



## International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)

A Peer-Reviewed Bi-monthly Bi-lingual Research Journal

ISSN: 2349-6959 (Online), ISSN: 2349-6711 (Print)

Impact Factor: 6.8

Volume-XII, Issue-III, May 2026, Page No. 242-251

Published by Scholar Publications, Sribhumi, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://www.ijhsss.com>

DOI: [10.29032/ijhsss.vol.12.issue.03W.338](https://doi.org/10.29032/ijhsss.vol.12.issue.03W.338)



# Democratic Participation of Youth in India

Amaira Jain

*Student, Modern School Barakhamba Road, New Delhi, India*

Received: 09.05.2026; Accepted: 16.05.2026; Available online: 31.05.2026

©2026 The Author(s). Published by Scholar Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

### **Abstract**

*India is the world's largest democracy, yet the patterns of inconsistent political participation among its youth have shown an upward trajectory, thus raising questions about the effectiveness of its democratic structures. This paper seeks to investigate the factors that influence the political participation of youth in India and how institutions like family, education, and social media shape their engagement in democratic processes. This study employed a mixed-method research design that triangulated primary data from semi-structured interviews with 20 Delhi-NCR residents aged 18-30 along with secondary electoral data post 1950, revealing a disjunction between democratic ideals and its reality in practice. It also found the theory of civic education isolated from societal context. Alternatively, digital media, a major source of political learning, may also be the cause for misinformation and bias. Some other factors that may suppress political participation include logistical challenges, electoral inaccessibility, and a sense of political inefficacy. The study underscores a need for a multi-dimensional approach to strengthen youth participation and provides a framework to influence future research, educational practices and electoral reforms aimed at bridging the gap between formal laws and active engagement.*

**Keywords:** India, Electoral Politics, Decolonisation, Political Socialisation, Voter Turnout, Democratic Deficit

### **Introduction:**

"The ballot is stronger than the bullet." – Abraham Lincoln

However, a ballot unused is power surrendered. Even with universal suffrage guaranteed in India, the real issue is now not whether the youth can vote, but whether they choose to do so. Youth participation forms a cornerstone of any functioning democracy. Today's youth is tomorrow's future; thus, it reflects not only present engagement but also the future trajectory of political institutions. Young citizens form a substantial part of the Indian electorate; their active involvement carries significant repercussions on policies and representation. Year by year, the size of the electorate increases but the proportionate increase in participation shows disappointing results.

The underlying theme of this paper is to analyse the extent to which young citizens of India meaningfully engage with democratic processes, with a focus on social and institutional forces that shape political engagement. It also aims to understand the

challenges that play a role in discouraging active involvement in electoral and civic processes. This study delves into some of the most critical themes of Indian electoral politics from a youth perspective. Firstly, it analyses how they perceive political participation and civic duty and what factors influence them. Secondly, the barriers discourage them from voting and fulfilling other civic duties. Thirdly, the role of exogenous influences (family, school, and social media) in shaping political opinions and socialisation. Finally, it explores the broader structural and psychological factors impacting youth political apathy.

This is followed by a literature review, and a detailed methodology section outlining the design of research. This is followed by the results and discussions, where the findings are presented and interpreted in light of the research objectives. The policy implications section extends these insights into practical recommendations. The paper concludes with a synthesis of key arguments, along with acknowledgements and references.

### **Literature Review:**

Human beings are not born with an innate sense of the political world and what constitutes politics is a complex question. It is not just limited to possessing knowledge about the particular forms of government and institutions of a particular nation or sets of nations. The process by which individuals in a given society become acquainted with the political system and which to a certain degree determines their reactions to political phenomena is known as political socialisation (Rush, 1992, p.92). It is a matter of developing core values and attitudes as well as perceptions of authority that together influence political views and shape political behaviour.

