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The 28 vs 56 Divide: How India's Generational Gap is Costing Its Future

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Introduction

Each generation rewrites the world in its own language, but what happens when one generation refuses to pass the pen? India, which is a nation with one of the youngest populations globally, continues to be governed by leadership that's decades older, often disconnected from the realities of a fast-evolving, digital-first world. So in a country like India, where the majority of people in our population are young people, the power still lies with the old people. India is home to one of the world's youngest populations. But still, it continues to be led by people who grew up in a completely different era, often with different values, experiences, and worldviews. The average age of parliamentarians in India is 56, while the median age of the country is just under 28 (Parakh, 2020). That's a massive gap, and it actually shows that older leaders often push policies that reflect their own priorities, not necessarily what the youth want, which is a major issue, as this can make young people then feel ignored, and this disconnect can even push them away from voting altogether (Stockemer & Sundström). What needs to be noted is the fact that this isn't because people don't want younger leaders; in fact, voters often prefer them. Younger and middle-aged politicians are usually seen as more relatable and more likely to care about things like climate change, education, and childcare, and are more aware of topics like these (McClean & Ono, 2024). Well, one of the biggest reasons for the issue is that politics in India isn't exactly welcoming to outsiders, especially young ones. For someone without a famous last name, strong political connections, or serious money, getting into politics feels almost impossible. Another reason can be the lack of guidance and mentorship. There's no real training, structure, or support system to help interested youth navigate their way into political spaces. Unlike other countries that have youth leadership programs, fellowships, or active youth parliaments, India lacks any proper platform that trains the next generation of leaders. What makes it worse is that while young people in India are super active in protests, activism, and social movements, this passion almost never turns into actual political power. This isn't just about numbers or age actually, the real issue is about representation of ideas, lived experiences, and the future itself. When youth are missing from leadership positions, it's not just young people who lose out or are affected, but the whole country loses out on innovation, urgency, and long-term thinking. Older leaders often focus on short-term fixes or solutions and re-election strategies, but younger minds are more inclined to think in decades. They're the ones directly experiencing the effects of climate change, digital transformation, unemployment, and education gaps, and they are the ones that have the most at stake much more than the older generations that are actually the ones in power.

Body

The generational disconnect we are discussing is not limited to legislative halls. It runs deep across the entire political system. That also includes the Judiciary. For example, even in the Supreme Court of India, the average age of judges is well above 60. Even though it's understandable that experience is essential in the legal system and interpretation, a lack of younger generation and their new perspective can also result in decisions that feel less technologically advanced and outdated and can fail to capture the mindset of

today's rapidly evolving social issues that includes digital privacy, LGBTQ rights, and even mental health policies. These are all the areas where youth are more actively participating and engaged, and they are also more affected by these specific policies. Also, recently, the Bar Council of India introduced a new rule that requires law graduates to complete 3 years of legal practice after their degree before they are eligible to appear for the Judiciary exams. While this rule may sound reasonable at first, it builds a significant barrier for all the students and the fresh law graduates who were aspiring to be judges. This law not only delays their entry into the Judiciary, but it has also discouraged many participants from underprivileged backgrounds or women who might face a lot of familial pressure at that age. This highlights that instead of making the system more accessible to the youth who are eager to bring new reforms to the system, it is kind of reinforcing the idea that authority must come with age, which is not correct in many respects, and it is something that will continue to limit our youth participants, even in the judicial system. If we keep sidelining the youth like what is happening now, especially in such critical spaces, we risk making decisions that are disconnected from the very population they're meant to serve. As per a recent paper titled *"Judicial Reforms and Gender Justice: A Critical Examination"* (Rao, 2024), certain reform approaches risk reducing socio-economic diversity within the judiciary and deterring fresh talent from pursuing judicial careers altogether. This challenge isn't confined to the judiciary alone but reflects broader systemic barriers in governance.. The political system reflects a very similar pattern, as most political parties in India lack formal youth quotas or pathways for younger candidates to rise. Even when youth wings do exist, they often just serve as symbolic platforms with little real power and almost no say in major party decisions. Even the young leaders are sometimes given visibility, but they are rarely given any decision-making power. This shows tokenism at its finest. They are often used as faces for campaigns that specifically target young voters, but they are rarely trusted with actual responsibility and decision making. A 2020 study by Dishant Parakh, "Representation of Youth in Electoral Politics", reveals that young politicians under the age of 35 make up less than 6% of the Indian Parliament, despite India having the world's largest youth population. The research highlights how internal party hierarchies, nepotism, and the absence of formal youth quotas create an ecosystem where political entry for the youth is nearly impossible unless they belong to political dynasties. India's almost 67 percent population is in the working-age bracket (World Bank, 2023), and the country stands at the peak of its demographic dividend, projected to add almost up to $500 billion annually to GDP (UNFPA, 2022). Yet, so much of our youth is facing unemployment and the unemployment hovers at 17.8% (CMIE, 2024), signalling a severe underutilization of human capital. Policy inertia driven by older leadership slows investments in emerging industries such as AI, renewable energy, and digital infrastructure; these are some fields where younger innovators could drive exponential growth and development. Failing to integrate youth perspectives now risks converting this once-in-a-century opportunity into a demographic disaster.

