

Young India, Ageing Parliament

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Youth representation in the Indian Parliament is critically low despite the country's large youth population. This article examines the historical and current trends of young adult representation (aged 25–40) in the Lok Sabha, highlighting a significant decline from 1951–52 to 2024. The youth representation index is formulated to measure the proportion of young members of Parliament relative to their population share, revealing a sharp decrease in youth presence over time.

Youth representation in parliaments worldwide stands at a critical juncture, highlighting the urgent need to bridge the gap between burgeoning youth demographics and their under-representation in political processes. Despite their significant contributions to social change, economic growth, and technological innovation, young people remain disproportionately under-represented in national political institutions, exacerbating their perceived marginalisation within democratic frameworks (IPU 2023). This disparity undermines the demographic context within which representative democracy has developed (Berry 2014) and poses profound challenges to the legitimacy and efficacy of political institutions.

Globally, this issue is stark. While half of the world's population is under 30, only 2.8% of parliamentarians worldwide are aged 30 or under (IPU 2023). This age discrepancy in parliamentary representation is prevalent in democracies such as Japan, the United Kingdom, and Egypt, including India. The median age gap between politicians and citizens varies across regions, with the smallest gaps observed in Europe and the largest in Africa and other parts of the global South. Despite the youth representing a significant portion of the global population, their presence in legislative bodies is minimal, highlighting a widespread democratic deficit (Stockemer and Sundström 2023).

Demographic Context and Political Barriers

India, home to the world's largest youth population, a demographic segment often referred to as a substantial demographic dividend (James 2008; Kulkarni 2017), exemplifies disparity in youth representation. With a median age of 28 as of 2024, India's demographic landscape underlines the importance of

youth representation in shaping the country's political trajectory. However, youth representation in the Indian Parliament remains disproportionately low, and even among them, many young parliamentarians are from entrenched political lineages or have familial ties within the political sphere. Socio-economic and political barriers, such as the reluctance of political parties to nominate younger candidates lacking experience or financial backing, further exacerbate the issue of youth representation. The candidate-centred political system favours older, more established candidates, particularly India's first-past-the-post system, perpetuating a cycle of limited youth representation (Joshi 2013).

The implications of limited youth representation extend beyond demographic proportions. The political landscape, predominantly occupied by older generations, fails to adequately address today's dynamic aspirations of youths and their needs. As technological advancements reshape societal dynamics, the evolving aspirations and perspectives of the youth present formidable challenges to the entrenched norms of current political systems. The rise of nuclear families further exemplifies the generational disconnect and the need for a more inclusive political discourse. This disconnect deepens intergenerational divides and hampers the ability of parliaments to tackle issues critical to the younger generation.

The impetus for including diverse social groups in Parliament stems from the need to reflect a broad spectrum of societal interests and experiences (Warren 2008). Phillips (1995) argues that focusing solely on ideological diversity within political parties is insufficient. Instead, political parties and legislature must mirror societal diversity to ensure that various social groups, particularly those from oppressed backgrounds, are directly represented without intermediaries (Joshi 2015; Young 1990). Building on existing literature, this article explores the trends, challenges and opportunities associated with increasing youth participation in Parliament. By conceptualising the under-representation of youth in

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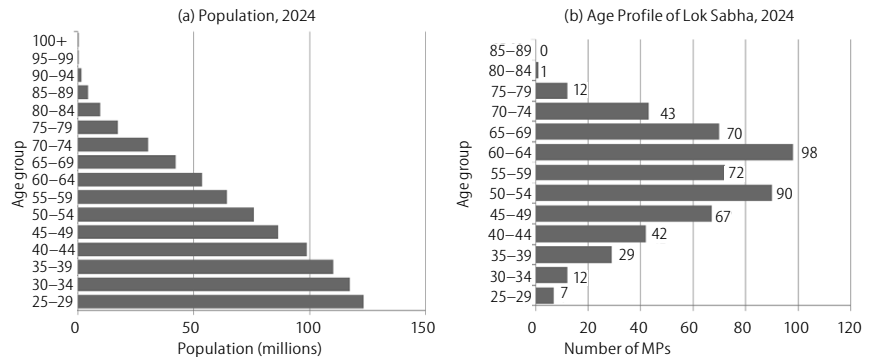
the legislature as a democratic deficit with far-reaching consequences, this article contributes to the discourse on youth representation in India, emphasizing the urgency of addressing this issue within the political landscape.

