

NOVEMBER 19, 2025

Nepal: Unlawful Use of Force During ‘Gen Z’ Protest

Credibly Investigate Role of Security Forces, Others in Two Days of Deadly Violence
Published in

- Security forces in Nepal used disproportionate force against youth-led protests on September 8, 2025, indiscriminately firing on protesters multiple times.
- On a second day of violence, people, some apparently not linked to the “Gen Z” protest, set fire to prominent government buildings; assaulted politicians, journalists, and others; and attacked schools, businesses, and media companies.
- A new judicial commission to investigate the violence can only succeed if it acts transparently and ensures that those responsible for breaking the law are investigated and prosecuted.



Riot police fired tear gas during a protest outside parliament in Kathmandu, Nepal, September 8, 2025.

© 2025 Prabin Ranabhat/AFP via Getty Images

(New York) – Security forces in Nepal used disproportionate force against youth-led protests on September 8, 2025, Human Rights Watch said today. The interim government led by former chief justice Sushila Karki, which took charge after the prime minister was forced to resign due to the protests, should investigate the excessive use of force as well as arson and mob attacks on individuals and buildings the following day, September 9, including those who may have ordered any unlawful acts.

Human Rights Watch found that police indiscriminately fired on protesters multiple times over three hours, killing seventeen people in Kathmandu who had been demonstrating against corruption in politics and a sweeping social media ban imposed four days earlier at a “Gen Z” protest in the capital, Kathmandu, on September 8. This sparked a second day of violence on September 9, but security forces appeared to fail to act when groups of people, some apparently not linked to the Gen Z protest, set fire to prominent government buildings; assaulted politicians, journalists, and others; and attacked schools, businesses, and media companies.

“The recent violence in Nepal included serious human rights violations, and those responsible should be held accountable, whether they are security forces or political actors,” said Meenakshi Ganguly, deputy Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “The government should ensure that the investigations are independent, time-bound, and transparent, and that no one found responsible for breaking the law is unfairly protected from proper prosecution.”

The Karki government has created a judicial commission of inquiry tasked with investigating the deaths of at least 76 people killed nationwide in the 2 days of violence, around 47 of them in Kathmandu, including 3 policemen. The Karki government should recognize and address corruption and the failure to ensure rights, such as an adequate standard of living, which spurred the youth protests, Human Rights Watch said.

Human Rights interviewed 52 witnesses, victims, journalists, medical professionals, politicians, and sources close to the security forces; verified photographs and videos posted to social media or shared with researchers; and visited hospitals and the scenes of protests and arson attacks. The research focused on Kathmandu.

On September 8, between around 12:30 and 4 p.m., police used lethal force to disperse young people after they gathered around the parliament, shooting people in the head, chest, and abdomen. Witness accounts and analyzed footage do not show the grave and imminent danger to life that would justify the intentional use of lethal force.

Participants, informed of the protest on social media including the communication platform Discord, began gathering around 9 a.m., and by 11 a.m. the crowd had grown significantly. As protesters advanced toward parliament, some overran the single barricade on a street leading to the parliament. Police used tear gas, water cannons, and batons to disperse them. Protesters gathered in large numbers around parliament’s main gate. Some threw stones at the police. At around 12:30 p.m., the government ordered curfew in the area, but protesters and journalists interviewed by Human Rights Watch were not aware of any announcement.

Close to 1 p.m., “things became really bad,” said a journalist who heard gunfire and sheltered with a colleague near the parliament compound’s front wall. “A bullet whizzed between me and another journalist.” None of the witnesses interviewed heard any warnings before police used lethal force.

Police gunfire continued intermittently for hours. At around 1:40 p.m., police shot a 20-year-old university student through the shoulder. “When I was shot, there was no violence,” the student said. “It was very peaceful. Out of nowhere, they started firing.” Her surgeon confirmed her injuries.

On the afternoon and evening of September 8, a protester said a police unit he identified as the Special Task Force detained him along with 33 other people on parliament’s grounds. He said they were beaten and threatened. They were only released the following afternoon.

