# How Are Youth Engaging In Indian Politics? Bridging the Gap between Indian Youth and Politics

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The core of a true democracy lies in popular sovereignty, where the Government derives power from the people. The government exercises power as long as the citizens desire. To keep the spirit of democracy alive, it is vital that all sections of society be able to table their concerns and interests through a healthy political discourse.

However, although they make up almost 24% and 27.5% of the world's and India's population respectively, youth (defined as the subset of the population between ages of 15 to 29 years)[1] often find themselves disconnected from mainstream politics and decision-making. According to UN Youth[2], in roughly one- third democracies, the eligibility for parliamentarians begins at 25 years old and only 1.6% of parliamentarians are in their twenties**.**

### 1.1 Current scenario in Indian politics

Honing down on the current situation in the Indian democracy, we find that even though student unions and youth organizations provide a massive platform for youth engagement, the proportion and representation in the parliament is abysmal. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)[3], young parliamentarians are defined at age 30 or youngerand even though India has the largest youth citizenry with a median age of 29 years, the average age of a directly elected Lok Sabha representative is 55 years, with that of an indirectly elected Rajya Sabha member being, even more, older, at 63 years. In the current Lok Sabha, only 4 MPs are below 30 years with none in the Rajya Sabha due to candidacy age limits.The situation in State Legislative Assemblies and Councils isnot much better, with almost all states having median age above 50, with current legislators crossing 80 years of age.[4]

Surprisingly, the system at the grass-root level defies all these notions. Though not as extensively documented, youth engagement at the Panchayat level showcases direct involvement and trust in the system, with several members of the panchayat belonging to the younger side of the age spectrum.

We next delve into how politics can be made more accommodating for the youth,following a mixed-research approach. Primary sources of information include prior publications, interviews with various key stakeholders such as the Young India Foundation (YIF), the Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC), professors from various leading world universities and cross-sectional survey analysis. Finally, we end by comparing best practices by various countries, tweaking them to fit our demography, while also providing pragmatic suggestions to change both perception and level of activity in political decision-making.

### 1.2 Survey Analysis

Our survey was targeted toward finding overall perception of political participation. A sizeable majority of respondents were in the 15-20 age group, which suited our research aim. There were people from a diverse

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[1] Government of India. 2014. *National Youth Policy, 2014*. Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports. (https://yas.nic.in/sites/default/files/National-Youth-Policy-Document.pdf)

[2] United Nations Youth. 2015. *Population Facts*. (https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/popfacts/PopFacts_2015-1.pdf)

[3] Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2021. *Data on youth participation*. Youth Empowerment. (https://www.ipu.org/our-impact/youth-empowerment/data-youth-participation)

[4] Nikhil Rampal. 2019.*India is young, its leaders aren't*. India Today. (https://www.indiatoday.in/diu/story/india-young-voters-old-mps-lok-sabha-1538175-2019-05-30)

range of cultural backgrounds. Most respondents were Hindu, from the General caste category, but there were responses from people of all the castes and religions enlisted in the options.

Even though 3 quarters of the respondents were aware of the news and frequently keep up with it, a trend was visible in our survey, wherein most respondents did not participate in avenues beyond direct voting. Out of the 113 people eligible to vote 84 of them had previously voted, and a reassuringly large proportion of people (94%) were willing to vote in future elections, indirect participation was fairly unpopular. A large plethora of people were unwilling to contest elections, publicly air their political opinions, or partake in politically oriented rallies.

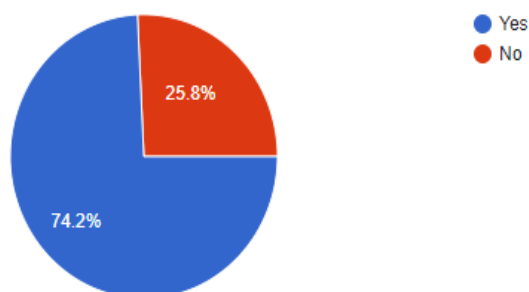Do you watch/read/follow the news regularly?

198 responses



Fig. 1

Do you frequently post political content publicly or on social media?
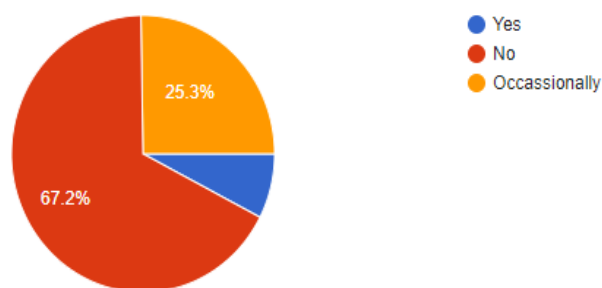
198 responses



Fig. 2

Have you been involved in political rallies, political parties or any political activities?
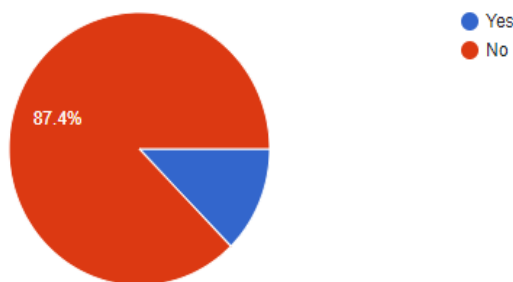
198 responses



Fig. 3

The response relating to contentious issues were mixed. With regards to identity politics, an almost equal proportion of people found the concept of identity politics detrimental (divisive), and neutral (both pros and cons), while a fewalso believed that it had mainly positive aspects.

