



## Engaging India's Youth in Voting

**For Prelims:** [Elections](#), NOTA, [Representation of the People Act, 1951](#), [Election Commission of India](#), Voter Rights, [Electronic Voting Machine](#), Rule 49P

**For Mains:** Youth participation in the electoral process, Implications of low voter turnout

[Source: IE](#)

### Why in News?

As India gears up for the **18th Lok Sabha elections**, a concerning trend emerges, the **reluctance of the country's youngest eligible voters to participate**.

### Why are India's Youngest Voters Hesitant to Participate?

- **Historical Trends:**
  - **Less than 40% of voters between 18 and 19 have registered** for the 2024 elections, raising concerns about youth engagement in the electoral process.
    - Lowest enrollment rates in Delhi, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh.
  - Despite exposure to political voices via social media, many young people seem hesitant to participate actively in voting, **despite their passion for social action and protests**.
  - Bihar reports only 9.3 lakh enrolled out of a potential 54 lakh (17%), despite being known for its youthful population.
  - Similar trends are observed in other states like Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra, where enrollment rates remain notably low.
- **Lack of Political Education:** Many young people feel that the **education system does not adequately prepare** them to understand the political process and its significance.
  - Insufficient education on the importance of civic engagement and voting.
    - Lack of critical thinking skills and political awareness in school curriculum.
- **Absence of Youth-Centric Agendas:** Political parties often fail to advocate agendas that resonate with the younger demographic, leading to a disconnection.
  - Political parties may often overlook key issues that are of significant concern to the younger demographic, such as job opportunities, and affordable higher education.
- **Inadequate Representation:** Despite forming a significant portion of the population, youth are often underrepresented in political decision-making bodies.
  - This lack of representation can lead to policies that do not adequately address the needs and concerns of young people.
- **Lack of Engagement:** Limited opportunities for meaningful participation in the political process.
  - Disillusionment with **top-down decision-making** and governance structures.
- **Social Pressures:**
  - Social pressures, including **stereotypes** and negative perceptions, can discourage youth from engaging in politics.
  - Instead of focusing on meaningful agendas, there's **often an emphasis on money and muscle power in politics**.

- This can divert attention from genuine political activism and hinder youth participation in bringing about meaningful change.
- **Disconnect from Issues:**
  - Feeling disconnected from political issues that **directly affect their lives and communities.**
  - **Perceived irrelevance of political decisions** to their immediate concerns and priorities.
- **Technological Influence:**
  - Over Reliance on social media for information, **leading to misinformation and superficial engagement** with political issues.

## How Voter Disinterest Puts Democracy at Risk?

- **Disenfranchisement:**
  - Disenfranchisement refers to the **deprivation of voting rights**, often resulting from legal barriers, thereby impeding citizens' ability to participate in the democratic process.
    - Many migrants face disenfranchisement due to their inability to travel to polling stations where they are registered as voters, as required by law. While it is possible to register to vote at a new location, doing so requires proof of a fixed address, which many of the poor do not have.
  - **Social disenfranchisement during elections** persists despite **constitutional guarantees (article 326)** that hinder equitable participation in the electoral process.
- **Undermining Democratic Principles:**
  - Voter disinterest challenges the core principle of democracy, which **thrives on active citizen participation in the electoral process.**
  - When citizens disengage from voting, they relinquish their role in collective decision-making, eroding the foundation of democratic governance.
- **Perpetuating Exclusion:**
  - Disinterested voters **allow a minority to dictate the course of governance**, leading to a cycle of exclusion for marginalised communities.
  - Lack of voter participation perpetuates **inequality and injustice**, as the voices of underrepresented groups go unheard in policymaking.
- **Questioning Legitimacy:**
  - Low voter turnout raises questions about the legitimacy of electoral outcomes, undermining public trust in the democratic process.
  - When a significant portion of the population abstains from voting, the mandate of elected representatives may be called into question, casting doubt on the credibility of democratic institutions.

## What are the Voter Rights and Responsibilities in Elections?

- **Voter Enrollment and Rights:**
  - **Eligibility:**
    - In India, the Electoral Roll updates quarterly, allowing registration in the quarter they come of age of 18. Eligible youth receive an Electors Photo Identity Card (EPIC) upon registration.
      - This applies to those reaching 18 by 1st January, 1st April, 1st July, or 1st October.
  - **One Place Registration:** Voters can be enrolled only at one place, multiple registrations are an offence.
  - **Alternative ID:**
    - Having a voter ID or [Election Commission of India](#) prescribed document doesn't guarantee voting. The name must be on the electoral rolls and a valid ID is required to cast a vote.
    - Voters can use their **Electors Photo Identity Card (EPIC)** or other documents specified by the Commission at polling station.
      - **A ration card is not a valid identification for voting.**
      - Alternative documents include an [Aadhaar card](#), [MNREGA job card](#), driving licence, [PAN card](#), a smart card from **Registrar General and Census Commissioner**, passport, pension document with photo, identity

card from the government agency, or an MLA/MP identity card.

