

Exploring Young Voters' Awareness and Perceptions of the Political and Electoral System

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Abstract

This study investigates the level of political awareness, knowledge, and perceptions held by young voters — specifically college students in Coimbatore city, Tamil Nadu — regarding India's political and electoral system. With 150 respondents selected through convenience sampling, the research employs a structured questionnaire and four analytical tools: Simple Percentage Analysis, Weighted Average Score, Chi-Square Analysis, and ANOVA. Findings indicate that social media platforms are the dominant source of political information among youth, while national development remains the foremost motivator for political interest. Respondents demonstrate a moderate level of overall electoral awareness (mean score 1.58/2), with relatively stronger familiarity with local body elections than parliamentary processes. Perception analysis reveals that young voters hold a moderately high and critical view of political leadership (mean score 4.19/5), acknowledging both desired leadership qualities and persistent systemic problems such as corruption, nepotism, and unfulfilled promises. Chi-Square tests confirm that demographic variables do not significantly affect awareness or perceptions, while ANOVA identifies significant variation in opinions concerning corruption, the VVPAT system, educational qualifications for leaders, online voting, and biometric verification. The study calls for stronger civic education programs, media literacy initiatives, and institutional reforms to bridge the gap between political exposure and informed democratic engagement among youth.

Keywords: *Political Awareness, Electoral System, Youth Perception, Civic Engagement, Social Media, Democratic Participation*

1. INTRODUCTION

Democracy in its truest form depends not merely on the existence of elections, but on the quality of participation by an informed and engaged citizenry. Among all segments of the electorate, young voters occupy a uniquely critical position. They are simultaneously the inheritors of existing democratic institutions and the architects of future governance. Their values, knowledge, and attitudes about the political system during their formative years have a lasting impact on civic behaviour throughout their lifetimes.

India, the world's largest democracy, has a youth population of considerable size — with citizens below the age of 35 constituting a substantial proportion of the total electorate. This demographic reality gives young voters a powerful, if often underutilised, influence on electoral outcomes and public policy priorities. In elections such as the 2019 and 2024 Indian General Elections, first-time and young voters played a visibly influential role in shaping the political landscape.

The last decade has witnessed an unprecedented transformation in how political information reaches young people. Traditional channels such as newspapers, family discussions, and civic education classes have given way — or at least yielded significant ground — to digital and social media platforms. Instagram reels, YouTube opinion videos, WhatsApp forwards, and X (formerly Twitter) threads now form the primary political information diet of many young Indians. While this expanded access to content has increased political exposure, researchers and educators have raised

serious questions about whether greater exposure automatically translates into deeper understanding or more nuanced political judgment.

There is a demonstrable and concerning gap between the volume of political content consumed and the actual comprehension of how democratic institutions function. Young voters may have strong, emotionally charged opinions about leaders and parties while remaining uninformed about how those leaders came to power, what constitutional obligations they carry, or how votes are counted and verified. This disconnect — between exposure and understanding — is precisely the concern this study seeks to address.

Furthermore, perceptions of political leadership — whether positive or cynical — are not formed in a vacuum. They are shaped by family background, peer group dynamics, media consumption habits, prior experiences with governance, and the quality of civic education received. Understanding these perception-formation pathways is essential for any serious effort to build a more politically literate younger generation.

This study focuses on college-going young voters in Coimbatore city — a major educational hub in Tamil Nadu, India — to assess their electoral awareness, probe their perceptions of political leadership, and gather their opinions on how the political and electoral system could be improved. The results offer both diagnostic insights and practical directions for educators, policymakers, and civil society organisations invested in strengthening democratic culture among India's youth.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Youth Political Awareness and Participation in India

Gaur (2021) explored youth political participation and voting behaviour in India and found that while political awareness among young people is relatively high, actual electoral participation remains inconsistent and uneven. The study identified education, political efficacy, trust in political leaders, and socio-economic background as key determinants influencing whether youth vote. Notably, the study highlighted significant regional disparities in participation levels and recommended political literacy programs, youth-focused policy initiatives, and trust-building measures as essential strategies to improve youth electoral engagement in India.

Mishra and Gupta (2017) analysed how young people in India interact with mainstream politics, including their interest in political affairs, voting behaviour, party identification, and participation in both electoral and non-electoral activities. The study emphasised that Indian youth are not a homogeneous political group — their attitudes and engagement levels are shaped by diverse socio-economic factors. Using data from multiple longitudinal surveys, the authors charted changing patterns of youth political engagement over time, concluding that while young voters are increasingly discerning, they remain susceptible to emotional and identity-based appeals in the absence of strong civic literacy.