On September 9, protesters across the city attacked police stations, looted weapons, and forced police to flee. Three policemen were killed in mob attacks, police officials and pathologists who conducted

postmortems said. In many places, members of the public participated spontaneously in arson and other attacks.

Mobs severely beat politicians and set their homes on fire. Some, including the then-prime minister, had to be rescued by military helicopter. Key government buildings, including the parliament, the presidential palace, federal offices, and the Supreme Court, were set ablaze. Schools, hotels, and private properties were also set on fire. Thousands of prisoners were freed after attacks on jails.

Several witnesses alleged that some mob attacks were selective and questioned why security forces did not do more to stop them. “The attacks were very targeted,” a businessman said, noting that neighboring businesses were typically left unscathed. Numerous witnesses said that security forces were largely absent as arson spread across the city on September 9, failing to protect individuals and properties under attack.

Witnesses and analysts interviewed by Human Rights Watch or quoted in the media said they suspected that the violence may have been influenced by “infiltrators” affiliated with various political movements. The criminal justice authorities should investigate any credible allegations of criminal acts contributing to the violence, Human Rights Watch said.

Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli resigned on the afternoon of September 9. That evening, President Ram Chandra Poudel issued a statement urging calm. The arson continued until around 10 p.m., when the army was deployed. The army chief, Ashok Raj Sigdel, summoned prominent members of the Gen Z movement, as well as some politicians, for discussions. On September 12, “Gen Z” representatives, after a consultation with supporters on the Discord platform, reached an agreement with the president to dissolve parliament and appoint Karki as head of an interim government that would conduct fresh elections.

Pathologists at a Kathmandu morgue, which received 47 bodies over the two days, told Human Rights Watch that they determined 35 cases of death had been due to “high velocity gunshot wounds” to the head, neck, chest, or abdomen. Staff in various hospitals said they received hundreds of injured patients.

Police entered the grounds of a hospital on September 8 and charged staff and patients with batons, injuring a staff member, a hospital official said. Protestors attacked ambulances on both days. Journalists were injured by kinetic impact projectiles fired by police on September 8 and protesters attacked media premises on September 9.

A retired senior police official said police had failed to follow procedures for dispersing protests and the use of lethal force. The United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms prohibits the use of firearms except in cases of imminent threat of death or serious injury. Intentional lethal use of firearms is permitted only when it is strictly unavoidable to protect life. Under Nepali law, security forces, even when authorized to use lethal force to restore order, must issue warnings and prevent fatalities.

The commission created to investigate the events of September 8 and 9 should examine the role of security forces, credible allegations of infiltration, and criminal acts contributing to violence, Human Rights Watch

said. As of November 10, police had arrested 423 people allegedly responsible for violence on September 9, but were not known to have taken action against officers who unlawfully opened fire on protesters on September 8.

“The authorities should recognize that widespread impunity for human rights violations in the past helped enable the violence that occurred this time in Nepal,” Ganguly said. “It is crucial to reverse the decades-long tendency by successive governments in Nepal to bury investigations and stall prosecutions, and to bring about accountability and security sector reform.”

September 2025 Violence in Nepal

Human Rights Watch has long documented the failure to ensure accountability for human rights violations in Nepal, including during previous protests.

Increasing discontent, particularly among young Nepalis, followed a social media campaign exposing the luxurious lifestyle of the political elite. It expanded into widespread anger over socioeconomic inequality, corruption, lack of governance due to disagreements among the political parties, and the failure to bring accountability for rights abuses.

The September 8 protest in Kathmandu began peacefully but became disorderly when protesters overran a police barricade near the parliament building. Protests also occurred in other parts of the country. Security forces used lethal force and killed 17 protesters in Kathmandu, as well as 2 outside the capital, and injured hundreds.

On September 9, many people came out to protest the killings. Among them were individuals and groups who almost immediately engaged in physical attacks and arson that targeted the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary, as well as other institutions, schools, businesses, and media offices. Dozens were killed and injured, including six people burned to death in a supermarket attacked by arsonists, as security forces failed to ensure protection.

