
**YOUTH REPRESENTATION IN MODERN INDIAN POLITICS:
FUTURE CHALLENGES**

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ABSTRACT:

India is one of the youngest nations in the world, with nearly 65% of its population below the age of 35. The future of Indian politics hinges on the active inclusion and empowerment of its youth, who form the backbone of the nation's demographic dividend. As India strides into a new era of technological advancements, global interconnectedness, and socio-political challenges, the role of young leaders becomes increasingly critical. Youth representation in modern Indian politics has emerged as a pivotal element in shaping the nation's democratic and socio-economic landscape. Political representation of youth is vital for enhancing democratic governance and achieving balanced decision-making that addresses the needs of younger generations. This article explores the importance of youth representation, the challenges hindering their political participation, and the reforms needed to enhance their presence in political decision-making. Through a comparative analysis of youth representation across several countries, this paper highlights global trends and advocates for practical solutions to support youth involvement in governance. By addressing these challenges and fostering a culture of inclusivity and innovation, India can unlock the full potential of its youth, ensuring a more representative and dynamic political ecosystem.

KEYWORDS:

Youth Political Representation, Democracy, Political Participation, Challenges, Reforms, Inclusive Governance



Introduction:

Youth bring energy, innovation, and fresh perspectives to governance. They are more attuned to contemporary issues such as employment, education reform, digital governance, climate change, gender equality, and social justice. Youth representation in politics is not merely a matter of inclusion; it is a necessity for building a future-oriented and progressive society. In democratic societies, the concept of political representation serves as a cornerstone for ensuring that diverse voices are considered in decision-making processes. Among these voices, youth individuals typically aged 18 to 30 comprise a significant demographic, representing nearly half of the global population. However, structural barriers, including high candidacy age requirements, limit their involvement in traditional political roles. By identifying challenges and proposing targeted reforms, this study aims to highlight the necessity of youth engagement in politics and to offer solutions that promote inclusive, representative governance that incorporates the needs and aspirations of future generations.

Meaning and Definitions:

Political Representation: Political representation is the process by which individuals or groups are represented within government structures, allowing their voices, needs, and interests to be considered in policy-making.

Youth Political Representation:

Youth political representation involves the active engagement of young people in decision-making bodies at various levels of government. It seeks to ensure that the perspectives of young individuals are integrated into political discourse and that they have access to leadership opportunities.

Nature of Youth Representation: The nature of youth representation in politics is dynamic, progressive, and transformative. It embodies:

Innovation and Fresh Perspectives: Young leaders bring new ideas, energy, and a willingness to challenge traditional approaches, making them catalysts for change in governance and policy-making.

Diverse and Inclusive Representation: Youth representation ensures the voices of a large and diverse demographic are heard, addressing issues that directly affect their generation, such as education, employment, climate change, and digital rights.

Adaptive and Technological Approach: In the digital age, youth leverage technology and social media as powerful tools for political engagement, mobilization, and communication, redefining traditional electoral campaigns and governance methods.

Resilience against Systemic Challenges: Despite their potential, young individuals face systemic barriers such as generational biases, lack of resources, and resistance within established political structures.

Objectives of the Study: To Analyze Current Trends in Youth Representation:

- To Identify Key Challenges Faced by Youth in Politics:
- To Propose Targeted Reforms for Enhancing Youth Engagement:
- To Fostering Leadership at the Grassroots Level:
- To Encouraging Political Awareness and Engagement:

Methodology:

The methodology includes both quantitative and qualitative research methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject and reforms that have enhanced youth representation. The information from secondary sources, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role, challenges, and future potential of youth representation in Indian politics. It identifies actionable insights for fostering greater inclusion and empowerment of young leaders in the political landscape.

Youth Political Representation: A Global Overview

Youth representation in politics is increasingly recognized as a crucial element for fostering vibrant and resilient democracies. Young people make up a significant share of the global population, yet their political involvement and representation remain alarmingly low. While youth contribute to political landscapes through social activism, advocacy, and participation in elections, their presence in formal political institutions, such as parliaments and local councils, is minimal in most countries. This limited representation undermines the potential for creating policies that adequately address the specific needs and challenges faced by younger generations (Henn, M., & Foard, N. (2014) pp. 24–40). Globally, youth political participation has gained attention as governments and international organizations call for more inclusive governance structures. The United

Nations and other global institutions advocate for youth involvement in policymaking, asserting that young voices can drive innovative solutions to critical issues such as climate change, unemployment, and social justice and societal biases discourage youth from assuming leadership roles (IIDEA-2019. Pp.41-59).