As far as student politics is specifically concerned, the willingness to be involved is also split, but 44% were not interested in being involved, which reflects the present perception towards student politics still being mainly negative.

Finally, the survey looked at what kind of candidates people were interested in voting in, for which we employed both direct and indirect questions. A primary factor which people were interested in while voting for a candidate is innovation, which perhaps shows openness to new ideas and candidates. This was closely followed by preferences for candidates who reflected the preferred party ideology or were relatable to the respondent.



Which candidate would you vote for, if presented the following options?

198 responses

- Person A- Graduated from Oxford, many years of research
- Person B- Won the previous elections, experienced politician
- Person C- Just entered politics, has innovative ideas
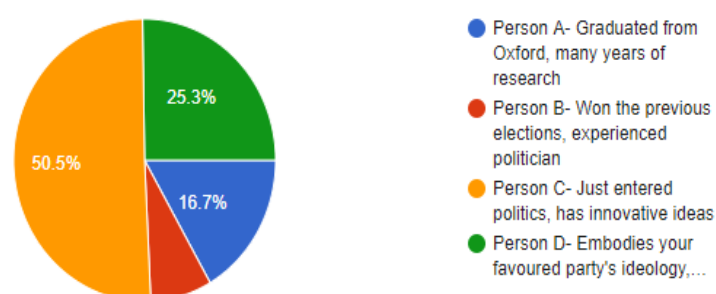- Person D- Embodies your favoured party's ideology,...

Fig. 5

## II.     CHALLENGES FACED BY INDIAN YOUTH IN POLITICS

### 2.1 Nepotism

Nepotism is the practice by which those with power or social influence favour their relatives or friends, especially by giving them opportunities like jobs. Within politics, nepotism has been a growingly common practice since the conception of the Indian democracy. Widely criticised for nepotistic portfolios, the Congress has had 36 dynastic MPs elected to the Lok Sabha since 1999.[5] This criticism extends to the right with the BJP having 31 such contemporaries and even trickles down to local level parties.[6] In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, AIADMK had two dynastic MPs, BJD had three, Shiv Sena had eight, TMC had seven, TDP had seven and TRS had four.[7] The extent and universality of nepotism in Indian politics is astounding. In a 2014 study by Patrick French, the true extent of nepotism in Indian politics is highlighted: all Members of Parliament below the age of 30 in the Lok Sabha were from politically active families. [8]

Nepotism poses a serious challenge to engaging the youth in politics as it promotes disparity and prevents new narratives, free of party politics. As stated by a stakeholder, nepotism may increase the percentage of youth leaders in the Parliament, but it doesnot translate to the youth's representation in the Parliament.[9] Several challenges help make nepotism a status quo in Indian elections like the high costs of funding and contesting elections and a lack of transparent election nominations.

### 2.2 Legislative barriers in elections
### i. Gap between eligibility age of voting and age of candidacy

In India, the voting age is set at 18 while the minimum age to contest elections is 25. This creates a gap between those who may elect their leaders and those who can get elected. Age gaps between voters and political

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[5]Gilles Verniers & Christophe Jaffrelot. 2019. *Why so many MPs are dynasts*. Indian Express. (https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/experts-explain-why-so-many-mps-are-dynasts-lok-sabha-election-bjp-congress-rahul-gandhi-5749570/)
[6]Tish Sanghera. 2019. *Is the BJP less dynastic than the Congress? Not so, Lok Sabha data shows*. Scroll. (https://scroll.in/article/918234/is-the-bjp-less-dynastic-than-the-congress-not-so-lok-sabha-data-shows)
[7]Tish Sanghera. 2019. *Is the BJP less dynastic than the Congress? Not so, Lok Sabha data shows*. Scroll. (https://scroll.in/article/918234/is-the-bjp-less-dynastic-than-the-congress-not-so-lok-sabha-data-shows)
[8]Patrick French. 2014. *India's Hereditary MPs*. NDTV. (https://www.ndtv.com/opinion/indias-hereditary-mps-577630)
[9]In conversation with Rishika Arora, CEO, Young India Foundation. June 2021.

candidates can imply that a higher amount of youth votes may not translate to a higher representation of young people. Furthermore, a perceptual problem arises as the youth is led to believe that their vote may not translate to action as elected leaders have limited accountability to the youth electorate, unlike communal or caste-based divisions. [10]

Furthermore, the Niti Aayog[11] suggests reducing the minimum age to attempt the civil services exam to 21, which begs the question –ifwe are ready to have some district magistrates and superintendents of police possibly below the age of 25, why is the parliament subject to such restrictive age-based divisions?[12]

**ii. High funding requirement for elections**

In cases where the youth does get to contest elections, the financial limitations of young candidates curtail the possibility of victory and thus any actual representation in the government. Elections in India are expensive and usually run on donations, including through electoral bonds.Individual candidates, especially the youth may find it difficult to compete on the scale of established party-backed politicians, resulting in poor outcomes. This problem is also directly linked to the prevalence of political dynasties in power and nepotism in the Indian parliament.