▪ **Disqualification from Voting Process:**

- Individuals who are convicted of offences committed under **Section 171E** (which deals with bribery) and **Section 171F** (which deals with personation or undue influence at an election) of the Indian Penal Code are disqualified from participating in elections.
- Those convicted of offences under Section 125 (which deals with various electoral offences), Section 135 and Section 136 of the [Representation of the People Act, 1951](#) **face disqualification from elections.**
- If an individual votes in more than one constituency, his vote is disqualified.

▪ **Voting Process:**

◦ **Wrong Button:**

- If a wrong button is pressed on an [Electronic Voting Machine \(EVM\)](#), approach the polling officer for a reset and let you vote again.

◦ **Refusal to Vote:**

- Electors can refuse to vote even after registering their identities before the presiding officer and reaching the polling booth.
- The **NOTA (None Of The Above) option allows voters to express a lack of confidence in any candidate, while the 'refusal to vote' option allows an elector to shun the entire poll process.**

◦ **Unauthorised Voting:**

- Voters can still vote if someone else has already voted in their name by using a "**Tendered Ballot Paper**" according to **Rule 49P of the Conduct of Elections Rules.**
- The Presiding Officer will collect and keep the tendered ballot paper separate.

◦ **Proxy Voting:**

- **Service voters with service qualifications**, such as members of the armed forces, Government employees posted outside the country, and members of the armed police force of a State, can use the proxy voting facility.
- They can appoint a proxy, who must be a **resident of the same constituency, to vote on their behalf.**

◦ **Vote from Home:**

- The **ECI** introduced home voting for the elderly and [Persons with Disabilities \(PwDs\) in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections](#), allowing those above 85 years of age and PwDs with 40% benchmark disability to avail of this facility.

▪ **Reporting Malpractices:**

- Report violations anonymously using the [cVIGIL citizen mobile app](#) to capture images or videos of malpractices you witness.
  - The ECI guarantees a response within 100 minutes, specifying the action taken.
  - The app allows users to report violations, track location via GPS, capture live incidents, monitor complaint status, and report violations anonymously.

## Way Forward

- Engage young voters through **appealing political agendas** and increased understanding of the political system.
  - Advocate for **increased representation of youth in political decision-making processes.**
  - Provide platforms for young voices to be heard and valued in societal and political discussions.
- Recognising the power of every vote is essential to **breaking free from the cycle of disenfranchisement.**
  - Encouraging active participation in the democratic process is crucial for safeguarding the principles of democracy and ensuring inclusive governance
- Focus on states with large youth populations, addressing issues affecting young adults during political campaigns, and dispelling stereotypes **about Gen Z's (generation of people born between 1997 and 2012)** social awareness and engagement.

- Empower India's youth by **orienting them towards the impact of their decisions**, sensitising them towards local and national issues, encouraging informed choices and emphasising the consequences of not participating in the democratic process.
- Harness the potential of **digitally connected and socially aware youth**, and encourage activism, social responsibility, and empowerment among young voters.
- Explore the **possibility of implementing secure online voting** to accommodate the digital generation.

**Drishti Mains Question:**

Q. How does voter disinterest impact democracy? Evaluate its implications on democratic principles, electoral legitimacy, and inclusive governance, with relevant examples from the Indian electoral context.

## **UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)**

### **Prelims**

**Q. Consider the following statements: (2017)**

1. The Election Commission of India is a five-member body.
2. The Union Ministry of Home Affairs decides the election schedule for the conduct of both general elections and bye-elections.
3. Election Commission resolves the disputes relating to splits/mergers of recognised political parties.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 3 only

**Ans: (d)**

**Q2. Consider the following statements: (2020)**

1. According to the Constitution of India a person who is eligible to vote can be made a minister in a State for six months even if he/she is not a member of the Legislature of that State.
2. According to the Representation of People Act, 1951, a person convicted of a criminal offense and sentenced to imprisonment for five years is permanently disqualified from contesting an election even after his release from prison.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Ans: (d)**

### **Mains**

**Q. Discuss the role of the Election Commission of India in the light of the evolution of the Model Code of Conduct. (2022)**