Researchers analyzed and verified 50 videos uploaded to social media platforms. Human Rights Watch has not included links to the online videos due to their graphic nature, but has preserved the visual evidence.

September 8

On September 4, the government of K.P. Sharma Oli announced a sweeping ban on 26 social media platforms and messaging apps that had failed to register with authorities following an August 25 cabinet directive. The government claimed the ban was necessary for tax and regulatory purposes, but many Nepalis said they believed that it was an attempt to silence criticism.

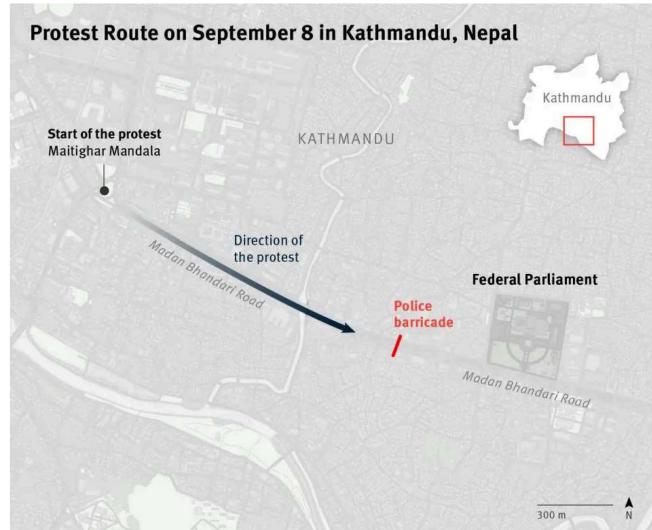
One of the organizers of the September 8 protest said the ban “triggered us a lot.” She described the protest movement as purposefully “leaderless,” coalescing rapidly between September 5-7, especially on the

communication platform Discord. Discord servers—online communities on specific topics—formed to oppose the ban quickly swelled to include tens of thousands of members. Although Discord was among the banned platforms, it and others remained accessible using Virtual Private Networks (VPNs).

A person close to the movement, who joined a key Discord server early on, said that membership “really started picking up after the protest was announced” for September 8. Although peaceful protest was the dominant theme, this person said, some on the platform advocated violence: “The idea that there would be infiltrators was already there.” Several interviewees, including informed analysts and witnesses, said they believed that supporters of various political groups deliberately instigated disorder.

On September 8, thousands of young protesters began to gather between 9 and 11 a.m. at Maitighar Mandala, the typical assembly point for protests in the city, two kilometers west of parliament. Organizers had obtained permission for the protest and planned to march toward parliament as far as a police barricade 400 meters west of the building.

The protesters demanded that the government lift the social media ban and address endemic corruption. Witnesses described a “joyful” atmosphere at the outset. Organizers, some of whom planned to give flowers to the police, believed that many had never attended a protest before. The crowds built up, and according to a journalist: “The mass was getting bigger and bigger. It was suffocating, so many people were there.” At around 11 a.m. they began to march toward parliament.



An organizer said that when the protesters reached the barricade, “we saw that they did not have enough police to control the crowd.” A police officer with knowledge of the operation said that police had underestimated the size of the gathering, and this failure of intelligence and preparation may have contributed to subsequent events. A retired senior police officer noted that it should have been possible to manage the protest without using lethal force. “For me, it was a fiasco,” he said.

Nepal’s parliament occupies one corner of a four-way junction called Naya Baneshwor Chowk. While the police had attempted to close the protest’s main route toward parliament, the other roads leading to the junction remained open.

At around 11:30 a.m., based on drone footage verified by Human Rights Watch, the crowd toppled the police barricade. The footage shows the main crowd of protesters approaching the barricade from the west,

while others approached from the direction of parliament and helped to pull it down, allowing those coming from the west to continue toward parliament.

Others appear to have walked around the barricade.

