



Journal for Social
Science Archives

Journal for Social Science Archives

Online ISSN: 3006-3310

Print ISSN: 3006-3302

Volume 3, Number 4, 2025, Pages 690 – 697

Journal Home Page

<https://jssarchives.com/index.php/Journal/about>



Youth Engagement in Policy Making: A Pathway to Inclusive Governance

Faheem Ahmed¹, Jameel Ahmed², Tahseen Akhtar³ & Muhammad Kamran⁴

¹LLB (Hons.) Batch 2k24, Department of Law, University of Sindh Jamshoro Campus;

Email: faheemahmedlegahri@gmail.com

²LLB (Hons.) Batch 2k24, Department of Law, University of Sindh Jamshoro Campus;

Email: jameeljamro5@gmail.com

³LLB (Hons.) Batch 2k24, Department of Law, University of Sindh Jamshoro Campus;

Email: memontahseen744@gmail.com

⁴BS Economics, Batch 2k23, Department of Economics, Lasbela University of Agriculture, Water and Marine Sciences, Uthal, Balochistan, Pakistan; Email: mkamranabro@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: September 12, 2025
Revised: October 20, 2025
Accepted: November 02, 2025
Available Online: November 07, 2025

Keywords:

Youth leadership, Inclusive Governance, Policy Making, Participation, Good Governance

Corresponding Author:

Tahseen Akhtar

Email:

memontahseen744@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Youth engagement is becoming more and more important in modern governance, especially when it comes to inclusive policy making. This study examined how engaging young people in decision making can create more inclusive governance when youth take part they bring new ideas, better understanding of technology, future focused thinking, and these contributions make policies stronger, more practical, and better suited to the need of society. In contemporary governance systems a significant gap exists between policy formulation and representation of younger population, resulting in limited consideration of their needs and perspective, previous research has highlighted the importance of participation in governance, however the specific contribution of youth in shaping responsive and equitable policies reminded underexplored. This study aimed to analyze the relationship between youth participation and inclusive policy outcomes within selected governance settings. This study examined a qualitative research methodology by using document analysis and policy reports, academic literature, and institutional frameworks to identify pattern of youth involvement in decision making processes, the findings revealed that increased youth participation contributed to improved transparency, innovation, and responsiveness in policy development, additionally youth led initiatives were associated with more inclusive approaches in addressing issues related to education, employment, healthcare access, and economic opportunities. The study concludes that youth engagement strengthens the foundation of inclusive governance by promoting participatory decision making and intergenerational equity.



Introduction

United Nations defines Youth as people aged between 15 and 24 years,¹ a huge part of world's population. There are over 1.8 billion of youth in worldwide² which makes up 23% of the global population.³ Young people are often creative, good with technology, and want to make the world better, as they are seen as key people who bring about change that is why it's so important to include young people in policy making and their voices on issues such as climate change, jobs, and education must be heard. Young people face big challenges like unemployment, inequality, climate change, and mental health issues, 1 in 5 young people are not in employment, education, or training (NEET).⁴ Young people globally stand to be the most influential in initiating changes in policies and legislatures at the government and society level. Considering their political energy and potential for innovation, youth have been found exhibiting initiatives and addressing urgent questions in the world today. This group of people has been, for instance, at the forefront of movements on climate change, social issues, and reforms in education, demonstrating their capacity to unite different groups of people and change the status quo. A policy initiative that increases the democratic participation of young people in important and would mark a major shift in their citizenship status.

Literature review

Crowley and Moxon's study addresses that young people are not disengaged from politics but they are simply moving away from traditional activities like voting and joining political parties toward alternative forms such as protest, online campaigning, and community action. The authors argue that "innovation" in youth participation is often misunderstood; instead of just describing what young people do, it should mean public authorities actively experimenting with new methods like co-management, deliberative forums, or digital tools, to listen better and involve young people in real decisions. Through surveys and real-life examples across Europe, the study shows that these innovative approaches face the same barriers as old ones, such as lack of funding and political support, and that being new does not automatically make them more effective. The key message is that governments and institutions must take the lead in testing, evaluating, and spreading what works, rather than expecting young people to fit into outdated systems.

