

**Political Participation and Youth Engagement in Democratic Processes: A Study of India**

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**Abstract**

Democratic governance is based on political participation and the extent to which the youth are involved in democratic processes defines the quality of the representative systems and their sustainability. In this paper, the author discusses the trends, factors, and issues of young people in India, the largest democracy in the world with more than three fourth of the population under 35 years old. The main aims are to determine the trends of youth voter turnout in the Indian general elections and to determine the socio-political issues affecting the turnout behaviour. A descriptive-analytical research design was used with the secondary data being provided by the Election Commission of India, Lokniti-CSDS National Election Studies and the United Nations databases. The hypothesis of the study is that even with numerical dominance, the Indian young people are subjected to structural and attitudinal obstacles that limit their successful politics. The findings indicate that youth voter registration has been growing by small percentage points; nevertheless, turnout does not correlate in the same direction, and the parliamentary representation of the individuals under the age of 40 has been lower than it should. It turns out that gender, urban-rural disparity and access to digital become important mediating factors. The discussion confirms that, online platforms have created new participatory spaces, although there are still offline institutional obstacles. The paper has concluded that the policy structures that are inclusive, civic education programmes and positive electoral mechanisms are key to converting the youth demographic advantage into meaningful political participation.

**Keywords:** Youth Political Participation, Democratic Engagement, Electoral Behaviour, Indian Democracy, Civic Voluntarism

**1. Introduction**

Youth and democratic participation have become one of the most significant impacts of the current literature in political science. The legitimacy and vibrancy of governance systems in democratic polities depends on the active participation of citizens on all demographical groups and when any substantial group in society is non-participatory, it is the basic challenges to representative democracy (Verba et al., 1995). Youth, in a broad sense when taken to refer to those who are between the age of 18 and 35 years, are not only the future voters; they also represent a current group whose participation or non-participation has direct implications on the policy makers, election results and accountability of the institutions. There have been worries on dwindling youth participation in formal politics across the world, and researchers have been recording trends in electoral turnout, cynicism in politics, and mistrust of institutions, among young citizens (Norris, 2002). Nevertheless, these processes of disengagement are alongside the signs of an increase in non-conventional engagement due to digital activism, protest movements, and politicized speech through social media (Boulianne, 2015). In the context of India, these processes gain particular weight due to the

demographics of the country. Ministry of statistics and programme implementation (2023) indicates that India is one of the youngest countries in the world with more than half the population of less than 25 years of age and about 65 years of age and below. A total of 968 million eligible voters were registered in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, of which 18.5 million were first time voters in the age group of 1819 (Election Commission of India, 2024). However, 38 percent of 1819 year olds eligible were enrolled in electoral rolls, which implies a large divide between population potential and the electoral mobilization (Mukherjee, 2024). The main problematic of this research is this paradox, when the number of young people is the dominant force in elections but are underrepresented in the formal political establishments. This phenomenon has been theorized by Dalton (2017) in the form of the so-called participation gap, according to which systematic asymmetries in civic participation are the result of socioeconomic inequalities, education, and unequal access to political resources. Also, the activities of the place of democracy have been significantly changed in the recent election periods in India. The emergence of social media platforms has made possible new forms of political expression, and government programmes such as the Systematic Voters Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) programme have tried to increase youth enrolment (Election Commission of India, 2023). At the same time, the enduring issues such as unemployment, political mobilization based on caste, and gender inequality still mediate the conditions under which the young Indians interact with the democratic processes (Kumar and Kumar, 2024). This essay is an analytical study of these overlapping trends founded on the confirmed empirical information and existing theoretical models of the field of political science to evaluate the situation of youth politics in India.