Data and Empirical Strategies

The article examines longitudinal trends of descriptive representation of young adults in Parliament (Lok Sabha), starting from the first general elections in India in 1951–52 to the most recent 2024 election cycle, with qualitative insights from a review of pertinent literature and policy documents. Parliament consists of two chambers: the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and the Rajya Sabha (Council of States). This article focuses exclusively on the Lok Sabha, which is composed of members of Parliament (MPs) directly elected by the people. Therefore, whenever the term “parliament” is used in this article, it refers explicitly to the Lok Sabha.

For analysis purposes, demographic data were sourced from the National

Figure 1 (a+b): Comparison of Age Distribution—Population vs Parliamentarians (Lok Sabha), 2024



Depiction of age group has been taken from 25 onwards, considering the eligibility age for candidacy to be 25 years, as set by the Constitution of India.

Source: United Nations Data Portal, Election Commission of India.

Commission on Population (2020), Registrar General of India (2022), and United Nations Data (2024) to calculate the share of eligible voters in the population. Electoral data sets were extracted from the digital repository maintained by the Election Commission of India (ECI 2024) and the Parliament Digital Library by the Lok Sabha Secretariat.

In this article, we categorise MPs as “young” if they are aged 40 and under, considering the eligibility age for candidacy

to be 25 years, as set by the Constitution of India. “Youth,” “young” and “young person” are used interchangeably and refer to young women and men aged 25–40 in this article. We argue that it is essential to compare youth representation in the Lok Sabha relative to the proportion of the youth population to understand the extent of their legislative absence. So, we have formulated the youth representation index (YRI). This index is calculated by dividing the

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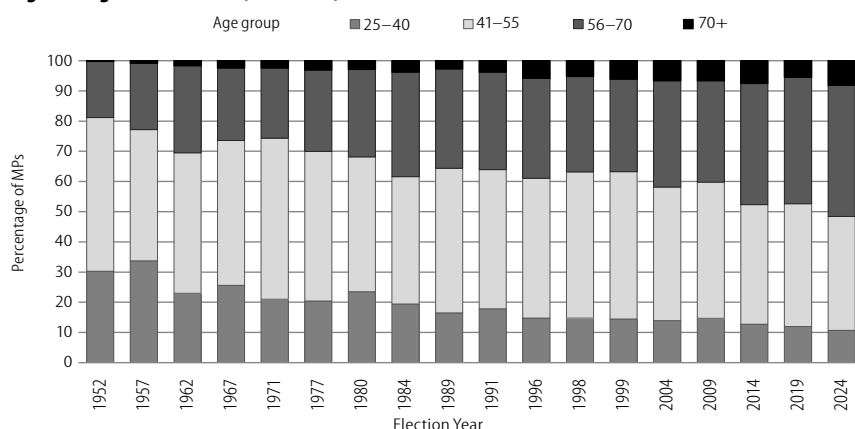
percentage of young MPs in Parliament (aged 25 to 40) by the percentage of youth (aged 25 to 40) within the eligible voting-age population and the increase by a factor of 100. For example, if the 25 to 40 age cohort makes up 20% of a country's legislature and the same age group comprises 25% of the population, the YRI would be 80, indicating that young adults' representation in Parliament is 80% relative to their proportion in the population. For comparative analysis, the same representation indexes were also calculated for the 41–55, 56–70 and 71 and older age groups.

Historical Trends in Youth Representation

The population data (Figure 1, p 14) indicate a broad base, signifying a large proportion of the population in the younger age groups. The age groups 25–29 to 40–44 (combining both sexes) show substantial populations, indicating a significant proportion of young adults eligible to vote and potentially participate in the election. However, the age profile pyramid of MPs in the Lok Sabha shows a different trend. Despite the large base of young adults in the general population, their representation in Parliament is disproportionately low. The MPs' age profile indicates a dominance of middle-aged individuals (50–64 years), which contrasts with the younger demographics of the population of India. This shows a potential barrier to young people entering and succeeding in politics and a significant under-representation of young adults in Parliament.