Political Socialisation is the process by which political cultures are maintained and changed (Almond & Powell). Easton and Dennis define it as those development processes by which acquires political orientation and pattern of behaviour. According to Allan R Ball it is the establishment and development of attitudes to beliefs about the political system. With the death of various members of a group, the political culture of the group does not die. The new members of the group maintain their political culture. From their childhood, they learned, embraced, and obeyed the political values or beliefs of society. There have been debates amongst scholars on the appropriate time for one to learn about politics. Some emphasise on the importance of early-life, pre-adult experiences and see education and parents are prominent social agents in shaping political views. On the other hand, some argue that the process of learning about politics is influenced by the various experiences throughout our lives which changes our circumstances and outlook on the world.

These broad definitions can further be disaggregated into two elements: political socialisation at the macro and micro levels. Virginia Sapiro argues at the macro level, political socialisation frames research on how polities and other political societies and systems inculcate appropriate norms and practices in citizens, residents or members. At the micro level, political socialisation frames research on the patterns and processes by which individuals engage in political development and learning, constructing their particular relationships to the political contexts in which they live. (Sapiro 2004: 2-3)

The socializing agents for our political education are clear, and these are families, friends, institutions like schools, political parties and so forth. However, there are many other ways in which socialization into politics can occur, including popular culture, particularly in an age of globalized digital media through which we are able to connect to culture and information globally through a touch of our phones, to be able to create our own image about politics. In the same way, there are certain events, such as 9-11, or the British exit from the European Union, that have played a big part in how we see politics, and how often we engage in politics.

Political socialization processes are categorized into two major types, that is, direct (manifest), or indirect (non-manifest) socialization. The direct kind of socialization entails an explicit and intentional transfer of political values and ideologies among individuals. This usually takes place in schools, at home through family members, through election campaigns, and via official media. If done in an ideal democracy, direct socialization should result in politically aware citizens knowing their political rights and obligations.

The way people learn about politics and how they feel about their country is really influenced by what happened in the past and the situation they are in now. The idea of - colonial citizenship is very important to understand this. It is about how people feel connected to their country and what rights they have in places that used to be controlled by countries. This is different from what people in countries think about citizenship, which is usually just about the law and how individuals relate to the government. In countries that used to be colonies the way people feel about their citizenship is affected by the history of being controlled by another country, racial differences, people being forced to move and disagreements about who's in charge.

According to Manby (2023) when countries stopped being colonies it was a moment for the idea of citizenship because it brought a more European way of thinking about citizenship to these places for the first time. However, the new systems of citizenship still had problems like excluding certain groups of people dealing with ethnicity and forcing people to move which were all issues from the time of colonial rule. In Africa and South Asia, the colonial powers created borders, moved people around and classified them by race or ethnicity in ways that still affect the laws about citizenship today.

Kornelsen explains that the way Western countries think about citizenship is based on the idea of controlling land and people which comes from time. He says that in countries that used to be colonies or where settlers arrived, citizenship is often about controlling land, resources and people rather than making sure everyone has equal rights. This means that the system of citizenship looks like it is open to everyone but is actually unfair to indigenous people and groups that are already marginalized. Bosma, Lucassen and Oostindie point out that post-colonial citizenship is closely related to migration and how people think about their identity. When countries stopped being colonies many people moved across borders, which created complex situations where people's legal citizenship did not always match their social status or political power. This has led to arguments about who belongs in a country and how they should be recognized.

This is especially true in India. The partition of the country, the reorganization of states based on language, the caste system and the many different religions all contributed to a system of citizenship that's officially fair to everyone but is actually divided socially. In India the way people think about citizenship has been shaped by both the idea of equality

in the constitution and ongoing conflicts about identity, belonging and recognition. For people in India being involved in politics is not just about using their legal rights but also about dealing with the effects of colonialism, nationalism and social hierarchy. To understand how young people participate in democracy we need to look at voting, protesting and political activism in the context of what it means to be a citizen, after colonialism, where who belongs and how people are treated is still an issue.

**Methodology:**

The aim of this paper was to investigate the nature of youth participation in democratic processes in India and to examine the barriers and incentives that influence the engagement in political decision-making and civic life.

