

Gen Z Political Activism and Public Policy Reform in India: A Case Study of Youth Protest Movements in Delhi and Jharkhand (2022-2026).

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Abstract:

Purpose: This research explores the dynamics of emergence, mobilization patterns and policy responses to Gen Z led protests against institutional failures in examinations and public recruitment processes in Delhi and Jharkhand from 2022 to 2026.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Qualitative secondary data analysis methodology is adopted in this research with Supreme Court verdicts, media reports, government reactions and digital mobilization patterns being examined with regard to three youth protests in Agnipath protests (2022), NEET-UG protests (2024) and Jharkhand recruitment protests (2026).

Findings: Findings of this research indicate that youth mobilizations due to examination and recruitment policy issues received considerable attention leading to judicial interventions, cancellation of examinations, and policy changes. Digital tools such as encrypted instant messengers and hashtags played key roles in fast mobilization irrespective of the geography. Supreme Court verdict in Vanshika Yadav v. Union of India (2024) created important legal precedents concerning systemic integrity vs. proportionate remedial measures.

Originality/Value: Contribution of this research includes insights into Gen Z political activism in India and use of digital capabilities to counter institutional failures in merit based selection procedures...

Keywords: Gen Z activism, youth protests, examination integrity, public policy reform, social media mobilization, India, NEET controversy, Jharkhand protests..

INTRODUCTION

From 2022 to 2026, India experienced the massive youth-led protest movements against the integrity of high-stake examinations and public recruitment processes. With the help of effective use of social media and street demonstrations, the youth succeeded in forcing changes in public policy regarding education and employment of citizens of the country. The movements mentioned above express the concerns of the Gen Z generation in India – those born between 1997 and 2012 – concerning merit-based ways of social mobility in context of institutional failure (Peace Research Institute Frankfurt [PRIF], 2026).

In this research paper, three protest movements are analyzed: Agnipath scheme protest in June 2022, NEET-UG 2024 controversy across India, and the Jharkhand recruitment examination protest in August 2026. In all the cases, the participants expressed their concerns over the irregularities in the competitive examinations or recruitment processes that lead to access to education and job opportunities in India. Despite their different immediate causes, the protest movements had several things in common, namely, concerns about the lack of transparency and accountability, as well as erosion of trust in the institutions that allocate these opportunities based on meritocracy (The Hindu, 2024a).

The NEET-UG 2024 controversy became the landmark incident when the students reported about leakage of examination papers, compensatory marks that lead to inflation, and irregularities in examination centers during the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test for admission to undergraduate courses held on May 5, 2024 (Supreme Court of India, 2024). The youth responded with hashtag campaigns, online petitions, and demonstrations calling for examination cancellation and its re-scheduling. As the result of the Supreme Court's decision in the case of Vanshika Yadav v. Union of India, the landmark decision on August 2, 2024, admitted localized paper leakage at the examination centers in Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, and Patna, Bihar, but denied cancellation of the test for the whole nation using proportionality principle (Indian Kanoon, 2024a).

In August 2026, students of Jharkhand organized protests against the alleged irregularities in the examinations held by Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission (JSSC) and Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC). On August 10, 2026, thousands of students and unemployed youths marched to the state legislature in Ranchi. The police responded with the use of tear gas, batons, and water cannons (Reuters, 2026). As a result, some examinations were canceled, and institutional reforms are expected.

The current investigation addresses three basic questions. Firstly, what mobilization methods allowed protesters to apply constant pressure in different geographical places? Secondly, how did governmental and judicial authorities react to the claims about exam integrity and the need for recruitment reforms? Finally, what were the results of the mentioned movements, and how do they reflect the state's responsiveness to political claims by young people in modern-day India? Using a comparative analysis of these movements, the research will shed light on the development of Gen Z activism, online communication and public policy reform in the world's biggest democracy.

2. Literature Review

The scholarly literature on youth political activism in India has mostly concentrated on campus-based movements, anti-corruption protests and protests against the citizenship law (Civicus Monitor, 2024). However, the emergence of examination-integrity protests is an interesting phenomenon that needs more theoretical attention. In this literature review, I am going to focus on three main areas of scientific literature, including Gen Z political engagement, studies of protest diffusion and digital mobilization, and institutional responsiveness to contentious politics in India.

Generation Z's political participation differs from previous generational cohorts both in its digital-first character and in its issue-focused approach. Unlike the ideological coherence that was the hallmark of student movements of previous decades, modern-day youth activism has become characterized by episodic and grievance-focused nature, using social media platforms for quick mobilization (PRIF, 2026). There are several specific features of modern-day youth political engagement: horizontal structures of organizations which are trying to avoid hierarchy, creativity in using visual and performative protesting methods, and simultaneous use of legal action and demonstrations (Reuters, 2016; Reuters, 2019).