**iii. Limited measures for increasing Parliamentary representation**

Although the youth aged 15-24 constitute 19.1% of India's population,[13] there exist few formal ways of ensuring representation of the youth in our government. Although there has been a growing focus on youth participation in lower levels of governance, and pathways are being set up to provide a clear political push to young people to transition from student and youth politics to national politics, there is very little coordinated action to promote youth engagement in politics and governance.[14]

**2.3 Intersectional differences**
**i. Urban-rural divide**

India follows a federal governance system: administration is decentralisedfrom the Center, the State and as of 2nd October 1959, the local self-government or Panchayati Raj. Vote shares are generally higher in rural areas presumably due to the direct link Panchayats provide with political engagement and outcome. In the wake of the 2019 General Elections, predominantly rural constituencies like Mandya recorded over 80 per cent polling, while Bengaluru South, the 'Silicon Valley of India', came in with a number that was around 27 percentage points lower.[15] As high as 45% of Indian voters in a survey by news app Inshorts cited that they will not be travelling back for elections if away from their hometowns.[16] Thus, although the low urban engagement in politics may not directly translate to higher rural youth engagement given the trend of internal migration in India, rural government participation may have higher appeal to the youth due to their accessibility and potential to cause instant change at the grassroots. While rural youth may vote and contest more than their urban counterparts, urban youth have a larger media exposure that may explain the rise in political-oriented conversations among this section of the population. This is especially true considering that urban youngsters often get most of their news from popular social media.[17]

In our conversation with Professor Craig Jeffrey,[18] the need for connecting rural and urban leaders, with a focus on the middle stages of the urban hierarchy from cities to villages, was highlighted as well. It is vital that the urban youth engage more with politics, and that the rural youth gain wider access to political conversations and issues.

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[10]The Ace Project. *Lowering the Age of Eligibility to run for office*. (https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/yt/yt20/lowering-the-age-of-eligibility-to-run-for-office )

[11]NITI Aayog. 2018. *Strategy for New India @ 75*. (https://www.niti.gov.in/.../files/2019-01/Strategy_for_New_India_0.pdf)

[12]Soroor Ahmed. 2017. *Why India Should Reduce the Minimum Age for Entering Parliament*. The Wire. (https://thewire.in/government/india-reduce-minimum-age-entering-assembly-parliament)

[13]Government of India. 2017. *Youth in India*. Ministry of Statistics and Planning. (http://mospi.nic.in/sites/default/files/publication_reports/Youth_in_India-2017.pdf)

[14]Government of India. 2014. *National Youth Policy*. Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports. (https://yas.nic.in/sites/default/files/National-Youth-Policy-Document.pdf)

[15]Narendar Pani. 2019. *Why are urban and rural voters dissimilar?*. The Hindu Business Line. (https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/columns/the-way-people-vote-and-why/article26913896.ece)

[16]Ananya Bhattacharya. 2019. *Why nearly half of young Indian voters won't participate in the elections this year*. Quartz. (https://qz.com/india/1583361/how-indias-youth-feel-about-elections-2019/)

[17]The Economic Times. 2019. *Paradigm shift: 80 per cent Indians consume news from social media rather than a newspaper*. (https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/paradigm-shift-80-per-cent-indians-consume-news-from-social-media-rather-than-a-newspaper/articleshow/59724410.cms?from=md)

[18]In conversation with Professor Craig Jeffrey, University of Melbourne. June 2021. He is currently studying youth involvement in North Indian Development Projects.

## ii. Gender-based divide

According to a 2016 report titled'Anxieties and Aspirations of India's Youth: Changing Patterns' by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS)-Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), which surveyed over 6,000 respondents aged between 15 and 34 years in 19 states, young urban men are more interested in politics than young urban women.[19] About 46% of young urban women are interested in politics as compared to 81% of young urban men.

This may be attributed to the higher education level as the margin of difference in 'interest in politics' is smaller between urban uneducated men and women. With an increase in education, more young women reported having 'No Opinion' on political matters. The findings of the survey indicate that amongst the urban young women who are interested in politics, only 25% participate in electoral activities while 54% of urban young men interested in politics do so. This interest, thus, may not directly translate to effective political action.