In order to achieve this efficiently, this study combined both primary and secondary data analysis tracing data analysis of youth political participation and post-independence democratic participation trends in India from 1950 onwards. Primary data was collected using a questionnaire format through face-to-face interviews. The questionnaire consisted of questions designed to capture the respondents' experiences, perceptions, and levels of engagement in civic life. Responses were recorded and later organized for analysis. Secondary data was collected from the Election Commission of India, Lok Niti- CSDS, Census of India, EPW, ORF, PRS Legislative Research and other such government records, academic journals, and public policy research organizations.

Ethical consideration was the topmost priority throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the objective of the study prior to responding and their responses were based purely on informed consent. No coercion or pressure was applied during any stage of data collection, and they were free to withdraw whenever they deemed fit. In order to ensure confidentiality and privacy, pseudonyms were used instead of real names in all records. No personally identifiable information has been and will be disclosed to a third party, ensuring protection of respondent identity. All information collected was solely for the purpose of this research.

The sample size of this study was 20 participants, residing in the Delhi-NCR region, drawn from both rural and urban backgrounds. Representing the young adult population of India, all participation fell within the 18-30 age group. The sample was structured in a way to ensure equal representation across gender and location categories. Ten participants were from urban areas and ten from rural areas, with each sub-group consisting of five male and five female participants, resulting in a 1:1 overall male-to-female ratio.

The structured composition of the sample enabled comparative analysis across location and gender without demographic bias. However, since a convenience sampling method was used to collect the primary data, the sample may not be representative of all youth in India. The relatively small sample size and geographic concentration in Delhi NCR limit the external validity of the findings since it represented only a small section of society. The questionnaire relied partly on self-reported responses, which may be influenced by personal bias or social desirability.

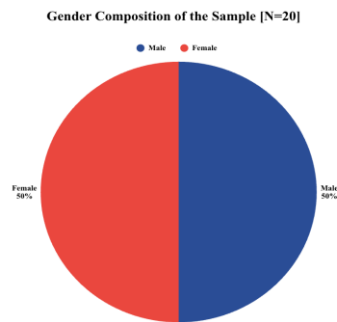


Figure 1: Pie-chart representing Gender-wise classification of Respondents

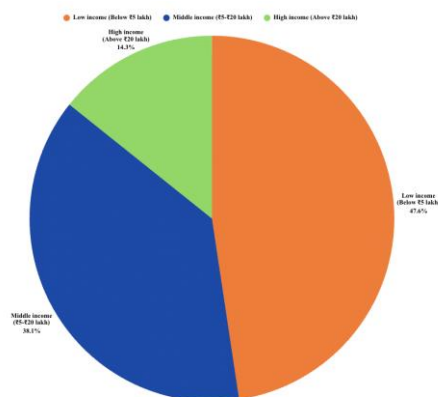


Figure 2: Pie-chart representing Income distribution of respondents

## Results & Discussion:

### *i) Perceptions of Political Leadership:*

Arti, 29, a repeat voter from the urban parts of Delhi criticised the fact that candidates only talked about issues that affect lower-income groups because they see them as their vote bank. Problems faced by urban taxpayers or the general category rarely appear in manifestos. She also expressed scepticism towards voter apathy in India, stating "People don't vote because politicians rarely fulfil what they promise. All they care about is filling their own pockets."

Similar frustrations were expressed by other respondents as well. Gaurang (28, Teacher, Gurgaon) suggested that "people only vote if they receive some form of incentive, otherwise they don't care enough to put in the effort".

Many viewed elections as a duty towards a leader rather than the institution of democracy. Vyan, 19, strongly believed that Indian election campaigns are disorganised. Anushka viewed them as "highly emotional and driven by propaganda".

These responses suggest an overarching theme of personality-driven politics rather than policy-driven, contributing to political disengagement.

### *ii) Civic Education and Political Awareness:*

Multiple voters criticised school civic education calling it "generic" and largely confined to textbook discussions, disconnected from real political discourse. Ayaan, a recent high

school graduate, criticised the contradiction between democratic ideals and everyday school culture, remarking that "there's nothing known as democratic voting in school, we live in the biggest democracy of the world but in our day-to-day life it often just feels like a farce. Gulnair, 22, stated that conversations about citizenship are "not a part of the actual discussions teachers have with students," and that whatever is taught in classrooms is restricted to the CBSE syllabus, ongoing political affairs are called "controversial" and are silenced.