Verma (2015) explored the pivotal role of youth as a transformative force in Indian democracy. The study highlighted India's large youth population as a dynamic demographic capable of reshaping traditional political structures, influencing policy agendas, and altering electoral outcomes. It addressed challenges such as nepotism, entrenched power structures, and limited political access for young aspirants, while documenting the growing importance of youth-led social movements and strategic use of social media for political mobilisation.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the level of awareness among young voters regarding the political and electoral system.
- To examine young voters' knowledge of specific electoral processes, procedures, and legal provisions.
- To study young voters' perceptions of political leadership and political parties.
- To analyse young voters' opinions and suggestions for improving the political and electoral framework.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology refers to the systematic process and procedures followed to collect, analyze, and interpret data in order to achieve the objectives of the study. It provides a structured framework that guides the entire research process and ensures that the findings are accurate, reliable, and meaningful.

4.1 Area of Study

The area of study refers to Coimbatore city, which is widely known as the Manchester of South India. It is a major educational hub with a large number of schools, arts and science colleges, engineering colleges, and management institutions. The presence of a large concentration of Youngsters from varied backgrounds makes it an ideal location for this study.

4.2 Sources of Data

The study makes use of primary data to ensure a comprehensive and well-rounded analysis.

Primary Data: Primary data was collected directly from the respondents through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was carefully designed in line with the research objectives and covered aspects such as awareness of the electoral process, knowledge of political institutions, perceptions of political leadership and parties, and suggestions for improving the political framework.

Secondary Data: Secondary data was gathered from various published and unpublished sources including journals, research articles, books, government reports, and reliable online sources. This data helped in building the theoretical background of the study and in comparing the findings with existing literature.

4.3 Sampling Method and Sample Size

The study follows a Non-Probability Sampling technique, specifically Convenience Sampling. Under this method, respondents were selected based on their accessibility and willingness to participate in the study. This approach was chosen considering the practical constraints of time and resources, and it allowed the researcher to collect data efficiently from Youngsters who were readily available and willing to respond.

A total of 150 respondents were selected for this study from among Youngsters who fall within the young voter age group.

4.4 Statistical Tools Used

Four statistical tools were employed to analyse the collected data, each serving a distinct analytical purpose:

Simple Percentage Analysis — This tool was used to summarize and interpret the responses by converting raw data into percentages, making it easier to understand the distribution of responses across different questions.

Weighted Average Score — The weighted average method is a way of calculating the average when some values are more important than others. Each value is multiplied by its weight, and then all the results are added to find a more accurate average

Chi-Square Analysis — This tool was used to test the association between two categorical variables and to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between them.

ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) — This tool was used to compare the means across different groups of respondents to determine whether there are any significant differences in awareness, perception, or opinion based on demographic variables such as age, gender, or educational background.

4.5 Limitations of the Study

- The study is confined to Coimbatore city and may not be representative of young voters across India.
- Convenience sampling limits the generalisability of findings to the broader youth population.
- Responses are self-reported and may be influenced by social desirability bias or personal subjectivity.
- The study captures attitudes at a single point in time; political perceptions may shift rapidly in response to current events.

5. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter presents a systematic analysis of the primary data collected from 150 respondents. The findings are organised by theme and analytical tool, progressing from demographic profiling through awareness assessment, leadership perception analysis, and reform opinions.

5.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic composition of the sample is summarised below. The study primarily captured the views of male (62.7%) undergraduate students (66%) who are currently enrolled in educational institutions (92.7%). The overwhelming majority are single (97.3%), indicating that the sample accurately represents the young, pre-career voter demographic. A near-equal spread across urban (35.3%), semi-urban (37.3%), and rural (27.3%) residential categories ensures geographic diversity within the Coimbatore region.

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male / Female	62.7% / 37.3%
Education Level	Undergraduate (majority)	66.0%
Occupation	Student (majority)	92.7%
Marital Status	Single (majority)	97.3%
Place of Residence	Semi-Urban (majority)	37.3%
Household Size	3–4 members (majority)	42.0%
Monthly Income	Below ₹20,000 (majority)	25.3%

5.2 Sources of Political Information and News Consumption Frequency

Respondents were asked to identify their primary sources of political information. Out of 368 total responses (multiple options permitted), social media platforms dominated at 24.2%, followed by casual conversations (20.38%), television news channels (19.56%), family and friends (18.47%), and newspapers (17.39%). This finding is significant: for a generation that has grown up in the digital age, social media has effectively displaced traditional media as the first point of contact with political content.