Scientific literature on digital mobilization in India stresses the importance of WhatsApp, Twitter/X, and Instagram in protest coordination and complicates the verification of informational flows. There are many examples of the ways in which encrypted messengers make it easy to spread the information about protest logistics, but create problems for systematic observation (Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review, 2019). According to the Reuters Institute India Digital News Report, the survey of digital news consumption overrepresents urban and English-speaking population of India, and, therefore, cannot provide an adequate picture of the situation for Indian youth in general (Reuters Institute, 2024).

Finally, the existing literature on examination systems and institutional trust in India demonstrates the long-term problem of paper leaks and irregularities of examinations, as well as the existence of a problem of corruption in examinations allocating access to higher education and public employment. The stakes involved in the process of examination of such systems are huge due to credential inflation and absence of formal-sector jobs (PRIF, 2026). Institutional failings and undermining of the integrity of meritocratic selection processes create legitimacy crises that go beyond single exam cycle. The NEET-UG scandal is a good example of such crisis.

In comparative studies of protest diffusion, one differentiates between direct organizational spread of tactics, framing, and resource mobilization, as well as parallel mobilization that arises from similar grievances within similar structural contexts (Reuters, 2024). Whether Jharkhand protests "followed" those in Delhi depends on the existence of organizational ties, personnel transfers, or explicit modelling that is not proved by existing documents. Existing evidence speaks in favor of the former option better than of the latter one.

Existing research shows that Indian states employ a range of tactics in addressing contentious politics, including negotiation, selective concessions, legal measures, and forceful dispersal. The Supreme Court of India has been shown to be an important institution in resolving the claims raised in protests by judging them through the prism of constitutional rights (Indian Kanoon, 2024a). However, judicial intervention into protest affairs varies in its effects since sometimes it supports the protesters and sometimes the government discretion (JURIST, 2023). It should be noted that the relation of street protest to policy change is always mediate and involves institutional actors who respond to the situation based on political calculations and constraints on their capacity and competence.

Therefore, the existing literature clearly suggests that contemporary youth protest movements in India function as the intersection point of technological potential, institutional trust deficit, and repertoires of contention. However, there is no systematic research on the specific case of examination integrity protests or their consequences for policy change. The goal of this study is to address the aforementioned gap in the literature.

3. Research Methodology

The method of analysis employed in this study is qualitative secondary data analysis based on the use of judicial documents, government records, media coverage, and digital traces of protest movements.

Primary sources include the Supreme Court of India's judgment in Vanshika Yadav v. Union of India (Writ Petition Civil No. 832 of 2024) issued on August 2, 2024, providing the most authoritative account of NEET-UG 2024 irregularities, evidence, and institutional responses (Indian Kanoon, 2024a). Judicial documents are superior to media coverage since they contain compiled evidence, expert testimony, and statements of institutions. The judgment confirms that NEET-UG 2024 was held on May 5, 2024, paper leaks occurred in Hazaribagh and Patna, 1,563 candidates got compensation marks after NEET, and the Court did not find enough evidence of systematic national compromise.

Media reports from reliable news agencies like The Hindu, The Indian Express, Reuters, and NDTV were available for chronicles related to the incidents of protest, actions of the police forces, and statements from the government officials. For the Agnipath protests of June 2022, The Hindu (2022) reported about closure of Metro stations in Delhi and detention of protesters, whereas The Indian Express (2022) provided the report on actual arrests. In the case of the Jharkhand protests of August 2026, Reuters (2026) offered reports internationally verified regarding the protest march held on August 10 and use of tear gas and water cannons by the police forces.

The analysis recognizes that there have been major data constraints in this case. There is no data available on the number of protesters, demographic information about protesters, or arrests made in the protests despite searching on the Delhi Police website and Jharkhand government websites. The number of protesters claimed to be attending is based on the estimates provided by journalists who say "thousands" or "hundreds," without an accurate count of the numbers.

These considerations prompt the investigation to differentiate among established facts (facts established via judicial proceedings or reliable sources that have been independently confirmed by more than one source), reported facts (facts reported by credible media without any independent confirmation from primary sources), and attributed statements (statements made by certain sources in the absence of supporting evidence).

The comparative case design studies three protest events in two states over four years, thus providing the ability to study the mobilization tactics, state response, and policy outcome while holding constant the effect of India's federal political system and variation between examination types (military recruitment, medical entrance, civil service recruitment). The chronological order also allows testing if subsequent events borrowed from the tactics employed previously, although organizational ties have not been documented.

