

Youth in Global Policy: The Future is Now

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Abstract- Youth have consistently been at the heart of transformational movements, yet their presence in formal political processes remains minimal. This paper explores the current gaps in youth political participation, identifies key challenges, and highlights global case studies to illustrate how young leaders have sparked change. It emphasizes the need for structural reforms to foster youth engagement in governance and concludes with policy recommendations to make youth participation meaningful and sustainable.

I. INTRODUCTION

Why Young Voices Matter

Ever noticed how youth-led movements shake the world? From the Arab Spring to climate strikes, young people have always been at the forefront of change. Yet, when it comes to formal politics—passing laws, shaping policies, or running for office, youth representation is shockingly low. Even though they make up a huge chunk of the global population, young people are often sidelined from decision-making.

This isn't just an issue—it's a missed opportunity. Imagine policies designed with fresh perspectives, digital-savvy solutions, and the energy of young changemakers. That's the kind of democracy we need. But first, let's talk about the challenges keeping young voices out of the conversation.

II. THE ROADBLOCKS

Why Aren't More Young People in Politics?

Too Young to Lead?

In many countries, you can vote at 18, but you can't run for office until 25 or even 30. This means that by the time young people can actively shape policies, they've already spent years watching from the sidelines. No wonder only 1.65% of parliamentarians worldwide are in their 20s.

Distrust in Politics

Let's be honest, politics often feels like a game where only the powerful wins. Corruption, broken promises, and outdated leadership discourage young people from engaging. Instead of voting or joining political parties, many turn to social movements, protests, and digital activism.

Barriers Beyond Age

If you're from a marginalized community, a low-income background, or a young woman, getting into politics is even harder. Discrimination, financial constraints, and societal biases create additional hurdles.

Lack of Civic Education

Many schools don't teach young people about their political rights or how to get involved in governance. If no one explains how the system works, how can we expect youth to engage?

Rethinking Political Participation: More Than Just Voting

From the streets to the screens, young activists are reshaping the world. Whether through passionate protests, digital revolutions, or grassroots movements, they are challenging the status quo and demanding a better future. Youth activism is no longer just about raising slogans—it's about rewriting the rules of justice and equality.

Politics isn't just about elections. Young people are shaping governance in creative, powerful ways:

1. Street Protests & Social Movements:

Fridays for Future, sparked by Greta Thunberg's lone school strike, has grown into a global youth uprising—proving that one voice, no matter how young, can ignite a movement for climate justice. From Fridays for Future to the #MeToo movement, young people are mobilizing millions for urgent social issues. Protests against rape culture, climate inaction, and human rights violations are turning streets into powerful platforms for change. University campuses like Delhi University (DU) have become epicenters of activism, where students are demanding justice, pushing for stronger laws, and challenging outdated societal norms.

2. Digital Activism:

In the digital age, activism isn't confined to the streets—it's happening online too. Hashtags, petitions, and viral campaigns have pressured governments to act on crucial issues. Movements like #BlackLivesMatter, #FridaysForFuture, and #JusticeForSurvivors prove that a single tweet can spark a revolution. Digital activism allows youth voices to be heard beyond borders, making global solidarity possible at the click of a button.

3. Community Engagement:

Not all activism happens in front of cameras. Many young changemakers are working at the grassroots level, leading local youth councils, volunteer networks, and grassroots leadership programs. At Delhi University, student-led movements like the Diversity and Inclusion Movement (DIM) are challenging discrimination based on caste, gender, and disability, while volunteers with Khalsa Aid are stepping up to provide relief in times of disaster, showing that real change begins with the passion and action of those closest to home. From organizing sanitation drives to setting up education programs for underprivileged children, they are bringing change where it matters the most, within their own communities.

4. Running for Office:

From Protest to Policy While rare, some young leaders are breaking barriers by entering politics to advocate for youth-focused policies. They are challenging the notion that politics is only for the experienced, proving that passion and vision can be just as powerful as decades of experience. Their presence in governance ensures that youth issues—like education, employment, and climate action—are no longer ignored.

III. STRUGGLES

The Struggles Behind Youth in politics: Why Change Isn't Always Easy

Youth-driven change is powerful and inspiring, but let's be real, there are some hurdles that come with it that we need to consider:

1. Lack of Experience & Impatience:

We've got passion, but sometimes that's not enough. Without experience, young leaders might miss the bigger picture or act too quickly. We're all about seeing change now, but this impatience can lead to quick fixes that lack long-term sustainability.

2. Over reliance on Social Movements:

Yes, protests and viral campaigns are amazing at raising awareness, but they don't always translate into policy change. Activism is powerful, but real change takes planning, expertise, and behind-the-scenes negotiation-a skill set many youth-led movements are still building.

3. Populist and Reactive Policies:

It's easy to get swept up in urgent demands, but when policies are based on emotions or the latest trending topic, we risk creating solutions that are more reactionary than thoughtful. In the long run, these policies might not stand the test of time.

4. Diversity of Youth:

Not all young people think the same way. With so many backgrounds and experiences, it's natural to have differing opinions and priorities. This can create internal divisions, slowing down progress and making it harder to build a united front.

5. Political Instability: Fresh ideas are important, but without the proper knowledge, quick decisions might create more chaos than stability, especially in sensitive areas like the economy, security, or international relations.

While youth involvement is key to driving change, it's all about finding the right balance. We need experience, patience, and a lot of thoughtful planning to turn our big ideas into lasting impact.