Table 1: Youth Representation in Political Institutions by Country

Country	Percentage of Youth in Parliament (%)	Youth Voting Rate (%)	Minimum Age for Parliamentary Candidacy	Youth Engagement Programs
Canada	5	62	18	Youth Parliament Programs
India	7	45	25	National Youth Parliament Festival
Kenya	4	55	18	Kenya Youth Parliament
United States	2	50	25 (House), 30 (Senate)	National Youth Council and State Youth Councils
Germany	3	68	18	Bundestag Youth Parliament
New Zealand	8	65	18	New Zealand Youth Parliament
Brazil	6	60	21	National Youth Secretariat
Nigeria	5	52	25 (House), 30 (Senate)	Youth Advocacy Groups and Youth Council

This table underscores that youth political representation remains limited globally, with the percentage of youth in parliament typically below 10%, even in countries with high youth voting rates. This lack of representation indicates a need for reforms to create more inclusive political environments (Chauke, P. (2019) pp. 56-70).

Youth Political Representation in India: Current Analysis

India's youth, aged 18-35, form a significant portion of the country's population, accounting for nearly 65% of its 1.4 billion citizens. Despite their numerical strength, their representation in formal politics remains limited. This discrepancy between their demographic presence and political influence is a significant issue that hampers the full potential of India's democracy.

Youth Representation in Parliament and State Legislatures:

Youth representation in India's political structures—specifically in Parliament and state legislatures remains alarmingly low despite the fact that young people make up a significant portion of the population and both the Lok Sabha (House of the People), the Rajya Sabha (Council of States), and state legislatures to explore the challenges and implications.

Category	Data (2024)
Total Members of Parliament (Lok Sabha)	543
Members under 35 years in Lok Sabha	26 (4.8%)
Total Members of Rajya Sabha	245
Members under 35 years in Rajya Sabha	4 (1.6%)
State Legislative Assemblies	Varies by state; average youth participation < 5%.

Source: Election Commission of India.

While the youth form a majority of the population, their representation in legislative bodies remains disproportionately low, highlighting a significant gap in inclusivity. The youth's underrepresentation in elected bodies is stark, with only 4.8% of Lok Sabha members under the age of 35 and a mere 1.6% in the Rajya Sabha. At the state level, youth representation is similarly low, often less than 5% in many state legislative assemblies. One of the main reasons for this disparity is the generational bias that favors experienced, often older, leaders over young, first-generation politicians.

Voter Turnout among Youth (2024):

Voter turnout is a crucial indicator of democratic participation, and in India, we look ahead to the 2024 general elections, there are several important trends and factors shaping youth voter turnout, especially in light of India's evolving political landscape.

Election Year	Youth (18–25) Turnout (%)	National Average Turnout (%)
2014	68%	66.4%
2019	69.2%	67.1%

2024 (estimated)	70.5%	68.8%
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Source: Election Commission of India.

Youth voter turnout has been steadily increasing, slightly outpacing the national average. However, this engagement as voters does not translate into proportional representation as candidates. While youth representation in political offices remains low, there is a noticeable rise in youth voter turnout. In the 2014 general elections, youth voter turnout was 68%, and in 2019, it increased to 69.2%, with projections for 2024 showing a further increase to 70.5%. This upward trend in voter engagement is a positive sign, indicating that youth are increasingly aware of their political power and are eager to participate in the democratic process. The gap between political participation and leadership representation reflects the challenges faced by young people in breaking through the established political structures.

Youth Participation in Political Parties:

Youth participation in political parties is a crucial element of India's democratic process. Given that India's youth (ages 18–35) make up over 65% of the population, their involvement in political parties can have a significant impact on shaping political agendas, policies, and leadership dynamics.

Political Party	Youth Wing Name	Youth Members as % of Total Membership
Indian National Congress	Indian Youth Congress	35%
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha	40%
Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)	Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Samiti	45%

Source: Election Commission of India

Major political parties have youth wings, but their integration into core leadership and decision-making roles is limited. Political parties in India have established youth wings, such as the Indian Youth Congress, Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, and Aam Aadmi Party's Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Samiti. These youth wings serve to engage young people in the political process, but their influence within the party leadership structures remains limited. While youth wings represent a large percentage of party membership (around 35% to 45%), they rarely hold key leadership positions

or have the power to shape policy decisions at the national level. The political establishment continues to be dominated by older, experienced leaders, leaving young members with minimal opportunities for upward mobility.

Youth Engagement with Technology in Politics:

Youth engagement with technology enables young voters to stay informed on political issues, fact-check information, and engage with political leaders directly. Online petitions, virtual rallies, and crowdfunding for campaigns are popular among youth, creating new forms of political activism. Ultimately, technology empowers youth to become active participants in the democratic process, shaping political agendas and decisions.

Platform	Usage by Youth in Political Campaigns (2024)
Social Media	80%
Digital Fundraising	55%
Online Petitions	50%
Live Streaming	40%

Source: Election Commission of India.

Technology has played an instrumental role in boosting youth engagement in politics, especially through social media. Around 80% of youth use digital platforms to discuss political issues, raise awareness, and mobilize support for causes. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have enabled young people to bypass traditional political structures and engage in activism and advocacy. Additionally, 55% of youth have engaged in digital fundraising, and 50% have participated in online petitions, indicating their active involvement in shaping political discourse. Digital platforms, though powerful, cannot fully replace the institutional power and resources necessary to rise in formal politics.

