

## THE ROLE OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN ECONOMIC CHANGE IN INDIA: A DEMOCRATIC PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

*India's economic reforms have been analyzed through various dimensions of policy design, institutional capacity and macroeconomic outcomes. However, the role of youth constituting the world's largest demographic dividend remains underexplored in shaping and sustaining democratic economic reforms. This paper examines how young citizens contribute to various reforms in a democratic framework. With the help of secondary data this study explores youth participation in start-up ecosystems, social movements, and their influence in policy making. In the present scenario there is a lack of youth representation in formal institutions, political disinterest among many young people and the gap between urban and rural areas. This paper argues that the youth is essential not just for fair and sustainable reforms, but also for strengthening democracy. Looking at economic reforms through the lens of youth brings fresh perspectives on India's development path in the 21st century.*

**Keywords:** Policy Design, Macroeconomic Outcomes, Economic Reforms, Demographic Dividend, Democratic, Start-Up Ecosystems, Policy Making

## Introduction

Over the past three decades, India has witnessed a series of economic reforms that has redefined its growth and global standing. Liberalization, privatization, and globalization (LPG) policies have marked a breakthrough in leading India to a market-oriented economy. Economic reforms such as Goods and Services Tax (GST), the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), and digital economy has helped in transforming the economic landscape of the country. These reforms did not emerge autonomously, they evolved within a democratic framework, shaped by electoral politics, civil society pressures, and public opinion. Within this democratic process one group stands out in both size and potential: the youth 65% of India's population are below the age of 35, the role of youth in influencing, adapting to, and critiquing economic reforms cannot be under estimated. campus protests to nationwide movements youth had a major role in demanding equality, openness and accountability in the country. Youth act as an agent of reform in many ways like a voter, consumer, entrepreneur, activist etc.

Student and youth protests have played a major role in pushing the government to address the issues like corruption, unemployment, education, etc. Globally, parallels can be drawn to the Arab Spring, Chile's student protest, Nepal Gen Z protest and climate activist demonstrating how youth catalyze democratic reforms with long-term economic implications. India's economic reforms are extensive, much of it is dominated by macroeconomic and institutional analyses. The agency of youth as reform actors remains under explored. This paper seeks to fill that gap by rethinking economic reforms in India through the youth factor.

## Objectives

- To analyze trends in youth unemployment and demographic changes in India.
- To examine how economic growth influences youth employment outcomes.
- To assess the role and significance of youth in India's democratic process.
- To give policy implications.

## Review of Literature

This section examines recent findings that illuminate how young citizens participate in democratic processes amid shifting economic landscapes. By analyzing diverse perspectives and regional variations, the literature highlights the opportunities and challenges faced by Indian youth in shaping political discourse and economic policies.

Chandra, K. (2020) highlights how political interest and education are the most significant factors influencing youth participation in elections across India. It shows that urban youth tend to be more engaged than rural youth, with political interest acting as a strong motivator for voting and other forms of democratic participation.

Roy & Banerjee (2022) explores how economic difficulties such as unemployment and inequality have pushed Indian youth to become more politically active. It links economic hardships with the rise of youth-led social movements aiming at addressing systemic socio-economic problems and demanding better governance.

Kumar, A. (2021) Kumar's work analyzes the crucial role of social media and digital platforms in empowering young Indians to raise their voices. It demonstrates how digital activism has facilitated greater youth mobilization for democratic reforms, transparency, and accountability in governance.

Singh, P., & Joshi (2019) examines the positive relationship between civic education and political participation. It argues that curricula emphasizing political literacy and civic responsibility can significantly increase youth engagement in democratic processes, especially in underrepresented regions.

Bhattacharya, T. (2023) focuses on how socio-economic and cultural factors lead to diverse patterns of youth political participation in different Indian regions. The case studies of Kerala and Northeast India reveal vibrant youth involvement shaped by local contexts, challenging the notion of widespread youth apathy.

### **Research Methodology**

This study is based on secondary data analysis to investigate the relationship between democracy, youth engagement, and economic change in India. Secondary data offers comprehensive, reliable, and cost-effective sources for examining large-scale youth political participation and economic trends across diverse regions.

### **Data Sources**

This research paper has drawn multiple secondary data sources including government reports (such as Census data and Election Commission records), academic journals, policy papers, and reputable survey datasets on youth voting behavior and civic engagement. Additionally, reports from youth organizations and digital media analyses will be incorporated to understand the role of technology in political mobilization.