## **2. Literature Review**

Theoretical foundation of the researches on political participation is also significantly based on the Civic Voluntarism Model suggested by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995), which consists of three important determinants of political engagement by citizens, including resources (time, money, and civic skills), psychological engagement (political interest and efficacy), and recruitment networks (organizational affiliations that help to mobilize the citizens). This model has been widely used in cross-national comparative research in order to describe the reason why certain groups of people participate in the survey at a higher rate than others (e.g. by age cohort). In her landmark study, Norris (2002) disputed the established history of democratic decay by showing that even as traditional forms of participation, such as voting and party membership, were disappearing, newer forms of civic participation, such as protest politics, consumer activism, and digital mobilization, were proliferating in the postindustrial societies. This has been an independent two-fold path of decreasing conventional and increasing unconventional attendance especially towards the youth groups throughout the world.

Relating particularly to the youth political behaviour, Quintelier (2007) has determined that differences in participation by age is not only an effect of life-cycle factors but also a modification of the generational change in values and norms of participation. This analysis was broadened by Dalton (2017), who showed that younger citizens in established democracies are becoming more and more involved in the so-called cause-oriented but not

duty-based forms of participation and are more inclined towards issue-specific activism than repetitive party loyalty. The Lokniti-CSDS programme has issued the most systematic longitudinal evidence on youth political attitudes and behaviour, in the Indian scholarly context, whereby Boulianne (2015) confirmed a positive yet moderate relationship between social media usage and political participation, though not necessarily a type of substantive offline political action. Examining the data provided by the National Election Study 2024, Kumar and Kumar (2024) have reported that the 2024 elections have seen a noticeable change in terms of the youth popularity of a single party as there is no party that has been able to secure a stable youth presence. According to the study by Vanditha (2024), just 34.50 percent of the interviewed Indian young people were interested in active political engagement, and 41.40 percent are not interested at all, which also confirms a consistent lack of engagement. A cross-sectional study conducted by researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles, with 602 Indian youth in 27 cities showed that male respondents were more interested in politics, and more engaged and interested in pursuing a political career, whereas female ones showed higher awareness of gender inequities but had lower participation results (Gender & Development, 2025). Such results are in line with the structural limitations cited by Pateman (1970) on the gendered aspects of democratic citizens. More recent academic research has also discussed the use of digital spaces as platforms of political socialization amongst young Indians. The phenomenon of 18 million first-time voters in 2024, which have been mobilized by the campaigns, such as MeraPehla Vote DeshKeLiye, is the result of the interaction between the institutional outreach and the digital communication (Election Commission of India, 2024). However, the existence of a digital divide, the fact that rural, tribal, and economically disadvantaged young people are still incapacitated by the internet and cannot take part in the political process online, demonstrates that technology access is a mediating factor, not a equalizer (Sahu & Gupta, 2024).

### **3. Objectives**

- 1 To assess the trends and patterns of youth voter turnout and electoral registration in Indian general elections from 2009 to 2024.
- 2 To identify the socio-political and demographic factors (gender, urban-rural location, digital access, and institutional trust) that influence the nature and extent of youth engagement in India's democratic processes.

### **4. Methodology**

The research design adopted in this study is descriptive-analytical research design that falls within the positivist paradigm and is based on secondary data sources only to address the question of youth political participation in India. The methodological practice is predetermined by the comparative-empirical tradition in the field of political science when the aggregate-level electoral data and the findings of surveys are systematically examined in order to determine the patterns and determinants of the participatory behaviour. The main sources of data include official statistical reports issued by the Election Commission of India (ECI) on the general elections of 2009, 2014, 2019 and 2024, the Lokniti-CSDS National Election Studies, the global population trends forecasted by the United Nations Population Division, and the data presented by the Inter-Parliamentary Union concerning the

representation of youth in the National Assembly, as well as the data presented by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation in its publication Youth in India Report (2023). The sample universe will cover all the groups of Indian electorate with special analytical treatment particularly on 18-35 age bracket, disaggregated by gender, place of residence (urban/rural) as well as state level variations where data is available. The tools that will be used in the analysis will be the percentage analysis, trend mapping and cross tabulation of the demographic variables with the indicators of participation. The data was obtained systematically by means of searching government databases, published scholarly articles found on Google Scholar, and institutional repositories. To make sure that data points were reliable the triangulation technique was used to cross verify the data points with various other sources that are considered authoritative. Time scope will be 2009–2024, and appropriate references to the context of the earlier electoral cycles will be selected when needed to analyze the trends. All data are given as present tables with distinctly marked sources, and statistical descriptions are given to every table in order to make it interpretively transparent. Because of ethical consideration, only publicly accessible non-identifiable aggregate data was used, which removed the issue of personal privacy or an informed consent.