In rural India, panchayats see 44% of women participation as opposed to 9% in the Lok Sabha.[20]Often thought to be figureheads for their husbands, rural women leaders conversely often make more progressive policies in subjects important to them like drinking water and sanitation. However, upon analysing constituency-level data covering all state elections in India during 1980-2007, it is revealed that there is a decline in the entry of new women candidates following a woman's electoral victory.[21]

## iii. Caste and communal differences

While our survey suggests that the youth is more participative in secular discourse (41.4% vote against identity politics), there still exist stark differences in the way religion and class impact the political engagement of the youth, especially in rural areas, which forms 65% of our population [22]

According to the CSDS survey, caste is still a distinctive political feature with only 17% of respondents being against caste-based reservations. The survey also confirms the suspicion that the Indian youth are more into religious activities than they were a couple of years ago. About 79% of those aged 18-34 years pray regularly or occasionally as compared with 73% in 2009 and in 2014. About 68% go to places of worship regularly or occasionally as opposed to 52% in 2009 and 56% in 2014.[23]

The CSDS-KAS survey reports that over two-fifths of upper caste youth identified themselves as students, whereas only about one-fourth of scheduled caste youth and a mere one-sixth of tribals did so. This may directly link to another aspect of CSDS's research into the positive relationship between education and political engagement, making marginalised communities less likely to participate in political discourse, highlighting class-caste hierarchical differences.

Religion also largely impacts how the youth engages with politics and those representing it, just as it does for the total vote bank. For example, Muslim youth and non-vegetarians are more likely to oppose anti-beef consumption laws than the Sikh and Hindu youth, perhaps impacting their party preferences.[24] With the growing religious focus in Indian politics, a growing atheist youth may be disillusioned in participating in governance today. Similarly, given that the youth belonging to religious and ethnic minorities may experience higher job insecurity and workplace discrimination, their persistent incentive for identity-based political participation may be explained accordingly.

[19]Sanjay Kumar. 2013. *Urban Youth and Political Participation*. Centre for the Study of Developing Societies.(http://www.esocialsciences.org/CMS/data/Urban_Reports/A2014613163039_33.pdf)

[20] Nalini Gulati & Ella Spencer. 2021. *Leaders and citizens: Women's political participation in India*. International Growth Centre. (https://www.theigc.org/blog/leaders-and-citizens-womens-political-participation-in-india/)

[21]Sonia Bhalotra.2015. *Role model effects? Women's political participation in India*. Ideas for India. (https://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/social-identity/role-model-effects-women-s-political-participation-in-india.html)

[22] Trading Economics. 2020. *India-Rural Population*. (https://tradingeconomics.com/india/rural-population-percent-of-total-population-wb-data.html)

[23]Harikrishnan.2017.*Indian youth is a strange mix of conservative and liberal attitudes: Survey*. The Economic Times. (https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/indian-youth-is-a-strange-mix-of-conservative-and-liberal-attitudes/)

[24]Gowda & Kumar. 2019.*Millennials don't have a taste for politics*. Livemint. (https://www.livemint.com/elections/lok-sabha-elections/millennials-don-t-have-a-taste-for-politics-1554348308033.html)

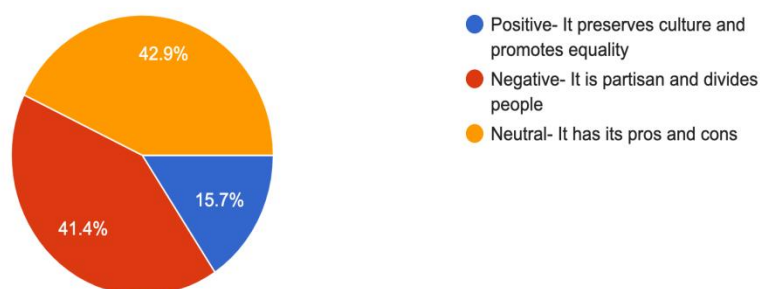What is your view on identity politics (based on religion, gender, caste appeal) ?
198 responses



Fig. 6

### 2.4 Poor political education
While there are a few programmes of varying success that support the holistic development of youth, structured programmes that help the Government of India engage with youth are absent. There are some unstructured interactions between policymakers and young Indians in forums such as educational institutions. However, there are no systematic channels for engagement between the government and young citizens and no mechanisms for youth to provide inputs to the government. There is also a lack of vocational training to student politicians that may help their transition to state or national level politics. The low level of political education becomes a bigger challenge considering the role education may play as a deciding bridge between the rural-urban divide, with college-passed urban and rural men reporting the same amounts of political engagement in the CSDS survey. Education also does seem to have a positive relationship with interest in politics across gender categories. Across all education categories, more men are interested in politics than those not interested in politics within the same education level.

## III.     TRANSITIONS TO POLITICS

### 3.1 Civil Services to Politics
Every officer who enters the civil services does so with a wish to make a positive impact on the nation. A politician is not chained by the same rules as a civil servant nor do they have to restrict themselves to a certain area of operation.[25] Politicians usually have provincial constituencies to look after. These constituencies do not change for long periods of time, thus helping them focus on issues of the area for much longer than an average bureaucrat is able to. IAS officers are more likely to make good politicians for other reasons too, such as their knowledge of government functioning and its limitations, their ability to express public opinion in an actionable form, their ability to better monitor implementation of government works and schemes, and their financial stability.According to veteran journalist T Koodalarasan "They might not help in increasing the party's vote share, but might help leaders in creating and implementing schemes. They can also be of help in administration. Political parties recognise this and encourage them,".[26] A relevant case to analyse would be that of Arvind Kejriwal.