Hundreds of protesters ran toward parliament as police retreated beyond a water cannon vehicle to form a line in front of the parliament gate. Drone footage shows the water cannon vehicle reversing while spraying water at protesters, many of whom fall to the ground. Witnesses said the police also fired tear gas and kinetic impact projectiles.

A police officer who was on the scene said that officers opened fire with lethal force five minutes after the District Administration Office declared an emergency curfew in the area at around 12:30 p.m. Human Rights Watch analyzed a video showing the Nepal Police and paramilitary Armed Police Force (APF) firing at protesters just in front of the main parliament gate.

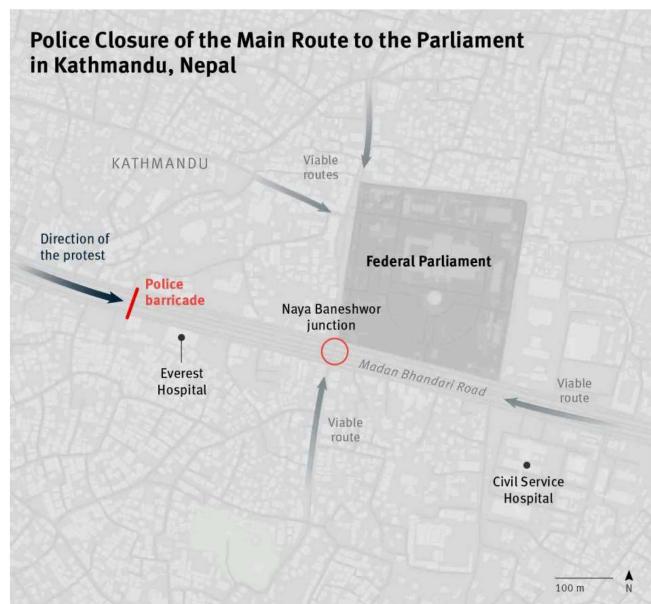
Another video shows officers inside parliament grounds, 40 meters from the wall, firing military rifles in the direction of protesters.

A protester who was among those who pushed through the barricade, and was later shot in the leg, said: "When we were in front of parliament, they shot metal bullets. Maybe some of our friends threw stones. But our friends threw stones, they shot [bullets]." He estimated



Demonstrators gathered outside Nepal's Parliament during a protest in Kathmandu on September 8, 2025, condemning social media prohibitions and corruption by the government.

© 2025 Prabin Ranabhat /Getty Images



Protesters topple a police barricade blocking the route to parliament in Kathmandu, Nepal, September 8, 2025.

© 2025 Sunil Pradhan/Anadolu via Getty Images

that seven meters separated police and protesters when the first shots were fired.

A 20-year-old woman said that after hearing that two people had been shot dead, she and others went to plead with the police to use restraint. “We were not there for any violence,” she said. Soon after, at around 1:40 p.m., she decided to go home. She said she was on the opposite side of the road from parliament, roughly 45 meters away, with her back turned, when she was shot through her shoulder.

Another protester said that he arrived at the Naya Baneshwor junction around 1:30 p.m. and stayed for two hours. He saw protesters transporting injured people to hospitals. He saw police officers firing guns from positions on the street in front of the main gate, and others firing tear gas from beside the wall of parliament between the gate and the junction. “During the two hours I was at the intersection, people were getting shot in their hands, legs,” he said.

One video captures the moment a protester who posed no apparent threat was shot on the street near the southwestern corner of the parliament. A boy in school uniform—later identified online as 17-year-old Shreeyam Chaulagain—is walking away from the parliament, clapping his hands above his head. A gunshot rings out. The boy’s head snaps forward, and he collapses. The shadows in the video indicate he was shot around 2 p.m. Another video filmed shortly after shows other protesters trying to carry him away and stem the blood flowing from the back of his head. He did not survive.

A senior official at the Civil Service Hospital said it treated 221 patients injured in the protest on September 8. Three died at the hospital. Staff at the National Trauma Center said they received 8 patients who were dead or later died and 73 who were injured. The Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital received over 30 casualties that day, mostly gunshot wounds and injuries from kinetic impact projectiles. Other hospitals also treated casualties.