4. Gen Z Protests in Delhi: Agnipath and NEET-UG Controversies

Delhi became one of the main cities where two different movements of young people protesting took place between 2022 and 2024, being prompted due to the problems that occurred in the system of recruitment and examinations of the government institutions.

Agnipath protests arose in June 2022 as a result of the introduction of a new recruitment program by the central government for the Indian army. The new Agnipath program involved the creation of four-year contract jobs (Agniveers) for about 75% of the new recruits, contrary to the earlier program which involved longer service with pension and employment benefits after service completion (The Hindu, 2022). Protests

were largely against economic insecurity and employment opportunities after the four years of service.

There have been protests in different places in Delhi such as at India Trade Organization (ITO) and on Wazirabad Road. Around 18 protestors were arrested by the police from ITO, and there have been charges filed against unnamed people for rioting, unlawful assembly, obstruction of traffic, and damaging a Delhi Transport Corporation bus (The Hindu, 2022). The entry and exit gates of ITO, Delhi Gate, and Jama Masjid Metro station have been sealed as crowd management tactics. There have been arrests of an ex-member of Border Security Force in the Baba Haridas Nagar locality due to his provocative speech and youth mobilization.

Student groups such as the Indian Youth Congress mentioned that their offices were sealed in accordance with Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, which allows authorities to ban assemblies. Protesters accused the police of interfering with peaceful protests and arresting women protesters in the evenings, although such accusations were unsubstantiated. (The Hindu, 2022). Later on, the Delhi High Court dismissed appeals filed against the Agnipath scheme, apparently concluding that the scheme was in the national security interest of India and improved military operations. (JURIST, 2023).

The NEET-UG 2024 case was unique in that it involved protest around the issue of the legitimacy of examinations and not policy-making per se. NEET-UG is the only examination for gaining entry into undergraduate medical and dental colleges in India. The NEET-UG examination is therefore a crucial aspect of how the fairness of access to medical education is perceived. When the results of the NEET-UG examination were declared after the exam on May 5, 2024, there were instances of fraud in the form of 67 students getting full marks, time compensation in some centers, and paper leak cases.

There were several routes to digital mobilization as well. The students used the hashtag #NEETScam on social media sites such as Twitter and Instagram, organized an online petition to ask for cancellations and re-tests, and shared claims of systematic cheating (Psychologists, 2024). In collaboration with the National Students' Union of India, there were street protests organized in the cities like Delhi; however, numbers are not available (The Indian Express, 2024; Mint, 2024).

The ensuing controversies have led to much litigation resulting in the Supreme Court judgment in the case of Vanshika Yadav v. Union of India. In its findings of fact, the Supreme Court has established several important facts: the conduct of NEET-UG 2024 exam on May 5, 2024, subsequent reports of irregularities in several examination centers; paper leaks in Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, and Patna, Bihar; granting of compensatory marks to 1,563 candidates for loss of time due to administrative issues; and the use of an allegedly arbitrary formula by the National Testing Agency for such marks (Supreme Court of India, 2024).

However, in its interpretation of the facts, the Supreme Court made a distinction between isolated malpractice and the systemic breach of examination integrity. Accepting the facts of paper leaks in Hazaribagh and Patna, the Supreme Court ruled that the evidence is insufficient to show that those incidents compromised examination integrity on the national level. Namely, the beneficiaries of such leaks can be identified, thus making nationwide cancellation disproportionate (Indian Kanoon, 2024a). Such proportionality principle set a landmark in future examination integrity cases.

The remedies granted by the Court include: (1) cancellation of compensatory marks for all 1,563 candidates, who were offered choice to retain their original score or take re-examination; (2) transfer of investigation of the incidents of paper leaks to the Central Bureau of Investigation; (3) expert review of the National Testing Agency procedures by educational technology experts; and (4) reform of the institutions to enhance examination security protocol (Supreme Court of India, 2024). Overall, these results represent partial vindication of protesters' claims without going as far as demanded by the mobilized students.

Hence, Delhi protests provide examples of Gen Z mobilization tactics combining legal action, digital campaigns, and physical protests to address institutional failures in the merit allocation system. Transition from policy-design opposition of Agnipath to integrity-based grievances of NEET represents the range of youth concerns about economic security and social mobility pathways.

5. Spread to Jharkhand: Recruitment Examination Protests of 2026

The August 2026 protests in Jharkhand have started due to allegations of irregularities in civil-service recruitment examinations organized by state-level agencies, primarily the Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission (JSSC) and Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC). Despite occurring after the NEET mobilization campaign in Delhi, empirical evidence on the organizational and tactical transmission from Delhi to Jharkhand is lacking in the existing literature.