The key pattern observed with experiences of the educated youth in India is that civic education is seen as ideational and postulatory. This disjuncture between formal democratic ideals and lived institutional experiences reveal that civic education, in its current form, appears insufficient and schools, as secondary agents of political socialisation are failing. This rote-based learning and limited exposure to real world scenarios creates a democratic deficit in every life, further inhibiting the development of participatory political culture among youth.

### ***iii) Role of Family in Political Socialisation:***

This led to the discussion of political discussions at home. Anmol voiced that politics was rarely discussed at home during his childhood. Similarly, Nitin said that it wasn't like political discussions were avoided on purpose at home, they just didn't come up. 14 out of 20 respondents felt that political socialisation through both schools and family networks remains limited. Few exceptions existed however, wherein a more open political environment within their families was seen. Ruchi, 23, noted that such open and liberal family discussions played an important role in shaping her understanding of political issues.

The limited role of family suggests a weak foundation of primary political socialisation, leading to low early exposure, weak political identity formation and fragmented political learning. Politics is considered as a sensitive topic, and intergenerational transmission theory is largely absent here. Conversely, respondents from politically expressive households demonstrate the significant impact of familial discourse in fostering political engagement.

### ***iv) Social Media and Political Information:***

Due to lack of open political discussions in schools and at home, many respondents viewed social media as an important entry point to political information. Tanvi, 24, acknowledged that social media has really influenced her opinion as it's a quicker way to gain insights and information without following traditional news sources. "XYZ leader isn't actually that stupid," said Saksham, a construction labourer, after observing that online narratives and memes often distort public perception of controversial leaders.

Divya expressed concerns over misinformation circulating on social media that has worsened the political environment, further emphasising the need to complement online information with "actual research and credible sources."

Social media functions as a dominant agent for youth today. Discussions reveal a shift from traditional to digital and networked political socialisation. However, it simultaneously exacerbates epistemic vulnerabilities through misinformation and bias. Platforms like instagram, facebook, X, youtube, function as powerful agenda-setters.

The prominence of certain narratives driven by virality rather than relevance, sideline other important issues thus distorting priority-setting among youth dependent on social media platforms. Furthermore, perceptions of politicians are heavily shaped by framing effects where information is sensationalised, biased and exaggerated.

**v) Electoral Infrastructure and Accessibility:**

Many respondents commented on lack of infrastructural facilities and access to polling booths. Meghna (25, Delhi) said ramps and wheel chair access have still not been provided in most booths. Amarnath observed that though polling booths in posh localities have a cleaner set up, ramp access is still not in place even there. These differences are far more apparent in informal settlements and rural regions. "Most of these booths did not have backup power with generators," Rahul said. The absence of fans, coolers, or any sort of shade at the booths in Bawana and Panchkula further exacerbated the situation for the voters. "We were told a wheelchair would be provided at the polling booths, but it wasn't at ours," Arun, PwD worker in Narela.

This evidence illustrates the problem of institutional and infrastructural barriers to political participation. The primary claim of universal adult franchise is undermined when access is not equal, turning the phenomenon from an equitable principle to one operated selectively. This aspect relates closely to rational choice theory that emphasizes that if people perceive the costs of participating to be more than the perceived returns, participation rates fall.

**vi) Youth Voter Registration Trends:**

A total of 17 Lok Sabha has been conducted in India since its independence. Ever since its first general polls in 1951, which the Congress won comprehensively, voting patterns have seen enormous fluctuations.

Recent statistics from the ECI reveal that the youth voter turnout has consistently been lackluster. Less than 40% of the voters aged 18-19 registered for the 2024 elections across the country. Only a little over 1.8 crore new voters in the 18-19-year-old bracket have been included in the electoral rolls. The figure is considerably lower than the projected population size of this demographic which stands around 4.9 crore, which shows around 36.7% successful registration of these first-time voters. Each election as the size of the electorate rises, a subsequent increase in the voter turnout is expected. However, patterns have shown this expectation usually remains unmet.