### Case study: Arvind Kejriwal
Arvind Kejriwal is the current and 7th Chief Minister of Delhi since February 2015. In 2006, after resigning from the post of Joint Commissioner in the Income Tax Department, he assisted in forming the NGO named Parivartan.Together with three other partners he established the Public Cause Research Foundation in December 2006.To form India Against Corruption Group (IAC), he joined various activists including Anna Hazare and Kiran Bedi in 2011. It demanded the enactment of the Jan Lokpal Bill. However, there were some disagreements about the participation in politics in which Arvind Kejriwal was in favour of the move along with Shanti Bhushan and Prashant Bhushan. As a result, Arvind Kejriwal announced the formation of a political party

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[25]The Print. 2018. *Unethical for IAS officers to join politics ahead of polls or do they make for good netas?*. (https://theprint.in/talk-point/unethical-for-ias-officers-to-join-politics-ahead-of-polls-or-do-they-make-for-good-netas/157881/)

[26]S Kumaresan. 2020. *Will bureaucrats make better politicians?*. The New Indian Express. (https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2020/nov/18/will-bureaucrats-make-better-politicians-2224716.html)

on the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi on 2 October 2012. He formally launched the party on 26 November 2012.The party was named Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

**3.2 Entertainment Industry to Politics**

Stars from the entertainment industry have long held sway over the Indian masses, comparable with the devotion elicited by politicians. Similar to the industry, politics is also about garnering the attention and support of people, so in a way, politicians need to play characters which seem relatable and perfect to citizens. Hence, politics may seem like an intriguing career switch for them.

**Case study: J.Jayalalithaa**

J.Jayalalithaa was an actress- turned-politician and was a six -time chief minister of Tamil Nadu. She was elected as the chief minister for a record sixth term on 23 May 2016. She was referred to as "PuratchiThalaivi" meaning revolutionary leader and "Amma", meaning mother, by her followers. Jayalalithaa started her journey in Tamil cinema in 1965 with 'VenniraAadai', when she was 16 and since her debut She acted in more than 140 films from the 1960s.[27]J Jayalalithaa started her political career in 1982 by joining All India Anna DravidaMunnetraKazhagam (AIADMK) and was elected as the member of Rajya Sabha in 1984.  In the 1991 election, AIADMK-Congress alliance led by Jayalalithaa had a sweeping victory making her the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.[28]

**3.3 Social Activism to Politics**

Social activism has played a key role in furthering democracy, as activists seek to engage civil society in a discourse about key issues. Hence, it doesn't come as a surprise that many of these influential reformers decided to join politics, to make a direct impact and generate change.

**Case study: Kisan Baburao Hazare**

Kisan Baburao Hazare, fondly known as Anna Hazare, is a social activist who has been a key member in the promotion of rural development and increased government transparency and has been one of the most vocal supporters for bringing in stricter anti-corruption measures in the country. His hunger strike in 2011, pressuring the government to bring in the Lokpal Bill, led to massive nation-wide support. After a series of hunger strikes, protest and political movements, the crusader has certainly gained a lot of political sway. Even though he is yet to contest elections, his indirect involvement and the controversies that surround him, do tend to attract and influence the general public.

**3.4 Student politics to Legislative Politics**

When analyzing the role of youth in politics, one of the most visible factors is student politics and the role of student-run organizations and movements. In a gerontocracy like India, which has only one Prime Minister to date who was born in Independent India,[29]student-run organizations function as an effective way to ensure that the voice of the young generation reaches the power holders. A lot of prominent student leaders have been known to move into mainstream politics,[30] and sources suggest that most of our current politicians were into student politics themselves, thus drawing a link between student politics and the representation of youth.

**Methods of entering student politics**

As is clear, there are quite a few methods by which student-run organizations and politics are carried out.

i.       Well-known universities in India like Delhi University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Jadavpur University are popular for the famous student elections, which are contested by both independent candidates as well as political-party-backed student bodies.
ii.      Student political bodies backed by political parties are also common. They serve as a branch for major parties to reach out to the youth and students of the country. Some of the most prominent examples would be the National Students' Union of India (NSUI), Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), All India Students' Association (AISA), backed by the Indian National Congress, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and the

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[27]Sudha Tilak. 2016. *Jayalalitha: The 'goddess' of Tamil Nadu politics*. BBC News. (https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-37503616)
[28]The Economic Times. 2016. *Jayalalithaa: Mother of many comebacks*.(https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/nation-world/jayalalithaa-mother-of-many-comebacks/comeback-queen/slideshow/55811745.cms)
[29]Ramsha.   2019.*Student   Politics   In   Delhi   University   And   The   Many   Folds   Within   It*.   The Companion.(https://thecompanion.in/student-politics-in-delhi-university-and-the-many-folds-within-it/)
[30]Urmi Khasnobish.2020. *Weren't Most Of Our Current Politicians Into Student Politics Themselves During Their College?*. Ed Times.(https://edtimes.in/werent-most-of-our-current-politicians-into-student-politics-themselves-during-their-college/)

Left parties respectively. New groups like ChhatraYuva Sangharsh Samiti (CYSS, supported by the Aam Aadmi Party), and independent groups like the Birsa Ambedkar Phule Students Association (BAPSA) have emerged recently.

iii.        Another method would be that of student-run movements or initiatives. They consist of school or university students passionate about a particular cause, who create networks and build a movement to campaign for social, political, environmental change et cetera. Notable examples would be the Greenboro sit-ins of 1960, aimed at desegregation in the United States, and the Apartheid Divestment of the 1970s-80s, in both of which the youth played an essential role.

