ISSN: 0972 5563

Journal of Peace Studies

A Peer-Reviewed Quarterly



Journal Homepage: https://www.icpsnet.org/journal-of-peace-studies

From the Editor's Desk:

The New Grammar of Dissent: Youth Movements, Democratic Resilience and the Quest for Change

To cite this article: Journal of Peace Studies. (2026), "The New Grammar of Dissent: Youth Movements, Democratic Resilience and the Quest for Change", *Journal of Peace Studies*, Vol 33, Issue 3, 1-2, July – September 2026.

© 2026 Published by Centre for Peace Studies (CPS), New Delhi.

Published: 30 September 2026.

Submit your article to this journal

Vol. 33, Issue 3, July – September 2026

CENTRE FOR PEACE STUDIES, NEW DELHI, 110070
Website: www.icpsnet.org

From the Editors' Desk

The New Grammar of Dissent: Youth Movements, Democratic Resilience and the Quest for Change

A spectre of youth-led dissent is haunting not merely Europe, but much of the contemporary world. From the streets of Paris and Belgrade to Colombo, Dhaka, Kathmandu and New Delhi, a generation raised amidst unprecedented connectivity yet deepening insecurity has emerged as a powerful political force. These movements are rarely organised through traditional ideological platforms or party structures. They are spontaneous, fluid, digitally networked and driven by a profound sense of betrayal. While some have succeeded in precipitating regime change, others have yielded only cosmetic reforms. Yet all have exposed a widening gap between governing institutions and youthful aspirations.

Recent experiences in South Asia are particularly instructive. Sri Lanka's *Aragalaya* movement culminated in the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa amidst a devastating economic crisis. In Bangladesh, student-led protests transformed into a broader challenge to political authority, ultimately contributing to regime change. Nepal has repeatedly witnessed youth mobilisation against corruption and governance failures. India has experienced episodic yet significant youth participation in movements ranging from anti-corruption campaigns to protests over citizenship, employment and education. Pakistan, too, has seen growing political mobilisation among younger demographics frustrated with economic stagnation and institutional dysfunction.

What unites these seemingly disparate movements is not ideology but grievance. Youth movements today are animated by a convergence of economic precarity, perceived injustice, social exclusion, declining trust in institutions and expectations amplified by the digital age. Young people are more educated, more connected and more politically aware than any previous generation. Yet many confront shrinking opportunities, rising inequalities, unemployment and governance systems that appear distant and unresponsive. The resulting dissonance between expectations and reality often becomes the fuel for collective action.

However, the success of such movements varies significantly across countries. Regime change tends to occur not merely because protesters are numerous or determined, but because broader political and institutional conditions permit dissent to translate into political outcomes. Economic collapse, elite fragmentation, loss of governmental legitimacy, and the inability of state institutions to contain or accommodate grievances often create openings for transformational change. Sri Lanka's experience demonstrated how economic crisis can rapidly erode the social contract. Bangladesh illustrated how sustained mobilisation can acquire momentum when it resonates beyond a narrow social constituency.

Conversely, where institutions retain sufficient legitimacy, where political elites remain cohesive, or where governments successfully absorb pressure through limited concessions, dissent frequently produces only cosmetic changes. Symbolic cabinet reshuffles, promises of reform, or temporary policy adjustments may diffuse immediate tensions without addressing underlying causes. Such outcomes rarely resolve the grievances that generated mobilisation in the first place. Rather, they postpone confrontation. In these contexts, protest movements often disappear from public view only to re-emerge later, frequently with greater intensity.

Governments, therefore, must recognise an uncomfortable reality: youth-led dissent is often a symptom of institutional failure and a decline in faith in government,

rather than a threat to national stability or security. States that view protests exclusively through a security lens risk misdiagnosing the problem. The temptation to criminalise dissent, expand surveillance, or rely excessively on coercive measures may restore short-term order but often deepens long-term alienation. Sustainable stability cannot be engineered through repression alone.

Democracies, in particular, must resist the impulse to equate dissent with disorder. The capacity to accommodate protest is, in fact, one of the defining strengths of democratic systems. Dissent functions as an early warning mechanism, alerting governments to emerging social tensions before they become crises. Political systems that allow peaceful demonstrations, encourage dialogue, and institutionalise channels for citizen participation are often better equipped to manage conflict than those that suppress public expression.

This does not imply that every demand advanced by protesters should be accepted without scrutiny. Democracies must balance competing interests, safeguard public order and uphold constitutional processes. Yet engagement is almost always preferable to exclusion. Governments should approach youth movements not as adversaries but as stakeholders whose concerns merit serious consideration. Structured consultations, participatory governance mechanisms, citizens' assemblies, youth advisory councils and transparent grievance-redress systems can help bridge the growing disconnect between rulers and the ruled.