Some studies have indicated a lower enrolment ratio amongst the young voters compared to the older ones. Almost all parties made attempts to mobilise the youth realising that the young voters constitute a sizeable proportion of the total electorate. The 2014 Lok Sabha elections witnessed the highest ever youth turnout in the history of Lok Sabha elections in India.

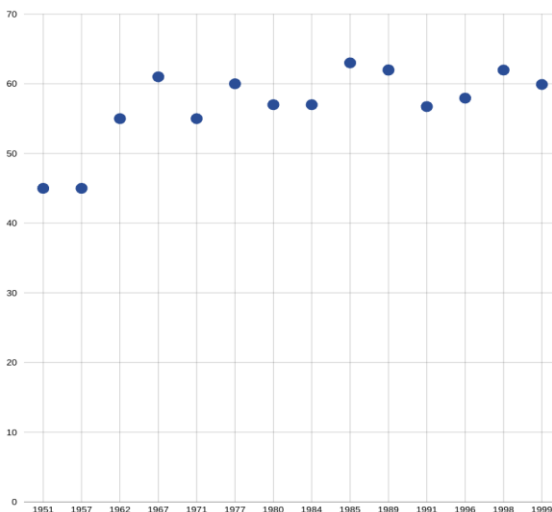
Young voters consistently participate at lower rates than older age groups. The long-term trajectory of youth participation in Indian democracy can be best described as stagnating with periodic fluctuations instead of the ideal of consistent increase. In the early decades after independence, youth participation remained limited due to low literacy rates, weak political awareness and logistical barriers to voter registration.

After the lowering of the voting age from 21 to 18 years through the 61st amendment in 1989, the youth electorate expanded significantly. However, increased eligibility did not

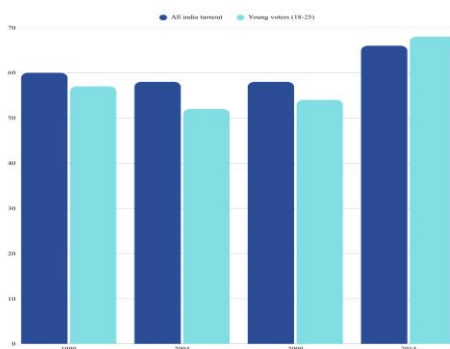
automatically mean proportionally higher turnout. Fluctuating engagement was seen in the 2014 general election with the turnout amount 18–25-year-olds reaching approximately 70%.

The Election Commission of India launched a national voter education programme after the national elections in 2009: ‘Systematic Voters’ Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP)’. The participation challenges were identified as:

- I. Gender gap
- II. Youth disconnects
- III. Urban apathy



**Figure 3: Temporal distribution of voter turnout in general elections (1951-1999): A scatter plot analysis in %**



**Figure 4: Comparison of youth and national voter participation in Lok Sabha elections from 1999-2014 (in %)**

**Policy Implications:**

The findings of this study highlight a critical participatory gap within India's democratic framework, particularly with respect to youth engagement. Therefore, targeted institutional and policy interventions are deemed necessary for the same. First and foremost, the central area of reform lies in the domain of civic education. In order to inform

citizens about the importance and implications of voting and democratic processes, it's essential that awareness starts from a very young age. Due to the limitations of the current civic education in India remaining textbook-driven and abstract, reforms must be made to the civic education system making a transition towards experiential learning models. This must incorporate guided discussions on current political issues, encourage multi-perspective analysis of policies and public debates and develop critical thinking rather than rote learning. In order to bridge the gap between theory and practical applications, it is imperative that schools have structured student governance frameworks which encourage students to engage in matters pertaining to policies, programs, events, rules, and other initiatives at school.

Aside from education, there needs to be a consistent campaign in terms of encouraging young individuals to get involved in politics. This can be accomplished by providing venues wherein they can actively get into the political process. Youth councils can be one good example. At the same time, candidates' forums must also be organized to enable their voices to be heard and taken into consideration in policy formation processes.