**Criticism of student politics**

In our survey conducted, over 45% of respondents explicitly said that they would never venture into student politics and the reasons for this are numerous.[31] Despite being an important catalyst for change, the system of student politics evokes a mixed reaction from students[32]. In prominent universities like the DU, it often means a caste-based system to elicit votes from vote banks, as found out during a stakeholder interview. Identity politics remain very prevalent, considering that the youth of today tend to be freer than past generations in exploring their identities. Students themselves recount that amid mass polarization and attempts to appeal to communities to secure votes, the true ideals of deliberation and benefits for students disappear.

Apart from this, student elections have been known to turn into a show of money and muscle power, which is almost a direct representation of politics at the governmental level. A survey shows that nearly 33% of people in metros believe that politics has no place in a student's life. This is a very significant number, considering that many universities with student politics are located in and around these metros.



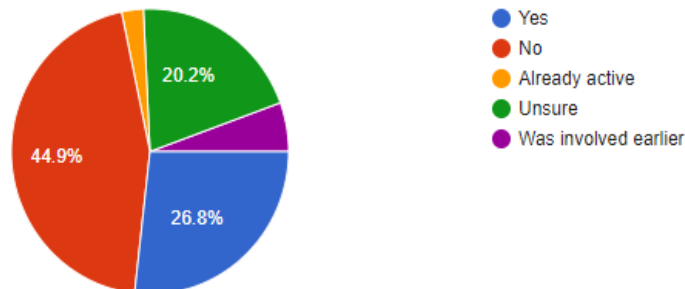Given a chance, would you venture into student politics?

198 responses

Fig. 7

**Case study: Amit Shah**

Considering that student politics mainly thrives on political backing, many prominent student bodies are funded by parties and their ideologies. It is hence inevitable that student leaders move into mainstream politics later in life. An interesting study here would be that of Amit Shah, who famously started his political career through the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP). During his college days, Shah was a member of the ABVP, the student wing of the RSS. At the age of 18, he secured a position in the ABVP and joined the BJP in 1987.[33]

Founded officially in 1949 with the objective of building nationalist movements on campuses, it is currently backed by the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh). Said to be the largest student organization in India, it is a major player at campus level and is also believed to have an influence at the national level.

Shah transitioned from student politics to party politics by joining the BJP in 1987. He became an activist of the BJP's youth wing, Bharatiya Janata YuvaMorcha (BJYM), in 1987. Steadily, he rose up the BJYM hierarchy, in which he held various posts including ward secretary, taluka secretary, state secretary, vice-president and general secretary. He became known for his management skills when he was the election campaign

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[31]AdrijaBhadra. 2020.*Resistance and Representation: The Impact of Student Unions on Politics*. Medium. (https://youngindiafdn.medium.com/resistance-and-representation-the-impact-of-student-unions-on-politics-5bd3ba9190d5)

[32]Statista.    2019.    *Opinion    on    student's    political    involvement    among    Indian    youth    in    2019*. (https://www.statista.com/statistics/1050180/india-opinion-on-student-politics-among-youth-by-city-type/)

[33]Poornima Joshi. 2014. *The Organiser: Amit Shah Takes Charge*. Caravan. (https://caravanmagazine.in/reportage/organiser)

manager for Lal Krishna Advani in Gandhinagar during the 1991 Lok Sabha elections, from where he gained his fame in being a strong strategist.[34]

## IV.   BEST PRACTICES

### 4.1 European countries

In Europe, there have been two major developments over youth involvement in politics over the last few decades.

●        Direct participation in elections has gone down in several countries. A possible reason behind this trend of declining youth turnout is the decrease in the notion of civic duties: only 57% of the respondents believed it was their civic duty to vote in 2013, as compared to 76% in 1987.[35]

●        Involvement in conventional methods of formal political participation (mainly voting) among the youth has been replaced by new forms of civic involvement (such as rallies, social engagement, etc.) and organisational membership.[36]

A youth engagement toolkit, created by the UK cabinet office to educate 13-16 year olds about democratic participation, noted that younger people had very limited motivation, awareness of rights, knowledge or cultural relatability when it came to politics. To counter this, it suggested making service learning programmes which would focus on relatable local issues, and would also have some form of incentivisation.[37] Keeping these in mind, many countries in Europe have come up with programmes aimed at increasing youth participation through new means of civic engagement:

