 undergraduates. It

finds moderate political awareness, a preference for parliamentary governance, and strong support for youth-centered political leadership, with gender significantly influencing leadership preference but not governance choices. Additionally, political awareness shows slight variation by academic discipline.

The research connects to Political Socialization Theory and Generational Theory, suggesting that Generation Z's political attitudes are shaped more by shared experiences and digital communication than by demographic factors. It highlights the need for improved civic education, critical media literacy, and experiential learning in universities, urging policymakers to facilitate meaningful youth participation in governance.

Limitations include the cross-sectional design, which limits causal inference, and the study's focus on university students, which limits generalizability. The study recommends that future research adopt longitudinal and mixed-methods approaches to deepen understanding of Generation Z's political perspectives and enhance democratic engagement among young citizens.

Transparency statement

The author confirms that this study has been conducted with honesty and in full adherence to ethical guidelines.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare there are no conflicts of interest.

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