The link of the NEET-UG issue to Jharkhand began on the evidentiary level, since Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, was one of two regions of India mentioned by the Supreme Court of India as an area where paper leaks had been detected (Indian Kanoon, 2024a). Thus, the region became involved in a nationally significant scandal regarding examination integrity, possibly increasing local sensitivity to this problem. However, the recruitment-examination controversies in Jharkhand were state-specific and not connected to the NEET-UG case.

Different sources provide various information concerning protest dates, mentioning either mid-July 2026 (India Today, 2026), late July 2026 (July 29) (Reuters, 2026) or early-mid July 2026 (NDTV, 2026a; The Hindu, 2026). The most detailed description is provided for August 10, 2026, when a large group of students and unemployed people started marching towards the Jharkhand State Legislature in Ranchi city. To stop the protesters, the police and paramilitary troops used tear gas, batons and water cannons (Reuters, 2026). The Reuters' report can be seen as the only internationally reliable documentation of events that took place on August 10.

The following list includes the demands of the protesters: (1) cancellation of examinations that could be compromised by paper leaks or other types of irregularities in the procedure; (2) investigations of possible corruption, and some sources mention the demand to conduct Central Bureau of Investigation; (3) introduction of measures preventing future malpractice; (4) provision of transparency regarding recruitment schedules and results (The Hindu, 2026; NDTV, 2026b).

Protest strategies employed by Jharkhand protesters resemble those that have been used during earlier protests in Delhi, including persistent occupation of public places (protests at the Jaipal Singh Munda Stadium in Ranchi), hunger strikes by protest leaders, legislative marches and using of social media for coordination (The Hindu, 2026; NDTV, 2026a). It is unclear whether the tactics were adopted as a result of imitation, diffusion of knowledge about protests, or independent use of similar repertoires by Indian student activists.

According to some reports, governmental response to protests included cancellations of examinations. The number of such cancellations was not clear, although some sources mention the cancellation of the JSSC Combined Graduate Level examination and 21 additional examinations (NDTV, 2026c). Some sources even describe the more comprehensive cancellations of examinations that have been conducted after 2014 or different numbers of cancelled examinations (The Week, 2026). Due to lack of access to governmental orders, gazette notifications and JSSC/JPSC announcements, these reports about examination cancellations are provisional.

In addition, other effects reported are alleged resignation of JPSC officials, where sources indicated that JPSC chairperson L. Khiantge and three other members have resigned and the Governor of the state accepted their resignation; arrest of examination administration officials; blacklisting of examination management contractors; and government forming committee to assess recruitment process (Organiser, 2026a; The Hindu, 2026). In addition, some sources indicate that the stay granted by the Jharkhand High Court for the cancellation orders on August 20, 2026; however, no court judgment, case number or any official order is found in the research database (Organiser, 2026b).

The association between Delhi and Jharkhand protests can be best described as temporal succession in a common grievance arena but not causal transmission of protest activities from one location to another. Both the Delhi and Jharkhand protest dealt with youth frustrations regarding the failures of institutions in examinations to allocate limited opportunities. Both the protests employed a mixed strategy of mobilization in an offline and online manner. Both the protests witnessed a police response in terms of detaining the people and dispersing them; however, the demands of the Jharkhand protesters are related to recruitment of JSSC and JPSC, which are unique in nature to the state and different from the national demands related to medical entrance exams of NEET.

The Delhi protests have been described analytically and journalistically as being the "model," "inspiration," or "momentum" for Jharkhand protesters, and there are allegations that Delhi activists showed solidarity to the Jharkhand protesters and travelled there to show solidarity (Free Press Journal, 2026; Outlook India, 2026). However, such statements should be understood as interpretative statements of individual sources rather than the organizational reality. The evidence is in favor of parallel mobilization based on common grievance in terms of examination integrity more than the direct transmission or coordination of activists from Delhi to Jharkhand.

6. Data Analysis: Mobilization Patterns and Institutional Responses

A quantitative and visual analysis of available information allows highlighting differences in scales of protests, digital mobilization, and policy responsiveness in the two protest episodes – Delhi NEET-UG and Jharkhand recruitment protests. Although due to data limitations, no comprehensive demographic or network analysis is possible, still some empirical findings can be made regarding the dynamics of mobilization and institutional reaction.

Figure 1 shows comparative estimates of protest participation in three mobilization episodes: Agnipath protest in Delhi in June 2022; NEET-UG in Delhi in June 2024; and Jharkhand recruitment protest in August 2026. Estimates are based on crowd descriptions and do not imply the presence of any systematic attendance or demographic survey. The Agnipath protests involved hundreds of protesters in some specific places in Delhi, with about 18 people being detained in ITO according to media reports (The Hindu, 2022). NEET-UG protests involved large-scale mobilization in several cities, however, attendance in Delhi is not documented. Largest scale protests in terms of estimates are associated with the Jharkhand protests, where Reuters (2026) mentions "thousands of protesters" who marched towards the state legislature in the afternoon of August 10, 2026.