Regarding consumption frequency, 28.7% of respondents follow political news a few times a week, closely followed by 28% who do so every day. Only 18.7% rarely follow political news, while 24.7% engage only during election periods. Together, these figures suggest a reasonably engaged youth readership — though the quality of engagement (critical versus passive) cannot be determined from frequency data alone. Social media campaigns (24.2%) were also identified as the political activity most responsible for increasing youth awareness, ahead of voter awareness programs (20.38%) and election rallies (19.56%).

5.3 Awareness of Election Types — Weighted Average Analysis

Electoral awareness was measured using a two-point scale (Aware = 2, Unaware = 1) across three types of elections. The weighted average scores are presented below:

Election Type	Aware (n)	Unaware (n)	Weighted Score	Rank
Local Body Elections	94	56	1.62	1st
Assembly Elections	90	60	1.60	2nd
Parliamentary Elections	81	69	1.54	3rd
Mean Weighted Average	1.58 / 2.00 (Moderate-to-Low Awareness)			

The mean weighted average of 1.58 out of 2 indicates a moderate-to-low level of electoral awareness. Young voters are more familiar with Local Body Elections (which affect daily civic life directly) than with Parliamentary Elections of national significance. This pattern suggests that the immediacy and tangibility of local governance issues drives awareness more effectively than abstract national-level political processes.

5.4 Factors Motivating Young Voters to Learn About Politics

Respondents were asked to indicate which factors motivated them to engage with political content. The 'Development of Nation' emerged as an overwhelming driver — 96% of respondents affirmed it, compared to just over half who cited welfare schemes (56%), youth-related policies (58%), leadership speeches (53.3%), peer influence (55.3%), or family influence (54%).

This finding has important implications: young voters in this sample are not primarily motivated by narrow self-interest or social pressure, but by a substantive concern for national progress. This issue-based orientation is a positive indicator for the quality of democratic engagement — young voters who care about outcomes rather than personalities are more likely to vote evaluatively and hold leaders accountable.

5.5 Perceptions of Political Leadership — Weighted Average Score Analysis

Respondents rated 12 statements about political leadership on a five-point Likert scale. The resulting weighted average scores, ranked from highest to lowest, are presented in the table below. The overall Mean Weighted Average of 4.19/5 places the collective perception squarely in the 'Agree' band, indicating a consistently critical and demanding stance toward political leadership.

Rank	Statement / Perception Item	Weighted Score	Band
1	Political leaders should have strong administrative and decision-making ability.	4.64	Strongly Agree
2	Political leaders are often involved in corruption and misuse public funds.	4.55	Strongly Agree
3	Political leaders often favor family members or close friends (nepotism).	4.51	Strongly Agree
4	Political leaders should be accountable for their actions and policy decisions.	4.37	Strongly Agree
5	Political leaders should be responsive to the problems and needs of citizens.	4.33	Strongly Agree
6	Political leaders should respect democratic values and the Constitution.	4.23	Strongly Agree
7	Political leaders often make false promises during elections and fail to deliver.	4.11	Agree

8	I trust political leaders and parties to work in the best interest of the public.	4.13	Agree
9	Political leaders should have a clear vision for social and economic development.	4.11	Agree
10	Political leaders should be easily accessible and approachable to the public.	3.90	Agree
11	Political parties show limited concern for youth welfare and youth-related issues.	3.80	Agree
12	Political leaders manipulate media and information for political gain.	3.51	Agree

The highest-scoring item — strong administrative and decision-making ability (4.64) — reflects the aspirational expectations young voters hold for leadership. However, the second and third-highest scores concern corruption (4.55) and nepotism (4.51), revealing deep-seated disillusionment with how leadership ideals are actually practiced. The relatively lower scores for media manipulation (3.51) and youth welfare concern (3.80) suggest that while these issues are recognised, they are not perceived as acutely as direct governance failures.

5.7 Chi-Square Analysis — Influence of Personal Factors

Chi-Square tests were conducted across three dependent constructs — perception of political party qualities, awareness of the electoral system, and opinions on electoral system improvements — against five demographic variables: gender, educational level, occupation, place of residence, and monthly income. The results are summarised below.