Between 3 and 3:30 p.m., a witness said he and another man led a large group forward to push police on the road back toward parliament. When they reached parliament, the police went inside the gate. “We were all there with our hands up, and we were trying to talk to the police,” the witness said. “We were saying: ‘Don’t shoot us, let’s do it peacefully.’ And then maybe three minutes later, somebody started throwing stones from the back, and then these other guys climbed on top of the army truck [parked beside the gate] and they started shaking the gates. I guess the police got spooked.”

He was two to three meters from the police, with the gate in between, when the police opened fire. He identified the police by their uniforms as members of the APF and the Nepal Police’s Special Task Force (STF). “They literally aimed at us and started shooting,” the witness said.

The witness said he attempted to shelter behind the barricade with another man, who had been shot in the lower leg. He heard the metal barrier ring twice when gunshots struck it. Researchers verified a video, uploaded to Facebook, that captures the moment the police opened fire as protesters were hiding behind a barricade and an ambulance a dozen meters from the main parliament entrance. Two gunshots are heard.

One protester falls to the ground and a second, later identified as Dipendra Basnet, hangs motionless on the rail of the barricade, blood streaming from his head. Basnet survived.

Security forces detained at least 34 protesters, held them inside the parliament compound, then transferred them to a police station at around 10 p.m. The protester who sheltered behind the barricade said that moments later, STF officers in riot gear came out of the gate, took him into custody, and brought him inside the parliament complex. He said that police personnel beat him with batons, bruising his back and shoulders. He said that one officer threatened to shoot the detained protesters, while others smashed their phones and destroyed their identity documents. The protesters were released the following day.

On the evening of September 8, the home minister resigned, expressing regret, and the social media ban was lifted.

September 9

In the morning, many Gen Z protesters returned to parliament. Although the police used tear gas and lethal force, protesters were able to enter and occupy the parliament building. A member of the Gen Z movement said she entered the building at around 1:30 p.m., but left after hearing that the prime minister had resigned.

The parliament building was later set on fire by unidentified people.

The arson attacks on September 9 documented by Human Rights Watch include some that may have been spontaneous expressions of public anger and others that indicate a planned and targeted use of violence. Witnesses and analysts interviewed agreed that while the crowd on September 8 was overwhelmingly composed of young protesters, on September 9 others also appeared to be involved in violence and arson.

An automated SMS message received by many mobile phone users at 12:20 a.m. on September 9, reportedly sent from an account operated by a local government in Myagdi district which claimed to have been “hacked,” and seen by Human Rights Watch, reads: “Only the blood of politicians who spilled the blood of innocent children will bring peace to Nepal.” Witnesses who spoke to Human Rights Watch and news reports described some social media and Discord posts encouraging or directing people to attack specific properties.

In the course of the day, people overran all but a few police stations in the city and looted weapons. Three police officers in Kathmandu were beaten to death by mobs, pathologists told Human Rights Watch. A police source said that the first station attacked was in Harisiddhi, a southeastern suburb of the capital. Researchers geolocated a photograph of the police station surrounded by smoke that was posted on Facebook at 11:34 a.m.

Witnesses said that some targets were clearly selected in advance. In Harisiddhi, a large group of people who do not live in the area forced their way into a housing complex, disabling CCTV cameras, and