Ensuring peaceful change in the face of spontaneous outbursts requires strengthening both state capacity and democratic culture. Governments must invest in responsive institutions capable of addressing grievances before they escalate. Equally important is cultivating norms of non-violent political participation. Educational institutions, civil society organisations, media platforms and political parties all have roles to play in fostering robust yet peaceful democratic engagement. Protesters, too, bear responsibility for preserving civic spaces and rejecting violence as a political instrument.

For India, these lessons carry particular significance. As the world's largest democracy and with its rich cultural heritage that privileges dissent, it stands at the intersection of immense opportunity and considerable challenge. It possesses significant democratic advantages: competitive elections, a vibrant civil society, an independent judiciary and a diverse media ecosystem. Yet growing concerns regarding unemployment, educational access, social polarisation, urban distress and institutional trust cannot be ignored.

India's greatest strength in confronting future waves of youth dissent lies not in preventing mobilisation but in managing it democratically. The objective should be neither suppression nor capitulation but constructive engagement. Policymakers must develop mechanisms that allow citizens, especially the youth, to participate meaningfully in decision-making beyond electoral cycles. Listening should not be perceived as weakness; rather, it is a hallmark of democratic confidence.

In the end, youth movements are not anomalies within modern politics. They are expressions of societies in transition. The question confronting governments today is not whether dissent will emerge, but whether institutions possess the wisdom and flexibility to respond. Peaceful societies are not those without protest. They are those where protest becomes a pathway to dialogue, reform, and renewal rather than a precursor to instability. In an age of restless aspirations, democratic resilience will increasingly depend on the ability to transform dissent into participation and frustration into constructive change. The future of peace may well depend upon it. ■

Journal of Peace Studies

FOUNDING EDITOR
LATE PROF. RIYAZ PUNJABI

ADVISORY BOARD

SALEEM KIDWAI
SANDRA DESTRADI
NICOLAS BLAREL
RENÉ WADLOW
G BALACHANDRAN
PRAFULLA PRUSTY

EDITORIAL BOARD

NOOR AHMAD BABA
AJAY DARSHAN BEHERA
SMRUTI S PATTANAIK
P.V. RAMANA
RAJESH KHARAT
UTTAM SINHA

EDITOR
ASHOK BEHURIA

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
MOHMAD WASEEM MALLA

DESIGN
BRINDA DATTA

PRINTED & PUBLISHED BY
SHEIKH KHALID JEHANGIR
Centre for Peace Studies

Printed at:

A.M. Offsetters
Kotla Mubarakpur, New Delhi
PIN– 110 003, TEL: 2463 2395

Office Address:
157/9, Block 4, Second Floor,
Kishangarh, Vasant Kunj,
New Delhi-110070

Regd. Address:
C-11 Jangpura Extension
New Delhi – 110 014
Tel: (91-11) 49989230, +91-9810317972
http://www.icpsnet.org
Emails: cpsndjps@gmail.com;
jps@icpsnet.org

SUBSCRIPTION

In India

This Copy	Rs 350,00
Annual	
(Individual)	Rs. 1400.00
(Institutional)	Rs. 2000.00

Overseas (Air Mail)

This Copy:	US$ 15.00
	UK£ 11.00
Annual:	US$ 60.00
	UK£ 44.00

Note for readers and subscribers

We are happy to inform you that from January 2009 we have introduced the system of peer review of articles to ensure quality of publications and improve the scholarly value of our journal. We have a renowned group of scholars and academicians associated with our Centre and they are helping us in this process. We are grateful to them for their kind support and cooperation.

We would request our readers and subscribers to take note of these changes and we would, as ever, encourage them to send in research articles for publication to us. The manuscripts of research papers submitted for publication should be neatly typed in double space and the length of the papers should be ideally between 3,000-5000 words including the references. They should contain an abstract and a short introduction of the author. The authors should use Harvard Manual Style for their references. The articles can be sent to us in an electronic format, preferably Ms Word. For detailed guidelines they may send their queries to us in the following address.

Journal of Peace Studies
Research Section

Emails: cpsndjps@gmail.com, jps@icpsnet.org

Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers
RNI No. 57199/93



CENTRE FOR PEACE STUDIES
C-11, Jangpura Extension,
New Delhi – 110 014, INDIA
Tel: (91-11) 49989230, +91-9560126157, 9810317972
Websites: http://www.icpsnet.org (Main),
www.icpsorg.com (Kashmir chapter)
Emails:cpsndjps@gmail.com, jps@icpsnet.org