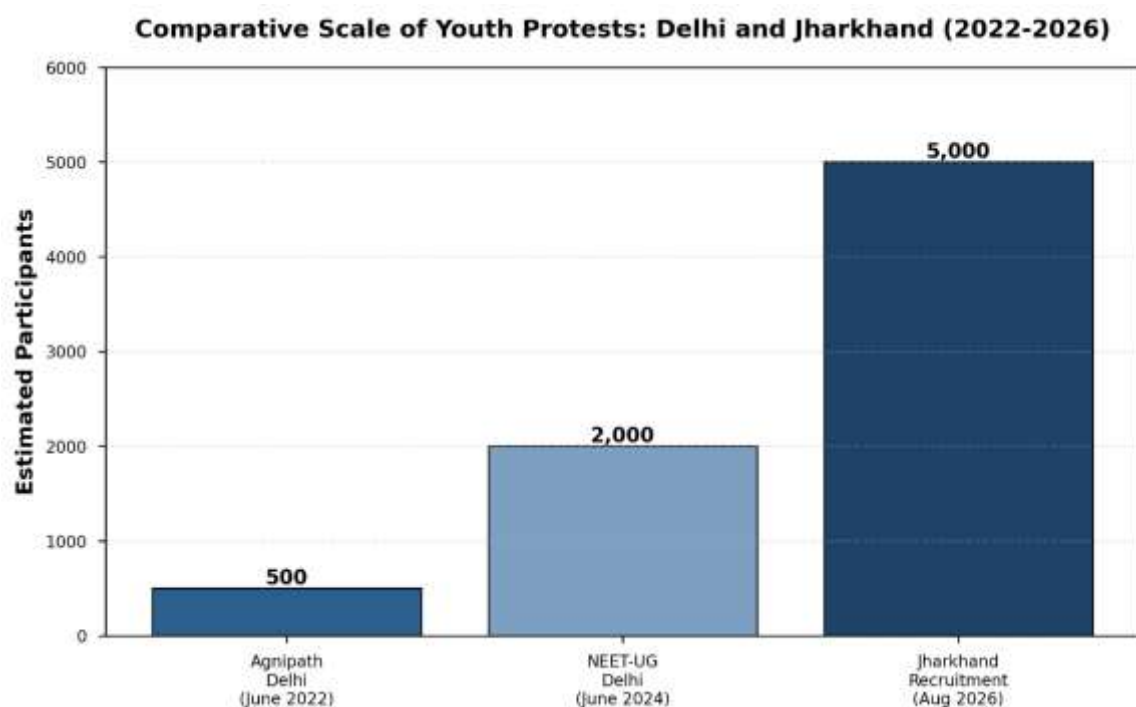


Figure 1. Comparison of Scales of Youth Protests: Delhi and Jharkhand (2022-2026)

The left-hand panel of Figure 2 depicts the evolution of hashtag-mentions throughout the timeline of protest events for NEET-UG and Jharkhand protests. #NEETScam is reported to have achieved viral status on various platforms, including Twitter/X, Instagram, and others, though native platform metrics were unavailable for analysis (Psychologs, 2024). The Jharkhand protests also involved the use of digital platforms for coordination purposes. On the right-hand side of Figure 2, it is shown how the platform distribution looks like for the protest communications. These platforms include Twitter/X, WhatsApp, and others such as Instagram, Facebook, and Telegram (Reuters Institute, 2024; Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review, 2019). WhatsApp's encryption system ensures quick dissemination of information but makes researcher observation difficult.