### 5. Results

The findings are presented through six tables, each containing verified data from authoritative sources, accompanied by statistical interpretation.

**Table 1: Voter Turnout in Indian General Elections (2009–2024)**

Election Year	Total Electors (in Crores)	Votes Polled (in Crores)	Voter Turnout (%)
2009	71.70	41.72	58.19
2014	83.41	55.38	66.44
2019	91.20	61.47	67.40
2024	96.88	64.20	65.79

Source: Election Commission of India, Statistical Reports (2009, 2014, 2019, 2024); PIB, Government of India (2024).

Table 1 shows the general trends in voter turnout in four consecutive Lok Sabha elections. The data indicates that the voter turnout was the highest in the last 2019, at 67.40 percent, which is the highest turnout in the history of Indian elections since independence. The 2024 elections however experienced a drop to 65.79 percent, though the overall number of voters increased to 96.88 crore voters. The total number of votes polled rose by 41.72 crore in 2009 to 64.20 crore in 2024, which shows the increasing electoral participation in absolute numbers. However, the fact that the percentage dropped in 2024 also reveals new trends in voter disengagement or rather a selective disengagement of particular demographic groups, especially in urban constituencies.

**Table 2: Youth Voter Registration Among 18–19 Age Group (2024)**

Indicator	Data
Estimated population of 18–19 year olds	4.90 Crore (approx. 49 million)
Registered voters in 18–19 age group	1.85 Crore (approx. 18.5 million)
Registration rate	38%
First-time voters added (18–29 age group)	Over 2 Crore

Source: Election Commission of India (2024); Press Information Bureau, Government of India (2024).

As shown in table 2, there is a dire youth electoral registration gap. Among the 49 million Indians aged between 18 and 19 years, only 18.5 million (38 percent) of the population had enrolled in the electoral rolls in the 2024 elections. This implies that about 62 percent of the youngest eligible voters were not present in the democratic process even at the stage of registration itself. The fact that the Election Commission has added more than 2 crore young voters in the 1829 age bracket under Special Summary Revision is an indication of institutional attempt, but the fact that the numbers of the youngest bracket of voters are still less indicates that campaign to enrol voters is still wanting in the grassroots level.

**Table 3: State-Wise Youth Voter Enrolment Rate (18–19 Age Group, 2024)**

State/UT	Enrolment Rate (%)
Telangana	66.7
Himachal Pradesh	>60.0
Jammu & Kashmir	>60.0
Kerala	~55.0
Bihar	17.0
Uttar Pradesh	<30.0
Delhi	<30.0

Source: Election Commission of India, as reported by Business Standard (April 5, 2024) and PIB (2024).

Table 3 illustrates that there is inter-state difference on the enrolment of youth into voting. The best enrolment was recorded in Telangana at 66.7 percent with more than 800,000 young people enrolled and this is a positive indication of state mobilization. Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir surpassed 60 percent. By contrast, Bihar enrolled only 17 percent of its potential 1819 year old age group (930,000 of the potential 5.4 million), with Uttar Pradesh and Delhi both registering a lower figure (under 30 percent). These gaps are highly associated with the differences in administrative effectiveness, digital literacy infrastructure, and administrative efficiency of local SVEEP campaigns, which validates the hypothesis that youth political entry is still not geographically balanced.

**Table 4: Youth Representation in Lok Sabha (Members Below Age 40)**

Lok Sabha	Total Members	Members Below 40 Years	Percentage (%)
14th (2004)	543	56	10.31
15th (2009)	543	63	11.60
16th (2014)	543	76	13.99
17th (2019)	543	68	12.52
18th (2024)	543	~65	~12.0

Source: Lok Sabha Secretariat; IPU Parline Database; EPW (August 2024) "Young India, Ageing Parliament."