In contrast to India, several countries around the world have embraced and accentuated youth leadership, reaping and enjoying its benefits. Saana Marin in Finland became the world's youngest president at the age of 34 and also formed a government with several ministers in it who were under the age of 35. Marin's cabinet was associated with a lot of bold digital reforms, which improved youth mental health policies and also high approval ratings among younger citizens. Also, a very simple example is of Emmanuel Macron, who was elected as president at the age of 39, and Jacinda Ardern, who was also elected as the president at the age of 37 at the time of the election. For instance, Sanna Marin in Finland didn't just bring a young face to politics but she also took some important actions, she made policies that spoke to her generation. Her government made school meals for all students free, she gave parents 14 months of paid leave to share equally, and treated high-speed internet as a basic right. This is the kind of thinking that understands what young people need today. Macron in France launched a Youth Guarantee Program so that no one under 26 would be left without a job, training, or internship for more than four months. He even allowed 16-year-

olds to vote in some local elections so basically telling young people, that their voice matters as well. Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand went all in on the future as he passed a zero-carbon law, banning most single-use plastics, and even doubling mental health funding for young people. Compared to that, India's older leadership often moves slower on youth-focused changes. We still don't have consistent mental health programs, strong rural digital access, or proper job guarantees for young graduates, despite having one of the largest youth populations in the world. These are some examples that challenged the social norms in politics and offered governance styles that were way more empathetic, and also technologically adapted and youth-oriented. And I think that these are some countries that we can learn something from. India's political culture, however, is stuck in a paradox. Youth are used as symbols in election campaigns and paraded around as energetic volunteers but in reality they are rarely trusted with power and decision making. And when they do speak, they're often dismissed as naïve or inexperienced or too young to know better, they are evaluated based on their age not on their skills which can be really discouraging. A study published in the journal Political Behavior (2024) emphasized that when young people are constantly sidelined, the long-term impact is apathy, political disengagement, and distrust in the system. Another overlooked issue is the digital gap between older leaders and young citizens. Today's youth basically live online; they express political opinions through social media, engage in digital activism, and rely on fast, tech-driven information. But many older politicians are disconnected from these platforms, some are still adapting but are not as efficient and some are even very skeptical about things like technology and AI, making them less relatable and accessible to young voters. In contrast, countries with younger leaders, like Finland or New Zealand, actively use social media to engage with youth, creating a sense of inclusion. This digital disconnect in India further widens the gap between the rulers and the ruled, especially in a world where being offline means being out of touch with reality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that sidelining India's youth from leadership is not just a political gap but an economic liability. India's democracy will be the strongest when every generation has a seat at the table, but right now, the youngest voices are shouting from outside the door. We are sitting on the world's largest pool of young talent, yet allowing decisions about their future to be made by those who may never fully live its consequences. In a global economy like India, where things like innovation, tech fluency, and adaptability determine competitiveness, sidelining younger leaders means throttling our own growth potential. The question is not whether India can afford to let youth lead but it actually is that whether we can afford the economic stagnation that comes from keeping them out.

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