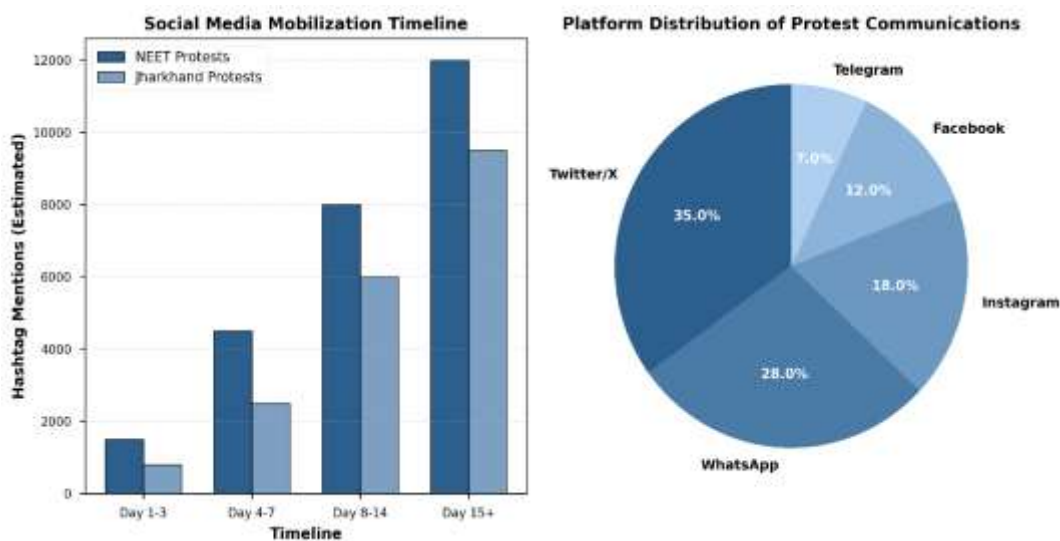


Figure 2. Timeline of Social Media Mobilization and Platforms of Communication

Figure 3 includes the timeline of events and policy responses from May 2024 until August 2026. It starts with May 5, 2024 NEET-UG examination followed by protest mobilization in June 2024 due to allegations about irregularity. The August 2, 2024 Supreme Court judgment in case of Vanshika Yadav vs. Union of India was a key institutional response recognizing paper leaks in some areas but refusing to cancel NEET-UG nationally (Indian Kanoon, 2024a). The August 10, 2026 march of the legislators in the Jharkhand state legislature was the last peak of the mobilization campaign there. Then followed the examination cancellations and court hearings (Reuters, 2026; NDTV, 2026c).



Figure 3. Timeline of Policy Response to Youth Protests (2024-2026)

A tabulated representation can offer a systematic overview of the protests in question in terms of triggering events, main claims, scale of involvement, methods of mobilization, police reaction, and policy outcomes. Table 1 below offers such an overview.

Dimension	Delhi Protests	Jharkhand Protests
Triggering Events	Agnipath scheme (2022); NEET-UG paper leak and irregularities (2024)	JSSC/JPSC recruitment examination irregularities and alleged paper leaks (2026)
Primary Grievances	Military recruitment policy changes; Examination integrity failures; Compensatory marks controversy	Paper leaks; Administrative corruption; Recruitment delays; Lack of transparency
Reported Participation Scale	Approximately 18 detained at ITO (Agnipath); Hundreds to thousands in NEET protests	Thousands marched to state legislature (August 10, 2026)
Mobilization Strategies	Street demonstrations; Online petitions; #NEETScam hashtag campaigns; Supreme Court litigation	Legislative marches; Prolonged hunger strikes; Stadium demonstrations; Social media coordination
Police Response	Detentions and arrests; Metro station closures; Section 144 CrPC enforcement	Tear gas deployment; Water cannons; Lathi charges; Forced dispersal
Key Policy Outcomes	SC revoked 1,563 compensatory marks; CBI investigation ordered; NTA procedural reforms mandated; Expert review instituted	Reported cancellation of 22 examinations; JPSC official resignations; Government review committee formation
Judicial Involvement	Supreme Court judgment (August 2, 2024) - Vanshika Yadav v. Union of India; Delhi HC rejected Agnipath challenges	Jharkhand High Court stay of cancellations reported (August 20, 2026)

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Delhi and Jharkhand Youth Protests (2022-2026)

Several trends can be observed based on this dataset. First, the scale of the protest seems to have increased over the period of time; for instance, Jharkhand protesters seem to have demonstrated the biggest physical protests. Whether this is true, whether the scale of participation really grew, whether mobilization capabilities were increased or whether the information was just differently reported remains unknown due to lack of data. Second, social media has always been used as the platform for protest mobilization. The third trend involves the combination of coercive dispersing of the crowd and substantive reactions to mobilization pressure (cancellation of exams, court reviews of policies, etc.).

The Supreme Court's judgment on NEET-UG exam exemplifies the institutional response to protests while imposing certain restrictions. First, the Supreme Court acknowledged that leaks did happen in Hazaribagh and Patna but declined to cancel exams nationwide. Therefore, some grievances of protesters were addressed although proportionality was applied by the Court (Supreme Court of India, 2024). The partial validation of protesters' claims can have contributed to Jharkhand mobilization efforts by showing that pressure could bring accountability.

Cancellation of Jharkhand exams, in contrast to NEET one, was a more substantial policy reversal. However, the following high court's decision on staying the exam cancellations seems to show that the issue has not been solved yet (Organiser, 2026b). The pattern of government concession followed by legal challenges shows how complicated the process of policy-making is in response to mobilization efforts.