## Data Interpretation and Analysis

The study uses secondary data sourced from PLFS reports, the World Bank, the Election Commission of India, and Ministry of Statistics demographic projections. The analysis focuses on understanding how youth unemployment, demographic shifts, and political participation trends relate to broader patterns of economic change in India. By comparing indicators across time, the analysis identifies structural trends reflecting labour market performance, economic growth cycles, and the evolving demographic weight of young citizens in the electorate. Overall, the data provides an evidence-based foundation for examining the inter linkages between youth dynamics, democratic participation, and macroeconomic trajectories.

Table 1 — Youth Unemployment Rate (Periodic Labour Force Survey)

PLFS Year	Youth Unemployment (15–29) %
2017–18	17.8
2018–19	17.3
2019–20	15.0
2020–21	12.9
2021–22	12.4
2022–23	10.0

Source: PLFS Annual Reports: 2017–18 to 2022–23

This table shows the declining unemployment trend among youth aged 15–29 from 2017–18 to 2022–23. It highlights gradual labour market recovery, with youth unemployment reducing from 17.8% to 10%.

Table 2 — GDP Growth (Annual %)

Year	GDP Growth %
2018	6.5
2019	4.0
2020	-5.8
2021	8.9
2022	7.0
2023	6.3

Source: World Bank – World Development Indicators (WDI)

This table presents India’s annual GDP growth, showing fluctuations driven by economic cycles and the COVID-19 disruption. It reflects a strong recovery after 2020, indicating overall economic resilience.

Table 3 — Youth Unemployment & GDP Growth

Year	Youth Unemployment %	GDP Growth %
2018	17.8	6.5
2019	17.3	4.0
2020	15.0	-5.8
2021	12.9	8.9
2022	12.4	7.0
2023	10.0	6.3

Sources: 18–23 – Unemployment 15–29, World Bank WDI – GDP Growth

This table compares youth unemployment with GDP growth to show how economic performance influences labour market outcomes for young people. It demonstrates an inverse relationship—high growth years tend to coincide with lower youth unemployment.

Table 4 — Youth Population Share (Projection)

Year	Youth (15–29) Share (%)
2011	30.0
2016	28.5
2021	27.2
2026	25.5
2031	23.9

Sources: Ministry of Statistics & UN Population Division

This table shows the projected decline in India’s youth population (15–29) from 2011 to 2036. It suggests that India’s demographic dividend is shrinking, affecting future labour supply and political representation

Table 5 — Electorate Share of Youth (18–29)

Election Year	Youth Share of Electorate (%)
2019	25.37
2024	22.8

Sources: Election Commission of India (ECI)

This table highlights the share of young voters in the 2019 and 2024 Lok Sabha electorate. The reduction from 25.37% to 22.8% signals a declining demographic weight of youth in national elections

### Findings

Youth unemployment in India has come down over the years, showing that more young people are getting jobs compared to before.

India's GDP growth has gone up and down, especially during the COVID-19 period, but the economy has recovered strongly afterward.

When the economy grows well, youth unemployment becomes lower, showing that young people depend a lot on overall economic conditions.

The share of young voters in national elections has reduced from 2019 to 2024, meaning youth now form a smaller part of the electorate.

India's youth population is slowly decreasing and will continue to decline in the coming years, which means the demographic advantage is reducing.

These points show that India must invest more in education, skills, and jobs to fully benefit from its youth before their numbers decline further.

### Suggestions

The government should give more skill training to help youth get better jobs.

Colleges and schools should focus more on practical and job-oriented education.

More job opportunities need to be created for young people, especially in new industries.

Education must be made equal and accessible for all youth across the country.

Young people should be encouraged to participate more in democracy and voting.

Support for poor and marginalized youth should be increased through scholarships and mentoring.

Youth should be given more support for mental health and well-being.

The government should help young entrepreneurs with loans and training.

Better internet and digital facilities should be provided, especially in rural areas.

Long-term planning is needed to prepare for the future decline in the youth population.

## Conclusion

The relationship between democracy, youth and economic change have a significant and complex relationship with each other that it helps in shaping the development arc of the country. The data shows that the demographic advantage which India was having is shrinking now. India was a country which had youth population more, but recent data suggests that the share of youth in both the population and the electorate are declining. At the same time the labour market indicators are showing that there is a decline in the unemployment among the youth, it is still remaining as a challenge that it influences the economic aspirations, political engagement, and social mobility of young people.

Economic growth pattern suggests that when the economy grows strongly, young people get more job opportunities; when the economy slows, youth unemployment increases. Furthermore, there is a decrease in the proportion of the young voters of the country during 2019-24 suggesting that there is a shift in the political participation, and representation. Overall, the analysis shows that India's economic growth and the strength of its democracy depend heavily on how well the country supports its young people. Providing good education, improving skills, creating more job opportunities, and encouraging youth involvement in public life are necessary to keep the economy strong and the democracy healthy. The findings make it clear that India's future will largely depend on how effectively it invests in and includes its youth in the nation's development.

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