●        **France** has a vast system aimed at civic engagement. There is a specific national programme for this purpose, as also multiple public institutions and ministries such as Ministere de la Juenesse, INJEP, etc, with numerous programmes which help foster affinity towards community service and political engagement. The national "Youth and Voluntary Organizations Program" aims to train and encourage voluntary participation by the youth, while "civique service" aims to offer a chance for the younger population to engage in social service for a limited period of time.[38]

●        Service-learning measures were incorporated into a number of programmes in higher education institutions in the **United Kingdom**. These service-learning programmes consist of a mixture of lectures/training related to key aspects of civic engagement, with actual civic service (the courses were in some instances incentivised with credit points based on amount of time put in).[39]

●        In **Northern Ireland**, there are service-learning policy measures such as the "public achievement Northern Ireland" Programme, which seek to increase political interest as well as an overall sense of citizenship among the youth by making them tackle local level community problems. Young people from different racial and cultural backgrounds collectively partake in this problem-solving process, which increases unity, helps people empathise with the issues faced by other communities, and makes the youth understand the depth and importance of political issues through first-hand exposure to these challenges.[40]

●        In **Turkey**[41] lowering their candidacy requirement to 18 saw an 18-year-old female high school student win the largest constituency, Istanbul, in 2018.

●        Overall, such instances of policy action were also boosted as a result of the EU's efforts to accommodate diversity and create cooperation between different social communities by engaging the younger population. This is relevant in the Indian context due to the diverse range of ethnic and religious groups within India.

### 4.2 Africa

African nations have taken an interesting approach by amalgamating reservations for youth interests in formal legislative bodies with other forms of engagement based on proper research, despite socioeconomic challenges.

[34] NDTV. 2013. *Who is Amit Shah?*. (https://www.ndtv.com/people/who-is-amit-shah-525154)

[35]NatCen. 2015. *British Social Attitudes Report*.(https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/38972/bsa32_fullreport.pdf)

[36]Magdelina Kitanova. 2020.*Youth political participation in the EU: evidence from a cross-national analysis*. Journal of Youth Studies. Vol. 23 No. 7. (https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13676261.2019.1636951)

[37]Her      Majesty's      Government.      2018.      *Youth      Engagement      Toolkit*. (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/896841/Youth-Engagement-Toolkit.pdf)

[38]Innovations in Civil Participation. 2021. *France*.(http://www.icicp.org/resource-library/icp-publications/global-youth-service-database/europe-2/western-europe/france/)

[39]Jennifer      Iles.      2017.      *Higher      Education      and      civic      engagement*. (http://ndl.ethernet.edu.et/bitstream/123456789/38274/1/31.pdf.pdf#page=170&zoom=100,0,-1)

[40]Roholt & Smith. 2017. *Civic youth work and implications for service learning - lessons from Northern Ireland*.(http://ndl.ethernet.edu.et/bitstream/123456789/38274/1/31.pdf.pdf#page=182)

[41]Hurriyet      Daily      News.      2018.      *18-year-old      becomes      Turkey's      youngest      ever      MP      candidate*. (https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/18-year-old-becomes-turkeys-youngest-ever-mp-candidate-132185)

●      Rwanda's system is a prime example as it reserves seats in the legislative body for youth, wherein 2 youth members are elected by their National Youth Council.[42] In order to follow up these measures with further youth engagement, assessments were done for political youth development, which identified key priority areas for helping youth develop and effectively exercise their citizenship.[43]

●      Uganda has adopted a system within which five seats in parliament are reserved for youth representatives.[44] Boosted by social media and new ideas about political involvement, the youth voted in large numbers in favour of the opposition in the last elections. [45]

## V.    RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON OBSERVATIONS

| Sr.No. | Proposed reform | Rationale behind proposal | Possible limitations |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Policymakers can provide talented young graduates with hands-on experience in the world of policy-making, equipping them with necessary skills with paid internships at different levels of government. | By encouraging formal political involvement, the government provides means for the youth to segue into politics effectively. | This method may only target the educated youth so the eligibility criteria for these jobs must be made adjusted in different contexts. |
| 2. | Media houses can give young citizens opportunities to express their opinions about politics on TV and radio broadcasts. | By providing media representation of youth leaders, this reform will help break down the stereotype about youth being incapable of being politically active in public life. | Access to media is limited. Furthermore, this could be difficult in a conservative political environment. |
| 3. | Straightforward communication between lawmakers and the youth can be facilitated by institutional channels of dialogue over conflict resolution, feedback mechanisms and policy development. The government can also create assessment tools to examine how adequately national policies respond to youth concerns and organize youth camps where young people put forward their recommendations. | Can increase political engagement instead of political activity that may not contribute to the effective discourse, for example on social media. | Carefully moderated discussions with adequate representation from different youth communities are important to ensure validity and accountability. |
| 4. | Using entertaining and inspiring stories of youth politicians from non-political backgrounds in popular media experiences of young people to inform them of their rights and responsibilities. Sharing resources and stories of lesser-known youth leaders at local levels who may be from non-political backgrounds and making effective change at the grassroots. | Introduces a narrative of the possibility of political engagement beyond nepotism and traditional forays into the field. Also starts conversations about engagement on different levels of the urban hierarchy. | Intersectional differences should be carefully considered so that the non-homogeneity of the youth is adequately represented. |
| 5. | Incentives in educational institutions for organizing/ participating in campaigns, raising awareness about political subjects on social media, and competing in debate and public speaking competitions. These can be institutionalised by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and State education boards. | This may help in changing the youth's negative perspective towards Indian politics and help in motivating them by constructive rewards right from school level education. | This could result in misinformation if left unstructured. |
| 6. | Government can create extracurricular political literacy guidelines, which can be adopted even in rural areas, to inform | Will encourage political engagement at the grassroots level. | Implementation will require regular surveillance to ensure widespread |