Youth Participation in Global Governance this paper essentially says that while there are many international policies, charters, and programs—like those from the United Nations and African Union—that officially recognize young people as important partners in decision-making, there is still a huge gap between these written commitments and reality. Existing studies show that youth participation is often superficial (tokenism), underfunded, and lacks proper mentorship, leaving young people frustrated. At the same time, the literature highlights that grassroots movements (such as Fridays for Future) and digital platforms have given youth powerful new ways to organize and demand change. Ultimately, the review argues that meaningful youth participation requires not

¹ United Nations <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth>.

² United Nation Youth participation in global governance: Youth-oriented institutional reforms and inclusive political and development participation. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/youth/>

³ Mathews, T., Abrahams, K., & Mokoena, T. (2025, August 19). Youth orientated institutional reforms and inclusive political and development participation. Parliamentary Research Unit and Committee Support Services, Parliament of South Africa.

⁴ Mathews, T., Abrahams, K., & Mokoena, T. (2025, August 19). Youth orientated institutional reforms and inclusive political and development participation. Parliamentary Research Unit and Committee Support Services, Parliament of South Africa.

just symbolic inclusion but real institutional reforms, dedicated resources, and genuine intergenerational collaboration.

Youth Oriented Institutional Reforms and Inclusive Political and Development Participation paper argues that synthesizes international and regional frameworks such as the SDGs, the African Youth Charter, and IPU resolutions which argue that while there is broad normative consensus on the importance of youth participation in governance and development, implementation remains critically weak. It highlights persistent barriers including structural exclusion, cultural biases, resource gaps, and the digital divide, and concludes that moving beyond tokenism requires systemic reforms: aligning voting and candidacy ages, introducing youth quotas, embedding youth mainstreaming across parliamentary functions, and creating sustained platforms for meaningful engagement. The overarching message is that young people must be treated as essential partners, not merely beneficiaries, if democratic institutions are to remain legitimate and effective.

Judith Bessant's article argues that despite the widespread rhetoric of "youth participation" in government policy documents from Australia, the UK, and the Commonwealth, these initiatives do not genuinely advance young people's democratic citizenship. Instead, she contends that they function as a new mode of government—a strategy to extend state management over young people by defining participation narrowly as involvement in adult-supervised activities (such as schooling, volunteering, and sports) while deliberately excluding any meaningful political power or legal rights. Drawing on govern mentality theory and a critical analysis of official reports, Bessant concludes that the language of democracy and empowerment masks a reformist agenda aimed at controlling "youth at risk" rather than redressing the power imbalances that exclude young people from genuine public sphere engagement.

A Simple Guide to Dr. Ariadne Vromen's Paper argues that youth participation is often misunderstood because it is narrowly defined through individual actions like voting or tokenistic consultation, when in reality young people engage in diverse, collective, and community-based activities that build social capital and drive change. The review contrasts two dominant frameworks: the youth development approach, which treats participation as a tool to "fix" individual young people, and the youth involvement/active citizenship approach, which sees participation as a right that can transform policies and institutions. Drawing on existing research, it highlights that most formal consultation processes are tokenistic, exclude marginalized youth (e.g., refugee, migrant, low-income), and fail to share power. The literature ultimately calls for rethinking participation to make it inclusive, partnership-based, and responsive to young people's own definitions of meaningful involvement. Research shows that youth benefit from engaging in governmental decision making by developing a greater understanding of governmental processes, leadership skills, and expansion of social networks (Conner & Cosner, 2016)⁵. Despite these potential benefits, there is widespread criticism in youth serving fields (e.g., education, child welfare, government) as to the practice of meaningful youth engagement and whether soliciting input from youth without taking their views into account is harmful to youth or a step towards collective engagement (Canosa et al., 2022, Lundy, 2018).⁶

Methodology

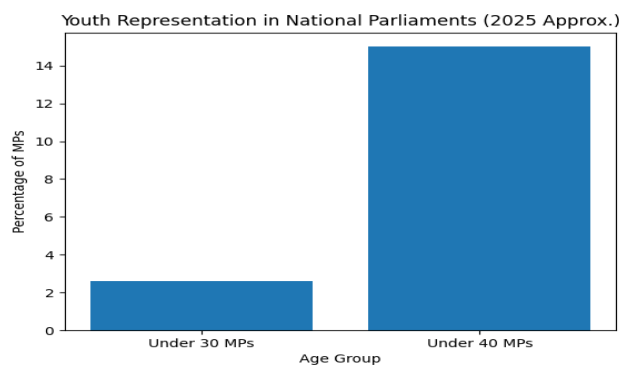
⁵ Conner, J. O., & Cosner, S. (2016). An examination of the ways that student voice can contribute to school reform. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 52(2), 233–274.