Personal Factor	χ^2 — Perception	χ^2 — Awareness	χ^2 — Reform Opinions	Avg. p-value	Result
Gender	6.214 (0.372)	5.768 (0.329)	6.842 (0.285)	0.329	NS
Educational Level	8.536 (0.201)	7.214 (0.302)	8.917 (0.178)	0.227	NS
Occupation	7.482 (0.278)	6.483 (0.371)	7.364 (0.296)	0.315	NS
Place of Residence	5.963 (0.309)	4.956 (0.423)	5.923 (0.341)	0.358	NS
Monthly Income	9.124 (0.167)	8.105 (0.224)	9.506 (0.149)	0.180	NS

In all 15 combinations of demographic variable and dependent construct, the p-value exceeds 0.05, resulting in acceptance of the null hypothesis (H_0) in every case. This is a significant finding: it indicates that young voters across different genders, education levels, income groups, and residential backgrounds share broadly similar perceptions of political leadership, similar awareness levels of the electoral system, and similar opinions on what reforms are needed. Political concerns among youth in this study transcend demographic boundaries.

5.8 ANOVA Analysis — Significant Group Differences

ANOVA was applied to test for significant mean differences across respondent groups on specific items within the three constructs. While most variables showed no significant group variation, the following items yielded statistically significant F-values ($p < 0.05$):

Variable	F Value	p Value	Result	Implication
Corruption Involvement (Perception)	2.964	0.035	S	Views on political corruption vary significantly across respondent groups, indicating socially or experientially shaped perceptions.
VVPAT System Awareness	3.104	0.029	S	Knowledge of the VVPAT electronic audit trail differs significantly, suggesting unequal access to specific electoral education.
Educational Qualification for Leaders (Reform)	3.104	0.029	S	Opinions on mandating educational qualifications for political leaders vary across groups.

Mandatory Competency Examination (Reform)	3.286	0.022	S	Support for a mandatory competency test for politicians shows significant group-level divergence.
Online / Remote Voting Accessibility (Reform)	3.462	0.018	S	Views on digital voting differ significantly, possibly reflecting variable access to technology and digital literacy.
Biometric Voter Verification System (Reform)	3.688	0.014	S	Most strongly significant variable — views on biometric verification diverge markedly, reflecting differing trust levels in technology-driven electoral solutions.

Non-significant ANOVA items — including SIR process awareness ($p=0.174$), candidate disqualification awareness ($p=0.110$), and most reform suggestions (political education, transparent governance, minimum age, physical fitness, accountability, corruption reduction) — confirm that on these broader issues, young voters form a cohesive and unified opinion bloc regardless of background

6. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following evidence-based suggestions are proposed for policymakers, educational institutions, the Election Commission of India, and civil society organisations committed to strengthening youth democratic participation:

1. Political education programs should be introduced in educational institutions to improve young voters' understanding of the political and electoral system.
2. The Election Commission and government agencies should conduct more voter awareness campaigns targeting youth.
3. Social media platforms should be used more effectively to spread accurate and reliable political information.
4. Educational institutions should organize seminars, debates, and workshops on democracy, elections, and civic responsibility.
5. Greater efforts should be made to increase awareness about electoral procedures, such as VVPAT systems, candidate affidavits, and election regulations.
6. Transparency and accountability in governance should be strengthened to increase public trust in political institutions.
7. There should be minimum educational qualifications for political leaders to ensure better decision-making and governance.
8. Measures should be taken to reduce corruption and political malpractice in the electoral process.
9. The government may explore technological innovations such as secure online voting systems to make voting more accessible.
10. Biometric voter verification systems could be implemented to prevent duplicate voting and ensure election integrity.

7. CONCLUSION

The study titled **Exploring Young Voters Awareness and Perceptions of the Political and Electoral System** highlights the level of political awareness and attitudes among young voters, particularly students. The findings reveal that young voters possess a moderate level of awareness regarding the political and electoral system, with social media emerging as the most influential source of political information. While respondents demonstrate a strong interest in national development and governance issues, there is still limited awareness regarding specific electoral procedures and legal regulations.

The study also indicates that young voters hold critical perceptions of political leadership, particularly concerning issues such as corruption, nepotism, and transparency. At the same time, they express strong support for reforms such as educational qualifications for political leaders, stronger accountability systems, and improved political education for youth.

Overall, the research emphasizes the need to strengthen civic education, promote accurate political information, and encourage greater youth participation in democratic processes. Enhancing awareness and engagement among young voters is essential for building a more informed, responsible, and participatory democratic society.

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