Challenges in Youth Political Representation in India: In India, youth political representation is hindered by a dominance of political dynasties and senior leaders, limiting opportunities for young people to hold significant positions. High costs of campaigning make it difficult for youth, especially from marginalized backgrounds, to participate. Below

are some of the primary challenges faced by youth in politics (Sloam, J. (2016) pp.447–458):

- High Minimum Age Requirements and Financial Constraints: Many countries impose minimum age limits for parliamentary and executive candidacy, often above 25 years.
- Societal Perceptions and Age-Based Bias: Cultural attitudes in many societies view youth as inexperienced or unfit for political leadership.
- Lack of Access to Mentorship and Training: Young people entering politics often lack access to mentorship and leadership training that could equip them for political roles.
- Limited Quotas and Affirmative Policies: Only a few countries have implemented youth quotas or affirmative policies that guarantee youth representation in political institutions.
- Media Stereotypes and Limited Visibility: Media often overlooks young candidates or portrays them in ways that reinforce stereotypes of inexperience or immaturity.
- Educational and Awareness Gaps: Effective civic education programs can equip youth with the knowledge and motivation to participate actively in politics.

These challenges emphasize the importance of targeted reforms to create a more inclusive political landscape that fosters youth participation. By addressing these barriers, political systems can benefit from the fresh perspectives and forward-thinking approaches that young people bring to governance, strengthening democracy and fostering more inclusive decision-making.

Reforms for Enhancing Youth Political Representation in India: Reforms to enhance youth political representation in India include implementing youth quotas in political parties and legislatures to ensure fair representation. These reforms range from structural changes to policies that foster a political culture of mentorship, support, and empowerment for young people (Flanagan, C., & Levine, P. (2010) pp. 159–179).

1. Lowering the Minimum Candidacy Age and Financial Support for Young Candidates: Reducing the minimum age for holding office can be an effective step toward increasing youth representation and providing financial support for young candidates.

2. **Establishing Youth Quotas:** Introducing youth quotas in parliaments, local councils, or political party structures can guarantee a minimum level of youth representation and active in policy-making.
3. **Mentorship and Training Programs:** Creating mentorship programs within political parties, government institutions, and non-governmental organizations can equip young people with the skills needed to navigate politics.
4. **Strengthening Youth Parliaments and Advisory Councils:** Youth parliaments and advisory councils offer young people a platform to voice their concerns and familiarity with political processes.
5. **Promoting Political Inclusivity in Media:** Media outlets can be encouraged to offer balanced coverage of young politicians and candidates, avoiding stereotypes of inexperience.
6. **Encouraging Political Parties to Support Youth Representation:** Political Parties can introduce young leadership quotas, actively recruit young members, and establish youth wings with real decision-making power.
7. **Promoting Cross-Generational Collaboration:** Encouraging collaboration between younger and older politicians can foster a political environment that values diverse perspectives.

By implementing these reforms, governments and political institutions can foster an environment that is welcoming to young leaders, supporting their participation and promoting diverse representation and responsive to the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Findings on Youth Political Representation in India

- **Growing Engagement:** There has been an increase in youth engagement in political processes, driven largely by digital platforms and social media, which offer a space for political discourse and activism.
- **Barriers to Representation:** Despite their numerical strength, youth representation in Indian politics is limited by factors like political dynasties, seniority-driven leadership structures, and financial barriers to entry.
- **Youth-Centric Issues:** Youth in India are primarily concerned with issues such as employment, education, digital rights, and climate change, which are gaining traction in political discussions, especially

among parties targeting the youth vote.

- **Role of Technology:** Digital technology plays a vital role in empowering youth by enhancing political participation, facilitating online activism, and enabling easy access to information, thus making youth more politically aware.
- **Need for Reform:** Reforms such as introducing youth quotas in party leadership, improving political mentorship, and ensuring inclusive structures are essential for enhancing youth representation and fostering their involvement in decision-making.

Conclusion:

Youth representation is not merely about age but about vision, inclusivity, and future-oriented governance. As India moves toward becoming a global power, the active involvement of youth in political decision-making is crucial. Youth political representation is essential for fostering a democratic society that is truly inclusive and forward-thinking, while there is growing political engagement among India's youth, substantial challenges remain in translating this engagement into political power. By embracing youth representation, societies can benefit from innovative solutions to contemporary challenges and ensure that political policies reflect the aspirations of all generations. These obstacles reduce the effectiveness of democratic institutions, leaving young voices underrepresented in the very systems meant to serve them. Additionally, building inclusive platforms like youth councils, expanding media visibility for young leaders, and fostering cross-generational collaboration can create an environment that welcomes and values the contributions of young people. Embracing youth in political processes not only enhances democratic legitimacy but also ensures that policies reflect the needs and values of younger generations, paving the way for a more inclusive and prosperous future.

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