Table 4 shows that the Indian Parliament has continued to suffer under-representation of the youth. Although they form majority of the population; a majority of less than 40 years have never surpassed 14 percent representation of Lok Sabha. The highest percentage was

registered at the 16 th Lok Sabha (2014) at about 14 percent which later dropped to about 12 percent in the years 2019 and 2024. This information highlights what the Economic & Political Weekly (2024) has labeled: Young India, Ageing Parliament, a structural mismatch between demographic youth bulge and legislative representation in India such as high costs of candidacy, party gatekeeping behavior, and dynastic politics.

**Table 5: Youth Attitudes Toward Political Participation (Survey Data)**

Attitude Category	Percentage of Respondents (%)
Interested in joining politics	34.50
Less interested in politics	24.10
Not at all interested	41.40

Source: Vanditha, S. S. (2024). *IJSSRD*, 6(2), 195–205. DOI: 10.34218/IJSSRD\_06\_02\_015

Table 5 shows the attitudinal information of a primary survey on youth political participation. The level of interest in politics was also high with 41.40 percent of respondents stating that they were not interested in politics at all and only 34.50 percent of respondents said that they would like to participate in political activities. The total number of disinterested plus less interested respondents (65.50 percent) is a large proportion as compared to the positive respondents. This attitudinal shortage is associated with recorded causes such as image of general corruption, nepotism in political parties, caste mobilization that isolates the educated youth and absence of visible accountability systems, which represents the disillusionment thesis in modern Indian political sociology.

**Table 6: Gender Disparities in Youth Political Engagement (India, 2022–2023)**

Indicator	Male Youth	Female Youth
Political interest (high)	62%	38%
Active political engagement	58%	34%
Political career aspiration	45%	18%
Awareness of gender inequities in politics	41%	72%

Source: *Gender & Development*, 33(2), 2025. Survey of 602 youth across 27 Indian cities (UCLA-Kuviraa Study, 2022–2023). DOI: 10.1080/13552074.2025.2539623

As shown in Table 6, there are strong gender differences in political participation among the youth. It was found that male respondents expressed significantly more interest in politics (62 percent vs. 38 percent) and active participation (58 percent vs. 34 percent). Aspirations to pursue political career were more prevalent twice among males (45 percent) than among females (18 percent). Nevertheless, the female respondents proved much more aware of gender inequities in politics (72 percent and 41 percent, respectively). Having examined 602 young people in 27 cities in India, these results validate the fact that patriarchal patterns of socialization, structural obstructions, and lack of female political role models still limit the paths of participation of women despite the increase of gender consciousness.

## 6. Discussion

The results of the current research provide a rather subtle image of the political engagement of youth in India which, on the one hand, does not disprove the existing theoretical judgements, but, on the other hand, makes them more challenging. Relative to the first objective, which is to measure the trend of youth voter turnout and electoral registration, the

data indicate that, although India has grown significantly in the number of electorate of 71.70 crore in 2009 to 96.88 crore in 2024, a corresponding growth had not occurred on the quality of youth participation in elections. Active voter turnout also decreased by 67.40 percent in 2019 to 65.79 percent in 2024 (Election Commission of India, 2024), and the registration rates among 1819 year olds were as low as 38 percent, which means that a large majority of eligible citizens of India are not registered to vote in the formal system. The finding is consistent with the conceptualization of the participation gap proposed by Dalton (2017) which argues that the structural inequality of resources, education, and political socialization places the younger and marginalized citizens at a systematic disadvantage when it comes to meaningful engagement in the democratic process. The difference between the 66.7 percent enrolment rate in Telangana and 17 percent in Bihar shows that the ability of the state government to govern effectively, the administrative reach, and local political cultures are the key factors that mediate the youth electoral inclusion. States that have a better educational infrastructure and civil society networks seem to be better placed to implement institutional campaigns to actualized registration results. Such trends echo the Civic Voluntarism Model, which identifies organizational recruitment networks as some of the key facilitators of political entry (Verba et al., 1995). In places where civic institutions, learning institutions and election machineries are active in recruiting young voters, the turn-out is proven to be high.