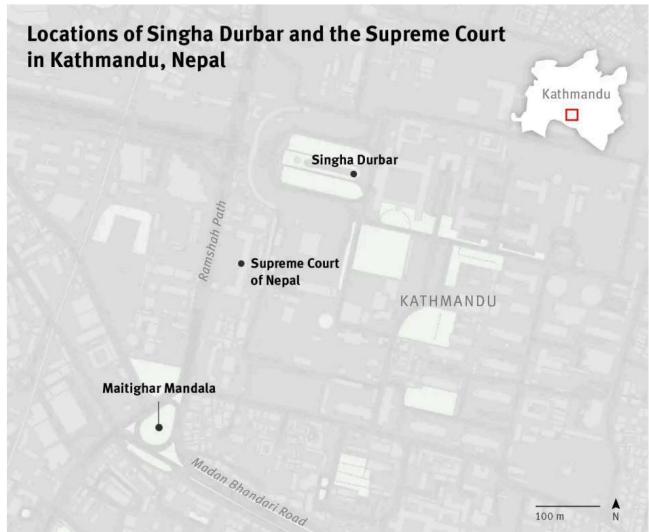
attacked the rented home of a junior government minister, said a witness who lives in the complex. “We have no idea how they knew that this person lives there because we did not know that he lives there,” she said.

At around 11 a.m., a group attacked Ullens School in Khumaltar in the southern part of the city, a private school that many Nepalis said they believed is associated with then-Foreign Minister Arzu Rana Deuba. A geolocated video posted on Facebook at 11:06 a.m. shows large plumes of smoke coming from the school. A staff member said the attack left the facilities “all burned, destroyed.” A second school operated by Ullens, in Bansbari in the northern part of the city, was attacked at around 12:30 p.m., the timestamp on geolocated videos posted to Facebook and TikTok showed. Videos posted in the hours that followed show burned out school buses and other destruction.

Between 1:30 and 2 p.m., 10 to 15 men armed with sticks, knives and gasoline vandalized the headquarters of Kantipur Television, a major private news channel, said the channel’s staff. Protesters assaulted four staff members. The attackers set fire to vehicles parked outside the studios and pushed a burning scooter inside, causing damage that took the channel off the air for 70 hours. The offices of Kantipur Group’s two daily newspapers, at a separate location, were evacuated at around 12:30 p.m. Staff believe that a mob set fire to that building between 3:30 and 4 p.m. The offices of another newspaper, the Annapurna Post, were also burned.

In the early afternoon, groups attacked government buildings including the Supreme Court and Singha Durbar, which houses the office of the prime minister and other departments. A witness said that the groups, some “very aggressive,” began arriving in the area between 12:30 and 1 p.m.

Around 2 p.m., several witnesses said, groups gathered outside the Supreme Court. A lawyer who was inside the court, as well as a journalist and bystander who were outside, saw men entering the building between 2 and 2:30 p.m., removing large volumes of files from cupboards and burning them in the parking area. Shortly afterward, the Supreme Court building was set ablaze. The attorney general’s office next door was attacked and records reportedly destroyed.



A photojournalist recorded 10 to 15 men carrying guns outside the gate of Singha Durbar, who then entered the complex. A man who ordered him not to take photographs assaulted him.

At Singha Durbar, several witnesses described a “biker gang” among the arsonists, armed with weapons such as *khukuris* (large knives) and iron rods. A witness saw these men make firebombs using fuel from their motorcycles, with which they set fire to the principal building.

Numerous businesses and homes of businesspeople were attacked, while neighboring properties including similar businesses were left unscathed.

By 4:25 p.m., the presidential palace, Shital Niwas, was on fire. A person who participated in the attack and was accidentally injured in the burning building said that a small number of soldiers deployed at the gate had been unable to prevent them from entering. The same man had earlier been present when the prime minister’s official residence at Baluwatar was burned. He said the police posted at Baluwatar said: “‘We won’t shoot at you,’ and 10 to 15 minutes later they opened the gate,” allowing them to enter.

Staff at the Teaching Hospital said they received most casualties on the second day in the afternoon, including nonfatal gunshot injuries at around 5 p.m. at the location in Maharajganj where policemen were beaten to death. Later, patients arrived with smoke inhalation injuries. According to a doctor, the Civil Hospital received 220 patients on September 9, including 3 shot dead outside parliament before it was overrun by protesters.

Region / Country

- Asia
- Nepal

Topic

- Digital Investigations Lab

Source URL: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/11/19/nepal-unlawful-use-of-force-during-gen-z-protest>