Moreover, there should be efforts to raise voter awareness among young individuals. In addition to disseminating information on voting, these awareness campaigns should deal with other related issues such as apathy, distrust and lack of agency in the decision-making process. A behavior public policy strategy may work well in such cases since this type of public policy uses psychological knowledge in shaping decision making. Specific interventions, such as targeted messaging, social norms and personalized outreach, may prove effective.

**Conclusion:**

The findings of this paper demonstrate that the democratic participation of youth is shaped by a myriad of personal, social, institutional, and structural factors. Participation is limited due to a declining trust in political leaders, meager civic education, limited family discussions on real-time political events, and the growing role of social media. In addition to these, democratic inclusivity remains constrained due to infrastructural barriers, lack of proper facilities and low voter registration rates. Due to the above reasons, democratic participation of youth remains inconsistent.

Voter abstention poses an impending challenge upon Indian democracy, suggesting not merely apathy but also indicating that the majority is no longer in favour of the existing system, putting the whole idea of 'government of the majority' at stake. When individuals willingly don't participate, they wave goodbye to their own chance in democratic decision making. This leads to the formation of governments that don't represent the interests of the citizens, as people's opinions aren't reflected in policy decisions.

The paradox with Indian politics is that while it is believed that increasing literacy levels contribute to increased civic awareness and political engagement, in reality it is the educated Indian elite who are increasingly disengaging from the system, thus indicating democratic backsliding.

Moreover, low voter turnout directly impacts democratic political legitimacy. As discussed earlier, if only a marginal percentage of those actually eligible to vote participate, the elected officials automatically will not represent the choices of the people. Due to this

people become frustrated with the governance and engage in protests, social unrest and violence, thus creating a vicious cycle.

### **Acknowledgement:**

Words cannot express my gratitude for the support and encouragement provided by my research supervisor, Dr Khushboo Srivastava, whose expertise and knowledge in this topic of study were invaluable during this research.

I would also like to express my appreciation to my family, especially my parents, without whose reassurance this paper would not have been possible. Any errors in this paper are my own and should not tarnish the reputations of these esteemed persons.

### **References:**

1. Almond, G., Powell, R., Easton, D., Dennis, J., Allan R Ball, Rush, M., Althoff, F., & Verba, S. (n.d.). Political General: Modern Political analysis. In *Unit III*.
2. Almond, Powell, Easton, Dennis, Ball, A. R., Almond and Sidney Verba, Rush, & Althoff. (n.d.). Political General: Modern Political analysis. In *Unit III*.
3. Axford, B. (n.d.). *Politics: An Introduction*. Psychology Press.
4. Bernstein, M. (2005). Identity politics. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 31(1), 47-74. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.29.010202.100054>
5. Bosma, U., Lucassen, J., & Oostindie, G. J. (2012). Introduction. Postcolonial Migrations and Identity Politics: Towards a Comparative Perspective. In G. Oostindie (Ed.), *Postcolonial Migrants and Identity Politics* (pp. 1-22). Berghahn. <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/31832>
6. Fukuyama, F. (n.d.). *The origins of political order and political order and political decay*. [https://psipp.itb-ad.ac.id/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Francis-Fukuyama-Identity -The-Demand-for-Dignity-and-the-Politics-of-Resentment-0-Farrar-Straus-and-Giroux.pdf](https://psipp.itb-ad.ac.id/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Francis-Fukuyama-Identity-The-Demand-for-Dignity-and-the-Politics-of-Resentment-0-Farrar-Straus-and-Giroux.pdf)
7. Dekker, H. (1991). Political Socialization Theory and Research. In *Chapter*.
8. Francis, T. P. (2007a). Identity Politics: Postcolonial theory and writing instruction. In University of South Florida & University of South Florida, *USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations*. <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd/711>
9. Francis, T. P. (2007b). Identity Politics: Postcolonial theory and writing instruction. In University of South Florida & University of South Florida, *USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations*. <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd/711>
10. Manby, B. (2023). Post-Colonial citizenship and decolonisation as a turning point: Continuities and discontinuities in African States. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4249692>