With respect to the second goal, the definition of socio-political factors affecting youth engagement, the gender aspect appears as quite prominent. According to the information provided in the UCLA-Kuviraa research ( Gender & Development, 2025), the number of women youths aspiring to political careers (18 percent) is lower than half of the number of men youths (45 percent), although women proved to be much more aware of gender disparities. According to this paradox, an awareness of structural barriers is not a necessary condition for having a participatory agency but instead, the patriarchal norms, familial restrictions, and the lack of any institutional support systems persist in stifling the political ambitions of women. This gap can be addressed by legislative means; however, the timeline of the implementation of the 2023 constitutional amendment that claims 33 percent of the seats in parliament to women is still unclear (Gopalan&Wattal, 2023).Table 5 also shows the importance of the attitudinal results. This is because the percentage of the surveyed young people showing no interest in politics was 41.40 which in turn questions the notion that the demographic dividend in India will automatically have a democratic dividend. The cause of this disengagementcorruption, nepotism, caste politics, and lack of accountability (Vanditha, 2024) can be attributed more to institutional flaws and less to a lack of interest in youth, which implies that the issue is not their age but the inability of the political system to provide meaningful ways to intervene. This meaning does not go against the argument by Norris (2002) that the shrinking participation in traditional institutions is the rational reaction to the perceived institutional ineffectiveness, but not a generational pathology.

The hope and constraint of youth participation lies in the digital aspect of it. The fact that campaigns like MeraPehla Vote DeshKeLiye mobilized more than 18 million first-time voters and that the vast usage of social media as a platform of political discussion is reshaping the participatory frontier all points to the reality that digital platforms are

redefining the participatory frontier (Kumar & Kumar, 2024). The meta-analytical result of a positive correlation between social media use and use (Boulianne, 2015) is applicable to the context of India, where the platforms have reduced the barriers to political expression by lowering the barriers to entry. Nevertheless, the fact that the digital democratization process is selective rather than universal is largely due to the existence of a digital divide with rural, tribal, and economically disadvantaged young people who are largely excluded in the digital political sphere (Sahu & Gupta, 2024). Nevertheless, the fact that the number of young people in the Lok Sabha is lower in comparison with the entire population (the percentages of them in the Lok Sabha are 12 with most of the youth being below 40 years) is, perhaps, the greatest structural barrier. Such a lack of representation is a by-product of various institutional reasons: the prohibitive cost of winning an election, the role of established political families in the choice of candidates and the lack of intra-party democracy processes that allow youthful candidacies (EPW, 2024). The difference between participation in electoral processes as voters and participation as candidates therefore is a qualitative aspect of exclusion that cannot be considered by quantitative turnout statistics.

## **7. Conclusion**

This paper confirms that the youth political participation in India is defined by a certain paradox: the country has one of the most significant youth populations in the world, and this demographic strength has not been reflected in the corresponding political power or representation. Even though voter registration and voter turnout have improved in an incremental fashion, there are still significant gaps in Voter turnout and voter registration especially among youths in the 18-19 years, women youths and those living in educationally and economically disadvantaged states. The discussion shows that structural elements such as institutional reasons, socialization by gender, digital inequality, and political disillusionment remain to mediate youth engagement stronger than individual motivation or awareness. To ensure that the democracy of India can use its demographic dividend to significant effect, the country needs systemic interventions: the reinforcing of civic education in school curricula, youth quotas in the policy of selecting candidates to political parties, the expansion of digital literacy programs in rural communities, and institutional means of youth involvement in government, other than through elections. Future studies must embrace longitudinal designs based on mixed research designs to monitor the relationship between the emerging digital participatory practices and the traditional institutional pathways in influencing the political direction of Indian youth.

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