Our analysis in Figure 2 and Table 1 gives a comprehensive overview of youth representation in the Lok Sabha from the first general elections in 1952 to the recent one in 2024. There has been a noticeable shift in the age profile of MPs in the Lok Sabha. The percentage of youth MPs aged 25–40 has declined over the years. In the early years, such as the second general elections of 1957, 33.74% of MPs were in this age group. However, by the 17th general elections in 2019, this percentage had dropped to 11.97%, declining further to 10% by 2024. Meanwhile, the percentage of older MPs has increased significantly. In 1952, only 19%

Figure 2: Age Profile of MPs (Lok Sabha) from 1952 to 2024



Source: ECI (2024) and Lok Sabha Secretariat (2012).

Table 1: Representation Index in the Lok Sabha, 1951 to 2024

Lok Sabha	Average Age of MPs	Percentage of MPs Age Group (25–40)	Percentage of Population Age Group (25–40)	YRI	Representation Index (RI)		
					RI Age Group (41–55)	RI Age Group (56–70)	RI Age Group (71+)
First (1952–57)	46.5	30.30	22.25	138	397	328	14
Second (1957–62)	46.7	33.74	21.63	156	337	348	56
Third (1962–67)	49.4	22.95	21.00	109	364	453	104
Fourth (1967–70)	48.7	25.61	20.25	126	385	363	147
Fifth (1971–77)	49.2	21.03	19.65	107	434	354	136
Sixth (1977–79)	52.1	20.43	19.74	103	409	410	161
Seventh (1980–84)	49.9	23.70	20.28	117	375	448	144
Eighth (1985–89)	51.4	19.40	21.93	88	358	533	183
Ninth (1989–91)	51.3	16.48	22.30	74	412	502	128
Tenth (1991–96)	51.4	17.82	22.52	79	391	488	178
Eleventh (1996–97)	52.8	14.72	22.80	65	367	492	262
Twelfth (1998–99)	46.4	14.77	22.91	64	371	467	229
Thirteenth (1999–2004)	55.5	14.42	22.97	63	367	453	263
Fourteenth (2004–09)	52.2	13.94	23.22	60	307	508	262
Fifteenth (2009–14)	53.7	14.68	23.81	62	298	436	241
Sixteenth (2014–19)	53.8	12.71	24.58	52	250	459	253
Seventeenth (2019–24)	54.3	11.97	25.23	47	245	424	163
Eighteenth (2024–)	55.6	10.68	25.76	41	214	409	208

YRI- youth representation index, RI- representation index.

Sources: Registrar General of India, United Nations Data Portal, Election Commission of India, Lok Sabha Secretariat (2012).

of MPs were 56 years and older. In 2024, this has increased to 51%. In the first Lok Sabha, there was just one MP over the age of 70. This has risen to 8.10% in the current Lok Sabha.

When comparing the percentage of young MPs aged 25–40 with the percentage of the population in the same age group (Table 1), it becomes evident that the youth demographics is significantly under-represented in the Lok Sabha. For example, nearly 30% of MPs were between 25 and 40 during the first general elections, while this age group constituted 21.63% of India's total population. In contrast, in 2024, only 10.68% of MPs are from this age group, even though they comprise 25.76% of the population.

This gap is expected to widen further. The average age of MPs in the Lok Sabha has shown an increasing trend over the years. Starting from an average age of 46.5 years in 1952, it gradually rose to 55.6 years in the 18th general elections in 2024. This indicates that Parliament has been getting older over time. If we consider Rajya Sabha members, it seems much older than Lok Sabha, with an average age of 63.

Youth Representation Index

The YRI measures how well the 25–40 age group of young adults are represented in Parliament relative to their population share. A YRI of 100 would indicate perfect representation. Historically, Lok

Sabha's YRI has fluctuated but shows a clear downward trend. It peaked at 156 during the second general elections in 1957, indicating a relatively high youth representation. However, it has fallen sharply, reaching 41 in 2024, indicating that youth representation in Parliament is 41% relative to their proportion in the population. This decline reflects a growing under-representation of young adults in the Lok Sabha.

Comparing the representation indexes of different age groups reveals further insights. The representation index for the 41–55 age groups has remained relatively stable and high, ranging from 307 to 434, suggesting a consistent over-representation of this age group relative to their share in the population. Similarly, the 56–70 age group has seen high representation indexes, often surpassing 400. In contrast, while showing some fluctuations, the 71 and older age group has also experienced an increasing representation, particularly in the latter election cycles, with the representation index rising from 14 to 208.

