

Youth Vote and Its Electoral Impact

Mains: GS II - Polity

Why in News?

India is witnessing a gradual transformation in its electoral landscape, with young voters emerging as an increasingly significant political constituency.

What is the background?

- **CJP protest** - The recent mobilisation of young people at Jantar Mantar, led by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), has renewed attention on the political aspirations and electoral behaviour of **Gen Z**.
- **Raising Expectations** - With Assembly elections scheduled in several major States, including Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Gujarat, the question is whether the youth can emerge as a decisive force in shaping electoral outcomes.
- **Lokniti-CSDS surveys** - The available evidence from Lokniti-CSDS surveys suggests that there is no uniform "youth vote".
- Young voters differ significantly in their turnout, party preferences and political priorities across States, age groups and elections.
- Their importance lies not merely in their numerical strength but in their capacity to shift political preferences and, at times, drive electoral change.

What is the pattern of youth voter participation?

- **National average** - Turnout among those aged **18-21 years was around six percentage points below the overall average**, while participation among the 22-25 age group was higher, at about 68%.
- **Low participation** - State-level Assembly election data reveals an even more diverse picture.
- In Bihar, only about **41% of 18-21-year-olds** voted, compared with an overall turnout of 67.3%.
- Uttar Pradesh displayed a similar pattern, with youth turnout at 51%, against an overall turnout of 61.1%.
- **High participation** - Several States witnessed exceptionally high youth participation.
- In Madhya Pradesh, turnout among 18-21-year-olds reached 89%, compared with 75.6% overall.
- Punjab and Gujarat also recorded higher participation among young voters, at 77% and 78%, respectively.
- West Bengal and Tamil Nadu recorded particularly high participation, at 93% and 90%

among 18-21-year-olds.

- Thus, youth participation is shaped by the **political context, competitiveness of elections, mobilisation efforts and local political issues**. Young voters can be relatively disengaged in one State and highly mobilised in another.

What are the realities of a Single “Youth Vote”?

- **Homogenous youth vote** - The evidence clearly suggests that there is no homogeneous youth vote in India.
- Age itself does not determine political preferences, and young voters belonging to different age groups may exhibit different political choices.
- **Case of West Bengal** - In the 2026 election, BJP support among 18-21-year-olds stood at 51%, compared with 33% for the AITC+.
- Among 22-25-year-olds, the contest was much closer, with BJP at 46% and AITC+ at 43%. This represented a significant change from 2021, when AITC+ had led among both groups.
- **Uttar Pradesh** - In the 2022 Assembly election, BJP+ received 44% support among both 18-21-year-olds and 22-25-year-olds.
- The SP+ remained a strong competitor, receiving 38% and 39%, respectively.
- These examples demonstrate that young voters are neither permanently attached to one party nor necessarily united behind a particular ideology.
- Their preferences can change rapidly in response to **employment opportunities, education, governance, identity, leadership, social media narratives and local political conditions**.
- **Support to the Winning Party** - Another important finding is that **young voters do not invariably support the eventual winner**.
- In Uttarakhand's 2022 Assembly election, **48% of 18-21-year-olds supported the Congress**, compared with 33% for the BJP.
- This represented a reversal from 2017, when Congress support among this age group stood at 42% and BJP support at 39%.
- Among 22-25-year-olds, Congress support increased from 28% to 36%, while BJP support declined from 53% to 41%.
- Similarly, in Bihar's 2020 Assembly election, the Mahagathbandhan received greater support among young voters than the NDA.
- Among 18-21-year-olds, the Mahagathbandhan secured 39% support compared with 24% for the NDA. By 2025, however, this preference had changed significantly: NDA support among 18-21-year-olds rose to 50%, compared with 40% for the Mahagathbandhan.
- Therefore, youth preferences cannot be treated as a reliable predictor of electoral victory.
- Young voters may support a losing alliance while still exerting considerable influence on the political debate.

What are the significant role of youth in recent elections?

- **Punjab's 2022 Assembly election** - The Aam Aadmi Party received **47% support among 18-21-year-olds**, compared with 24% for Congress and 6% for the BJP.

- Among 22-25-year-olds, AAP support rose to 52%. Between 2017 and 2022, AAP's support among 18-21-year-olds increased from 34% to 47%, while Congress support declined from 38% to 24%.
- The youth therefore formed an important constituency behind the political transition that brought AAP to power in Punjab.
- **Delhi 2020 assembly election** - Delhi also illustrates the strong appeal of a new political formation among younger voters.
- In the 2020 Assembly election, AAP received 58% support among 18-21-year-olds and 59% among 22-25-year-olds, compared with 52% among voters aged 29 and above. BJP+ support, in contrast, increased with age.
- **Tamil Nadu's 2026 election** - It provides another striking illustration.
- The TVK's support was particularly concentrated among younger voters, reaching 69% among 18-21-year-olds and 61% among 22-25-year-olds.
- It declined to 50% among 26-28-year-olds and 26% among voters aged 29 and above.
- This indicates the potential of younger voters to provide substantial support to emerging political formations.

What are the factors shaping youth political behaviour?

- **Employment and economic opportunities** - Unemployment, underemployment, recruitment examinations and aspirations for better livelihoods directly affect young voters.
- **Education** - Access to quality education, higher education opportunities and affordability remain important concerns.
- **Digital politics** - Social media has become a major source of political information and mobilisation for younger citizens.
- **Leadership and political alternatives** - Young voters may be more receptive to new leaders and political formations when established parties fail to meet their expectations.
- **Identity and local issues** - Caste, community, regional identity and local governance continue to shape voting decisions.
- **Political mobilization** - Campaigns, student organisations, civil society groups and digital networks can influence participation and preferences.

What are the challenges in interpreting the youth vote?

- The category "youth" encompasses a wide age range and should not be treated as a single social group.
- High turnout does not automatically translate into support for a particular party.
- Youth preferences may be issue-specific and election-specific rather than ideological.
- Social media visibility should not be confused with electoral strength.
- A political movement that appears dominant online may not necessarily possess an equivalent organisational presence or vote share on the ground.

What lies ahead?

- For political parties, the lesson is clear: the youth cannot be approached merely as a demographic category.

- They must be understood as citizens with aspirations concerning employment, education, dignity, governance and political representation.
- As India moves towards a future in which a large share of its electorate will belong to younger generations, understanding this dynamic constituency will be essential for both electoral strategy and democratic governance.

Reference

[The Hindu| Youth Electoral Participation](#)