[42]Aimable Twagilimana. 2015. *Historical Dictionary of Rwanda*. 48.

[43]Youth Power. 2021. Rwanda Youth Assessment. (https://www.youthpower.org/rwanda-youth-assessment)

[44]Ace Project. 2021. *Youth and Elections*. (https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/yt/yt20/quotas-for-youth)

[45]   Andrew Ewoku.2021. *Young people changing Uganda's political landscape*. Safer World. (https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/news-and-analysis/post/964-young-people-changing-ugandaas-political-landscape)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | the weaker sections of society about their rights as citizens, as well as their civic duty to vote and be an active participant in local as well as widespread politics. | | benefit. |
| 7. | Regulating political financing. Indian states should provide election expense-related subsidies to young independent candidates especially from disadvantaged communities. Also, parties can be encouraged by the Election Commission of India (ECI) to use part of their funding for increasing youth participation in politics, as observed in the Kenyan and Irish laws. | Reduces the barriers to entry into competitive politics which are very expensive for non-party backed individual candidates, especially the youth. | These reforms should be closely monitored to ensure transparency and efficacy. |
| 8. | Lowering the age of eligibility to run for office to reduce the gap between voting and candidacy age. By taking inspiration from successful models like Turkey there is a possibility that if coupled with other transitional functions, the laws of India can be reformed to make political engagement easier. | By reducing the gap between the voting age and the candidacy age there will be a growth in the number of youth leaders who are accountable to and represent the majority youth population in India, thereby increasing the incentive for the youth by making their vote seem more valuable and effective | This is a long term solution as first the youth would have to be made more politically engaged to effectively contribute to the Parliament. Also, there must be other methods used to ensure young candidates are able to stand for elections. |
| 9. | Quotas for the youth in Parliament, State and Local level bodies. Reserved seats in constitutional or legislative bodies like in Rwanda can institutionalise youth participation. Also, legal candidate quotas can encourage federal units to fill a certain percentage of their candidate lists with those belonging to the youth. Voluntary political party quotas can be enacted wherein political parties must choose to have some amount of positions reserved for the youth. This method is subject to party bias and thus may require institutional and supervisory external implementation. | By encouraging institutional reforms to supplement wider social reforms, the pathway into politics for the youth is made easier. Internal democracy and youth engagement within parties can translate to more youth leaders reaching top political positions eventually. | If not properly implemented, quotas could further corruption by parties and serve as a form of tokenism, wherein the youth leaders may not truly represent the youth at all. Thus there must be intersectional quotas within the broad youth quota itself and accountability measures for the youth leaders. Reservations may be subject to party bias and thus may require institutional and supervisory external implementation. This measure is highly dependent on the position the young person is being appointed for and the form of election, making it another long term measure. |
| 10. | Create an expert panel as a subsidiary to the NITI Aayog or another developmental organisation to identify potential reforms for student politics, by formulating advisory guidelines for educational institutions to maintain student political bodies and implementing regulatory mechanisms to overcome the present challenges and issues in student politics. | More research is required to understand the diverse roles the youth play in political discourse today, especially with the prevalence of social media activism. This research can help create more awareness and thus, more effective policies. | It may be challenging to find a completely non-partisan research body and this could lead to inaccurate results. |

## VI. CONCLUSION

In a country such as India, which has the highest ever youth population in the entire world, it is of paramount importance that the government lends an ear to the young people of the land. The fact that the average age of our Parliament is much higher than other democracies indicates an urgent need for reforms in the form of provisions for the youth to actively take part in politics; be it via student politics, or by actively aiming to reduce the influence of older and more experienced politicians.

Serious consideration needs to be given to ways to further engage the youth in a vast plethora of political activity and social work. Issues that crop up while attempting to do this: for instance, the role of intersectionality and casteism in student politics must be looked into and proposed suggestions like putting a cap on the funding sources and party influence in student elections could be implemented. Also of importance is the

creation of a holistic schooling environment where children, from a young age, are given the independence to voice their opinions and speak freely.

Finally, involving the youth in politics can only be fully done by eliminating the mindsets of ageism and over-dependence on experienced politicians in society. It must be recognized that the youth have a voice, and that they are capable of enacting social change by bringing in inclusive, unprecedented, and fresh ideas to the table.