The data reveals several key observations about youth representation in the Lok Sabha. First, there is a noticeable trend of an ageing Parliament, as evidenced by the steadily increasing average age of MPs. Second, there is a marked decline in the percentage of young MPs within the 25–40 age group, highlighting a significant decrease in youth representation. Additionally, this age group's representation in Lok Sabha is disproportionately low compared to their population proportion, indicating a severe underrepresentation of the youth. The YRI has also been on a downward trajectory, signifying that the presence of young adults in the Lok Sabha has worsened over time. These observations collectively underline the growing disconnect between the younger population and the nation's legislative body.

Discussion

Despite the growing proportion of young adults in the population, their presence in Parliament has diminished, as reflected in both the decreasing percentage of

young MPs and the falling YRI. In contrast, older age groups have seen relatively higher and more stable representation, indicating a legislative body that is ageing over time. This trend raises questions about the inclusivity and representativeness of the Indian parliamentary system concerning its youth population. The Youth and Politics Survey, 2011 by the Centre for the Study of Developing Society (CSDS), highlighted that nearly two-thirds of the youth preferred a young leader over an older candidate (Mishra 2014). However, the actual representation of youth in Parliament has steadily declined over the years.

Upon reviewing the current state of Indian democracy, it becomes apparent that despite student unions, youth organisations and NGOs providing significant opportunities and platforms for young people to participate, their representation in Parliament is remarkably inadequate. Young, competent candidates often struggle to succeed in elections because of systemic barriers and biases favouring older, more established

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politicians. The political landscape in many countries, including India, is dominated by wealthy, educated, middle-aged to senior men from the dominant ethnicity and caste, creating an environment that is not conducive to the inclusion of younger representatives. This situation is compounded by democratic ideals, which should be blind to demographic characteristics such as age, often falling short in practice, leading to the under-representation of youth (Berry 2014).

The under-representation of youth not only indicates a democratic deficit but also raises concerns about governance priorities. This trend has significant implications for the political landscape in India. Although skewed representation does not necessarily lead to poor governance, governments led by older politicians may pay less attention to issues of importance to women, the working classes, and the youth compared to countries with more inclusive parliaments (Joshi 2015). Whereas, younger people often hold more progressive views on issues such as climate change, sustainability, and equality, which older politicians may not adequately address (IPU 2023).

Bridging this gap could involve targeted policy measures and electoral reforms to enhance young adults' participation in the political process. First, Parliament should consider aligning the minimum voting age with the minimum eligibility age to run for office, which is 18 in many countries, or lowering the age requirement to contest elections from 25 to 21 for a start. This alignment can ensure greater participation by youth in parliamentary processes. Second, establishing youth caucuses and committees within Parliament, supported by adequate resources and led by young MPs, can also provide platforms for young voices to be heard. Third, these reforms alone may only moderately improve youths' presence. Therefore, more drastic measures are necessary to ensure proportional representation. For example, political parties must play a crucial role by applying youth quotas alongside gender quotas, ensuring that more young candidates are nominated to contest elections and supported throughout the electoral process.

Though much attention has been given to the women's quota in Parliament, it is also important to consider the youth quota (some countries have legal provisions for younger candidates in Parliament). Moreover, societal shifts that recognise, accept and value youth as active political participants are essential. This demographic, crucial for driving social change, economic growth, entrepreneurship and innovation, may feel increasingly marginalised within the political framework. Addressing this issue is essential for ensuring that the voices of young people are adequately represented in the decision-making processes that shape the nation's future.

In Conclusion

The under-representation of youth in Parliament can lead to a disconnect between the younger population's priorities, needs and aspirations. Therefore, enhancing youth representation in Parliament requires a comprehensive approach that addresses structural barriers, empowers marginalised groups, and promotes a culture of inclusivity and respect for diverse voices. While achieving perfect proportional representation may not always be feasible, making concerted efforts to combat age discrimination and promote youth empowerment are essential for the integrity and effectiveness of democratic governance. By addressing these challenges, India can ensure that its young population is not just spectators but active participants in shaping the country's future through the democratic process.

By introducing the YRI, this article contributes to the budding literature on youth representation with a better measurement that captures variation in the age distribution of populations rather than simply counting the percentage of elected legislators in a specific age group. Our study highlights the urgent need for political reforms that can facilitate greater youth participation and representation in Parliament. This could involve measures such as lowering the age for candidacy, promoting political education and engagement of young people, and encouraging political parties to nominate younger candidates not only for

elections but also for various positions within the political parties.

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