⁶ Laura Lundy. (2018). In defence of tokenism? Implementing children's right to participate in collective decision-making. *Childhood*, 25(3), 340–354. Canosa, A., Graham, A., & Wilson, E. (2018). Reflexivity and ethical mindfulness in participatory research with children: What does it really look like? *Childhood*, 25(3), 400–415.

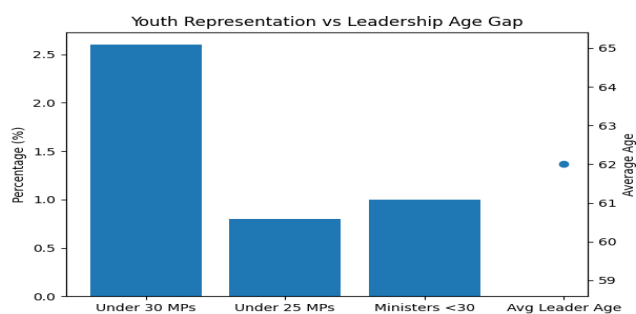
This study examined a qualitative research methodology by using document analysis and policy reports, academic literature, and institutional frameworks to identify pattern of youth involvement in decision making processes

Result and analysis

The 2025 data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union reveals a persistent underrepresentation of youth in formal political institutions despite their large demographic presence. Across 210 parliamentary chambers in 155 countries, individuals under 30 constitute only a small fraction of Members of Parliament, while even those under 40 remain significantly below proportional representation. This disparity highlights a structural imbalance between youth population size and their legislative presence. The revision of the “young MP” threshold to under 40 reflects an institutional attempt to adapt to global variations, yet it simultaneously underscores how limited actual youth inclusion remains. Overall, the data indicates that youth participation in parliaments is improving only marginally and remains far from reflective of demographic realities

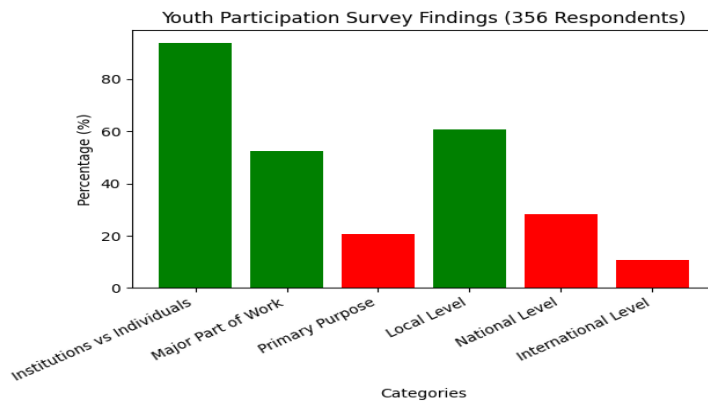


Quantitative indicators further demonstrate the depth of youth exclusion in decision-making processes globally. Only 2.6% of parliamentarians are under 30, and less than 1% are under 25, while just 1% of government ministers fall within the under-30 category. At the executive level, the average age of world leaders stands at 62, illustrating a stark generational gap in political leadership. This imbalance is compounded by perception data showing that 69% of young people believe politicians do not listen to them. Together, these figures reveal not only a representation gap but also a legitimacy crisis, where young people feel disconnected from political institutions that shape their future.



Survey-based findings from youth participation stakeholders provide insight into how engagement is currently structured. Out of 356 respondents, a majority represented youth-focused organizations, with over 94% responding on behalf of institutions rather than individuals. Notably, 52.3% of organizations identified youth participation as a major part of their work, while only

20.7% considered it their primary purpose. Most organizations operate at local levels (60.9%), with decreasing engagement at national and international levels. This suggests that while grassroots participation is relatively strong, there is a significant gap in translating local youth engagement into higher-level policy influence, limiting the overall impact of youth voices in governance.