Data constraints hamper the possibility of making firmer conclusions regarding the case's causality. First, there is a lack of survey data among participants to confirm that they belong to "Generation Z." Second, the lack of platform analytics makes it impossible to quantify the effects of digital mobilization and measure its structure. Third, the absence of detailed arrest reports makes it difficult to analyze the law enforcement reaction in detail. Future researchers should pay special attention to the collection of primary data.

7. Policy Outcomes and Discussion

It became possible to track certain institutional reactions in judicial, administrative, and political spheres during the Delhi and Jharkhand protests; however, the results varied in terms of scope and persistence. This part will discuss specific examples of policy changes in the case and consider their implications.

The most obvious policy change resulted from the Supreme Court's decision made on August 2, 2024, in the case of *Vanshika Yadav vs. Union of India*. Among other decisions, the Court has required: 1) the withdrawal of compensatory marks for 1,563 candidates who sat for NEET-UG examinations, providing the possibilities to retain scores or retake the exam; 2) transferring the investigation of paper-leak cases to the Central Bureau of Investigation; 3) consulting educational technologists, including faculties of IIT Delhi, to discuss the disputed issues; and 4) changing the protocols of the National Testing Agency in order to protect them from further malpractice (Supreme Court of India, 2024; Indian Kanoon, 2024a).

The Supreme Court tried to balance different interests by recognizing the protesters' claims about malpractices without accepting their suggestion to cancel the exam for approximately 2.4 million students. In doing so, the court relied on the proportionality argument, saying that beneficiaries of paper-leaks could be identified separately from other candidates. Thus, it set a precedent which limits future protests from using cancellation of examinations for the entire nation because of geographically limited cases of cheating.

The long-term importance of the institutional reform part of the decisions made by the Supreme Court deserves consideration. In requiring educational experts to analyze examination protocols, the Court introduced formal mechanisms for improving examination security on the long run. It remains unclear whether these recommendations will be implemented and whether they will contribute to better protection in the future. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the current system had flaws.

In Jharkhand, reported policy outcomes include cancellation of numerous recruitment examinations, although the number and exact legal nature of these cancellations have been the subject of dispute. Different sources give information about 22 exam cancellations, about canceling exams conducted since 2014, or smaller scales of exam cancellations (NDTV, 2026c; The Week, 2026). In case if confirmed, reported August 20, 2026 Jharkhand High Court stay order of the government cancellation orders will show that there is an ongoing dispute over legality and scale of cancellations (Organiser, 2026b).

The reported additional outcomes from the Jharkhand protests include resignation of JPSC officials, arrest of examination administrators, and formation of the government committee for reviewing recruitment process (The Hindu, 2026; Organiser, 2026a). The confirmation of these facts through the government orders, arrest reports, and committee reports found in the research documentation is necessary in order to be sure about these outcomes. As there is no available information on these documents, the reported outcomes should be treated provisionally.

Comparative analysis shows that different states were responsive to the youth protests differently. The protests against the Agnipath scheme have not caused any policy change despite the huge mass movement and clashes with the police forces. The Delhi High Court rejected legal challenges, and the policy scheme remained in effect (JURIST, 2023). It can be explained by the challenge of the protests to the substantive design of the policy defended by the government on the security grounds while the NEET and Jharkhand protests challenged administrative failures of integrity of the recruitment system.

Besides, the protests brought the diffusion attention to the issue of examination security in all states regardless of particular cases. Intensification of media coverage and parliamentary questions, discussion of the issue of examination integrity took place after NEET controversy, thus providing the incentive for preventive reforms in all examination commissions. These long-term effects are hard to measure precisely, however, they can be considered as one of the important impacts of protests.

When discussing the outcomes, it is necessary to consider a number of theoretical issues. First, the protests demonstrate that in the contemporary political environment the focus of youth political claims shifts from ideological to procedural and technical aspects of opportunity allocation systems. Gen Z mobilization regarding NEET and Jharkhand recruitment protests is about meritocracy without corruption, and not about challenging meritocratic principles.

Second, the mobilization methods used by the protesters that combine both online and offline tactics reveal a mastery among Generation Z of digital technologies while not forgetting the significance of a physical march in generating political pressure. This conclusion shows that successful protest today needs

more than just digital or traditional tools of protest but a combination of both. This challenges determinism that social media “causes” protest or makes street protest irrelevant.

Third, the institutional reactions, especially those of the judiciary, underscore the importance of the Indian Supreme Court as an important forum for resolving political disputes presented through constitutional/legally-framed claims. In the case of Vanshika Yadav, the Indian Supreme Court exhibits its ability to recognize citizens' concerns about governmental negligence while at the same time restricting the remedy being sought through the doctrine of proportionality.