IV. SUCCESS STORIES

When Youth Lead

Case Study 1: The Arab Spring – A Youth Revolution with Uncertain Outcomes

Imagine this: You and your friends, frustrated by a lack of jobs, corrupt politicians, and an unfair system, decide enough is enough. You take to the streets, armed with nothing but your voices, hope, and a smartphone. Now multiply that by millions. That's what happened between 2010 and 2012 across the Middle East and North Africa.

The Game-Changer:

- Social media became the ultimate rallying tool, spreading protests faster than wildfire.

- Dictators like Hosni Mubarak (Egypt) and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (Tunisia) were forced to step down.

But Then, Reality Hit:

- With the old leaders gone, who would take their place? Young activists had passion but lacked political experience.
- In Egypt, democracy was short-lived before a military coup took over.
- In Libya and Syria, power vacuums gave rise to extremist groups.

Key Takeaway: Change isn't just about breaking the old system, it's about building a better one. Passion must be paired with strategy, governance skills, and long-term planning.

Case Study 2: Greta Thunberg & Fridays for Future – School Strikes to Global Policy

Picture this: A 15-year-old girl sitting alone outside the Swedish Parliament, holding a sign: "School Strike for Climate." Sounds small, right? Yet, in just months, her solo protest became a global movement.

The Wins:

- Greta's speeches at the UN and Davos shook world leaders.
- The European Parliament declared a climate emergency.
- Millions joined climate strikes worldwide.

The Challenges:

- Critics claimed her movement lacked detailed solutions.
- Governments still dragged their feet on climate policies.
- Some dismissed her as "too young" to understand policy complexities.

Key Takeaway: Protests spark conversations, but real impact happens when activism turns into concrete policies. Engaging with lawmakers, scientists, and industries is the next step.

Case Study 3: Jacinda Ardern – From Young Leader to Global Icon

What if: A 37-year-old woman became Prime Minister and, instead of politics-as-usual, led with empathy and action? That's Jacinda Ardern's story.

Her Big Wins:

- After the Christchurch Mosque Attacks (2019), she swiftly banned assault weapons.
- Her COVID-19 response made New Zealand a global success story.
- She inspired more young people to engage in politics.

The Challenges:

- Economic policies were criticized for increasing national debt.
- Housing reforms and indigenous rights faced political roadblocks.

Key Takeaway: Young leaders can thrive when they balance passion with strategic governance and adaptability.

Case Study 4: Malala Yousafzai – From Survivor to Global Advocate

Imagine: You speak up for your right to education - and nearly lose your life for it. Instead of giving up, you turn your survival into a global movement.

The Impact:

- Malala's advocacy led to increased funding for girls' education worldwide.
- Her Malala Fund has helped millions of girls access schooling in conflict zones.

The Struggles:

- Some in Pakistan dismissed her as a “Western puppet.”
- Awareness is one thing, turning activism into lasting policy is another.

Key Takeaway: Youth activists can inspire change, but real transformation requires navigating political and cultural resistance.

V. FINAL THOUGHT

The Future of Youth in Politics

These stories prove that young people can shape the world, but real change requires more than just activism.

- Protests raise awareness but must translate into policy discussions.
- Young leaders challenge outdated systems but need governance skills to sustain change.
- Collaboration with policymakers and institutions is essential for lasting impact.

Final Thought

Youth have the power to lead, but change happens when activism meets strategy, patience, and political engagement. The future isn't just about raising voices, it's about making them count.

VI. NECESSARY CHANGES

What Needs to Change?

Young people have the passion, creativity, and drive to bring real change, but they often hit roadblocks when trying to enter the political arena. How can we make sure their voices are not just heard but truly matter? Here's what needs to change:

1. Lower Age Barriers

Why should age limit leadership? Governments need to rethink age restrictions for candidacy and open doors for young leaders. Imagine a world where fresh ideas and dynamic leadership aren't held back by outdated rules. By lowering these barriers, we can empower youth to shape policies that impact their generation and beyond.

2. Better Civic Education

Politics isn't just for politicians, it's for everyone. Schools should make civic education a priority, teaching students how governance works and how they can be part of it. Think of it as a toolkit for future leaders, helping them understand their rights and responsibilities and take informed action.

3. Supportive Institutions

Youth need a seat at the table, not just a voice in the crowd. Political parties and government institutions should create dedicated spaces for young people to engage in policy discussions. Whether through advisory boards, mentorship programs, or direct representation, it's time to move beyond token gestures and offer real opportunities for youth involvement.

4. Tech-Powered Engagement

We live in a digital era, why should politics stay stuck in the past? E-voting, online debates, and youth-led petitions can make governance more inclusive and accessible. Imagine engaging with decision-makers through an app or having your vote counted with a click. The future of politics should reflect the way young people communicate and mobilize today.

5. Youth Representation Quotas

What if every parliament or city council had a required number of young leaders? Setting quotas for youth representation ensures that young voices are present where decisions are made. It's not just about participation, it's about making sure youth perspectives shape policies in meaningful ways.

VII. CONCLUSION

Final Thoughts: The Time is Now

*Democracy thrives when everyone has a seat at the table, and that includes young people. They bring fresh ideas, tech-savvy solutions, and the passion to challenge the status quo. The world doesn't just need young voters, it needs young leaders. Young people have proven time and again that they are catalysts for change. From climate action to democracy movements, they've taken the lead. But passion alone isn't enough, systemic change is needed to translate activism into policy. By breaking down age barriers, improving civic education, fostering institutional support, leveraging technology, and ensuring youth representation in government, we can create a political landscape where young leaders don't just protest for change, they make it happen. The time to act is now. Let's make youth political participation more than a conversation - **let's make it a reality.***