Institutional and stakeholder surveys, particularly those conducted under the Council of Europe, highlight both opportunities and barriers in youth participation frameworks. The findings show that while multiple forms of youth engagement exist—ranging from consultations to participatory platforms—their effectiveness varies widely due to structural challenges such as lack of funding, weak implementation, and limited political will. Importantly, these surveys emphasize that many participation mechanisms remain tokenistic, with insufficient follow-through or policy impact. At the same time, the identification of innovative practices suggests that meaningful youth engagement is achievable when supported by strong institutional design, inclusivity, and sustained collaboration between governments and young people.

Discussion

Role of individual members of parliament

MPs must first understand their youth constituency by identifying key concerns and systemic challenges affecting young people. This requires recognizing diversity within youth populations, including differences in gender, disability, language, and location. At the same time, MPs should be well-informed about the laws and policies that directly impact youth to ensure their actions are relevant and effective.

Based on this understanding, MPs should develop an inclusive engagement plan that allows meaningful youth participation from the beginning. This can involve working with youth organizations, meeting in safe and accessible spaces, and using social media and digital platforms to maintain regular communication and outreach.

Finally, MPs should create multiple platforms for engagement, such as in-person meetings, policy discussions, and site visits to gather practical insights. While digital tools are useful, attention must be given to the digital divide, ensuring that marginalized groups are not excluded. Alternative methods like radio can also help reach a wider youth audience.

Role of parliaments

Along with the role of individual Members of Parliament, Parliament, as an institution is strategically positioned to influence youth-oriented institutional reform and inclusive political participation. The following actions are proposed:

1. **Raising issues identified by youth constituents in Parliament through the work of committees and the Houses:** This would include raising issues posed by youth constituents in committee work, in questions for oral or written reply to the Executive, in the submission of petitions, and in speaking and moving for debates.
2. **Advocacy and lobbying:** Advocating for youth mainstreaming and lobbying other Parliamentarians and Ministers directly.
3. **Creation of youth caucus:** With the slow but steady increase in the number of young Parliamentarians, a youth caucus can serve as a structured form in which issues affecting young people can be addressed in a coherent manner with a political block across party lines. Lessons can be learnt from the development and functioning of women's caucuses.
4. **Legislative reform:** Oversight of how effective laws and policies have been implemented to determine areas for improvement on the side of government and, where relevant, amending existing legislation or proposing new legislation.
5. **Youth Budgeting:** Engaging with budgets from a youth perspective and assessing whether policies and laws are supported with adequate funding to enable implementation. Determining if funds have been optimally used and if not, what consequence management has been implemented. Assessing what measures are in place to ensure budgets allocated for youth development are optimally utilized.
6. **Inquiry:** Calling for an inquiry into a specific matter.
7. **Treaty compliance:** Domestication of international, regional treaties and agreements and monitoring and evaluation of country's compliance in that regard.
8. **Facilitating platforms for youth engagement:** Creating opportunities for youth to engage directly with MPs in-person and on virtual platforms. Partnering with youth organizations, groups and young people and involving them from inception in the planning phase, implementation and providing feedback options. Use of social media, news print, radio and television are all important avenues to utilize as a part of a broader communication strategy.
9. **Youth Parliament:** Creating public platforms for meaningful engagement such as a Youth Parliament serves as an opportunity for youth to gather to raise their issues and engage directly with Parliamentarians on the things that impact their lives. Furthermore, the dialogue enables youth to articulate not only challenges identified but propose solutions and create partnerships for change.
10. **Youth Charter and Action Plan:** "In order to remain relevant to this expanding group, parliaments need to connect and interact meaningfully with them. Parliaments can enliven their youth engagement by working with young people to co-design a charter for youth participation."⁶² Developing a youth charter for participation as means of formalizing partnerships in which principles are outlined for how to engage, what to focus on, reviewing education programs, and creating digital hubs – digital platforms for engagement

between Parliament and youth. The charter should be accompanied with an action plan that outlines the approach for youth engagement. A key aspect of the charter is a commitment to partner/collaborate/co-operate with youth councils, organizations and networks with the action plan outlining the meetings to be held to discuss key issues in so doing enabling youth to share their ideas, perspectives and solutions.