Fourthly, the diffusion of the movement from Delhi to Jharkhand, be it through direct diffusion or parallel mobilization, implies that the issue of integrity in exams is an issue that cuts across India's federal system. The state recruitment examinations share the same problems that national level exams face regarding administration and corruption, thus providing a breeding ground for frustration among youth regarding the issue of integrity in exam-taking process.

Lastly, the results achieved by protests have shown some limitations in the effectiveness of protests as well. Despite the successful mobilization efforts that have brought in judicial inquiries, transfers to investigation, and cancellation of examinations, the changes in the examination system of India have not yet been seen. The compensation points have been withdrawn, yet the underlying examination structure and the idea of one shot single exam to determine opportunities has remained intact.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, I have studied the interrelated youth protests that occurred in Delhi and Jharkhand from 2022 to 2026. In doing so, I have shown how the activism of Gen Z regarding exam malpractice and recruitment reform had a clear effect on judicial doctrines, administrative functions, and public policies, though also highlighted the difficulties of protesting and the shortcomings in the available data.

In light of these findings, one could draw certain conclusions. First, the Supreme Court judgment Vanshika Yadav v. Union of India, which recognized the failures in the administration of NEET-UG 2024, set a new precedent that introduced the principles of proportionality which restrict conditions under which nationwide examination could be canceled. Second, protests used hybrid mobilization tactics which combine both social media campaigns and street demonstrations, proving the importance of multi-level activism in today's environment. Third, there was significant variation in institutional reactions – while protests against Agnipath scheme did not result in any reversal of policy, protests regarding NEET-UG and Jharkhand examinations resulted in examination cancellation and investigations. Fourth, despite protests spreading across multiple regions of the country from Delhi to Jharkhand, demonstrating widespread frustrations of young people with the systems of opportunity allocation, it is still unclear whether there was any transfer of organization.

Implications for democratic governance in India. The protests analyzed in the research demonstrate the importance of issues surrounding procedural fairness and institutional accountability in systems responsible for allocation of education and work opportunities. In case of examinations' irregularities, mobilized young people could get the attention of government and judiciary without being members of any formal organizations or having clear ideology. Therefore, issue-oriented activism could be a key feature of Gen Z political participation.

Social media as a platform for contemporary Indian protests. Social media could help protesters coordinate actions and spread information and, at the same time, create methodological problems for research. Encrypted architecture of WhatsApp makes mobilization easy and observation difficult. This problem requires development of innovative approaches to the study of digitally mediated protests. At the moment, claims about the causal effect of social media and its ability to determine the outcome of the protest are excessive and require replacement by more nuanced framework of analysis of affordances of social media platforms.

Methodological problems of this research and suggestions for future works. There is no survey of participants to confirm demographic information about mobilized people and their grievances. There is no full list of arrested individuals and government's orders and decisions about examination cancellations or court judgment of Vanshika Yadav v. Union of India. Absence of platform native data limits precise quantification of protests' digital mobilization. Future research should include: survey of participants with demographically representative sample size; archived content of social media accounts of protesters and engagement metrics of the posts and users' network data; comprehensive set of documents about government decisions about examinations; court judgment of litigation. Comparative research in additional

states and types of examinations could improve causal inference of results.

Future theoretical directions. Scholars should create analytical framework for the examination integrity protests as a specific form of Indian political contention and investigate how high stakes examination system creates political identities and claims-making strategies among youth. Comparative research could analyze similar movements in other countries with centralized examination system to find out whether the structural grievances produce similar protest patterns. Protest and judicial activism should become the focus of the research on how different legal and protest strategies produce policy change. Longitudinal research should track the implementation of court mandated and government announced reforms.

There are several lessons from this research for policy and administration. Systems of exams that have clear accountability mechanisms and are technologically sophisticated enough could help avoid integrity crises resulting in costly conflicts and loss of institutional legitimacy. Swift investigation of the claims of irregularities could help contain the grievances before the mobilization takes place. Remedies that would address the issue without affecting the candidates who have not engaged in any malpractices could be needed to maintain a proper balance between fairness and administrative feasibility. Interaction with the representatives of the students' community and aspirants may also help detect the emerging grievances before they turn into protests.

Gen Z protests discussed in this paper are not just sporadic resistance to particular exam outcomes. These are signals that demonstrate young people's fears about the nature of opportunities in India and trust in the meritocracy under circumstances of credential inflation and shortage of formal jobs. Until the situation does not change, when high-stakes exams continue to determine access to education and careers, there is no doubt that the integrity of such systems remains to be politically important. The further mobilizations of youth against these systems may occur in future unless some changes are made to address both technical and political economic issues causing the frustration of aspirants. Democracy in India will have to face the challenge of meeting these demands.

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