- 11. Use of social media:** Using social media and other digital platforms as a means of engaging with youth, raising awareness and disseminating information. Safeguards are required to protect against misinformation and dis-information, as well as exposure to online abuse and harassment (in addition to protection of personal information and data security). Due consideration should be given to tissues including the digital divide attributed to cultural and gender norms, gender, disability, geo-location (peri-urban, rural areas who do not have access) and access to data/network.
- 12. Eligibility age for voting:** Lowering the age eligibility for youth to vote from 18 to 17 years (as in the case with Greece and Indonesia) and 16 years (as in countries such as Austria, Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Cuba and more recently the United Kingdom). Consider the pros and cons in this formalized means of giving voice to youth within electoral reform as this provides young people the opportunity to say that how the country should be governed.
- 13. Young MPs:** Facilitating access for young people to become Members of Parliament by removing legislative barriers that would hinder this which may include the alignment of the voting age and eligible age to run for office. Emphasis should be placed on addressing the gendered implications insofar as young female parliamentarians are concerned and LGBTQIA+ persons.
- 14. Disability awareness:** Building disability awareness amongst MPs and Parliamentary staff and training on disability mainstreaming and the challenges faced by youth with disabilities.

Recommendation

Governments should introduce legally binding youth participation frameworks that move beyond consultation to actual decision-making power, ensuring youth voices influence policy outcomes.

- I. **Lowering the voting and candidacy age** should be considered to align political eligibility with youth demographic realities and expand formal participation.
- II. **Establishment of youth quotas in parliaments and political parties** can help correct structural underrepresentation and create pathways for young leaders.
- III. **Parliaments should institutionalize youth councils and youth parliaments** with direct linkages to legislative processes, ensuring their recommendations are formally debated.
- IV. **Increased budgetary allocation for youth-focused programs** is essential to support meaningful engagement rather than symbolic inclusion.
- V. **Governments and institutions must address the digital divide** by expanding affordable internet access, especially in rural and marginalized communities.
- VI. **Development of capacity-building programs** (leadership training, civic education, policy literacy) to equip young people with the skills needed for effective participation.
- VII. **Strengthening partnerships between governments and youth-led organizations** to co-design policies and ensure inclusive engagement.

- VIII. **Implementation of monitoring and accountability mechanisms** to evaluate whether youth participation initiatives lead to tangible policy impact.
- IX. **Promoting inclusive participation strategies** that actively involve marginalized youth groups, including women, persons with disabilities, and those from low-income backgrounds.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight a clear disconnect between the demographic significance of youth and their actual representation in political decision-making processes. Despite global recognition of youth as critical agents of change, their participation in formal governance structures remains minimal and often symbolic. Structural barriers, including institutional inertia, lack of political will, and insufficient resources, continue to limit meaningful engagement. While alternative forms of participation—such as grassroots movements and digital activism—have expanded youth influence, they have not yet translated into proportional representation within formal political institutions.

Addressing this gap requires a shift from tokenistic inclusion to systemic reform. Empowering youth participation is not only a matter of democratic fairness but also essential for ensuring responsive and future-oriented governance. By implementing inclusive policies, strengthening institutional frameworks, and fostering genuine intergenerational collaboration, governments can harness the full potential of young people. Ultimately, meaningful youth participation will enhance the legitimacy, effectiveness, and sustainability of democratic systems worldwide.

References

1. Anita Canosa, Anne Graham, & Erin Wilson. (2018). Reflexivity and ethical mindfulness in participatory research with children: What does it really look like? *Childhood*, 25(3), 400–415.
2. Conner, J. O., & Cosner, S. (2016). An examination of the ways that student voice can contribute to school reform. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 52(2), 233–274.
3. Laura Lundy. (2018). In defence of tokenism? Implementing children's right to participate in collective decision-making. *Childhood*, 25(3), 340–354.
4. United Nations. (n.d.). Youth. <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth>
5. Wise-Admin. (2020). The effects of war and migration on cultural identity. WISE. <https://www.wise-qatar.org/sadeem-jaro-faris-almoli-effects-war-migration-cultural-identity>
6. Youth participation in global governance: Youth-oriented institutional reforms and inclusive political and development participation. (n.d.). (*Unattributed report — organization not specified*)