

**THE PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH IN POLITICS:  
A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF LALPUR, KOTDWAR, UTTARAKHAND****Sandeep Kumar**HOD, Department of Sociology, Govt. PG college Kotdwar Uttarakhand.  
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[shraddhapp123@gmail.com](mailto:shraddhapp123@gmail.com)**ABSTRACT**

Youth is widely acknowledged as the cornerstone of any nation's development and political vitality. Their involvement in politics not only strengthens democratic institutions but also infuses governance with new ideas, energy, and innovation. Across the world, youth have played pivotal roles in political transformations from the Arab Spring to India's own historical youth-led movements. In a democracy as populous and diverse as India, the participation of young citizens is not just desirable but essential for an inclusive and representative political system.

In India, over 50% of the population is below the age of 25, and about 65% are below the age of 35 (Government of India Census 2011, projected to 2025). This demographic dividend positions India uniquely, offering immense potential if harnessed effectively. However, youth political engagement in India has historically been uneven. While urban youth often participate in issue-based activism and national movements, rural and semi-urban youth frequently remain detached from formal political processes.

Focusing on the town of Kotdwar, located in the Pauri Garhwal district of Uttarakhand, provides a unique window into these dynamics. Kotdwar is one of the major gateways to the hills of Uttarakhand, connecting the mountainous regions to the plains. It serves as a commercial, educational, and transport hub for the surrounding areas, including smaller localities like Lalpur.

Kotdwar has seen significant political activity historically. During the Uttar Pradesh era (before Uttarakhand's formation in 2000), Kotdwar was often a site of political campaigns, grassroots movements, and social activism. Post-statehood, the politics of Uttarakhand, including Kotdwar, have centered heavily around issues like migration, unemployment, environmental conservation, and infrastructure development. Youth have been at the center of these concerns, yet their political participation remains paradoxically visible in protests and social media campaigns but limited in formal electoral politics.

In Lalpur, a semi-urban locality within Kotdwar's jurisdiction, the situation mirrors broader trends but with unique local specificities. Despite the growth of educational institutions and increased digital connectivity, youth political engagement often does not translate into actual political action, such as voting  $\text{२०१९}$  local elections, contesting for political offices or sustained involvement with political organizations.

**Keywords**

Youth, Politics, Migration, Socialization, youth Political Activism, Demographic, Socio- Economic, Cultural Influences

**1- INTRODUCTION****1.1. Politics in Kotdwar and Uttarakhand: An Overview:-**

Uttarakhand, carved out from Uttar Pradesh in 2000, has had a distinct political journey. The state has seen frequent changes in government, political instability, and the rise of regional issues. Core concerns like the demand for better education, employment opportunities, road connectivity, healthcare, and the prevention of migration from hill regions dominate electoral politics.

Kotdwar has often acted as a microcosm of these political shifts. Over the past two decades, the city has elected representatives from both major national parties the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC). However, voters in Kotdwar have shown a tendency to be issue-focused rather than deeply loyal to a particular party, often swinging between options based on developmental performance.

Youth in Kotdwar, however, face a unique set of challenges:

**Migration:** A significant proportion of youth move to larger cities like Dehradun, Delhi, or even Mumbai for education and employment, leading to a "brain drain" in the region.

**Limited political platforms:** Unlike major cities, Kotdwar has fewer organized youth wings, active student unions, or grassroots political platforms that encourage consistent political involvement.

**Informal political participation:** Political engagement often takes informal forms discussions in tea shops, activism during specific issues (e.g., environmental protests), or digital expression through social media.

In Lalpur, these trends are even sharper. Political participation often remains limited to voting during major elections, with little year-round engagement. Traditional family influence, caste affiliations, and personal networks play a bigger role in determining political choices rather than policy evaluation or ideological commitment.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

A review of existing literature provides the foundation for understanding the dynamics of youth political participation. Scholars across sociology, political science, and youth studies have examined how young people engage with politics, the barriers they face, and the changing nature of political activism in an increasingly digital world. This chapter critically analyzes relevant theoretical frameworks, empirical studies, and key debates to contextualize the current research on the political engagement of youth, particularly in semi-urban and rural Indian contexts like Lalpur, Kotdwar.

### **2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Youth Political Participation**

Several sociological theories help explain youth political behavior:

**Political Socialization Theory (Easton & Dennis, 1969):** This theory posits that political attitudes and behaviors are learned through social agents such as family, schools, peers, and media. Early political socialization significantly influences later political engagement.

**Resource Model of Political Participation (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman, 1995):** According to this model, individuals' participation depends on access to resources like time, money, education, and civic skills. Youth from marginalized backgrounds often lack these resources, limiting their political involvement.

**Post-materialist Theory (Inglehart, 1977):** In societies where basic economic needs are met, youth prioritize issues like environmental protection, human rights, and social equality, engaging in new forms of "issue-based politics" rather than traditional party politics.

These theoretical frameworks highlight the multifaceted nature of youth political engagement, emphasizing that it is influenced by both structural factors and individual motivations.

### **2.2 Youth Political Engagement in India**

Indian scholars have extensively examined youth political participation, often noting a gap between political awareness and active engagement:

Yadav (1996), in his seminal work on democratic politics in India, observed that while Indian youth are aware of political processes, their trust in political institutions remains low.

Baviskar and Mathew (2009) noted that despite the expansion of education and communication technologies, political participation among Indian youth remains uneven, heavily influenced by caste, class, and regional factors. CSDS-Lokniti studies on youth and politics (2017) revealed that young Indians are more politically aware than previous generations but are skeptical of traditional political parties. Many prefer expressing their political opinions through protests, social media, and issue-based movements.

These studies suggest that while Indian youth are not politically apathetic, their modes of engagement are evolving, moving away from conventional forms like electoral politics towards alternative forms of political expression.

### **2.3 Regional Dynamics: Politics in Uttarakhand**

Uttarakhand's political environment provides a unique backdrop for understanding youth political participation:

The state was born out of popular movements led by youth and middle-aged citizens demanding separate statehood in the late 1990s (Mamgain, 2004). This historical experience indicates a legacy of political activism among the youth.

Joshi (2012) observed that post-statehood, the energy that once fueled political activism among the youth dissipated due to disillusionment with the slow pace of development and the perceived inefficiency of political institutions.

Migration is a critical issue in Uttarakhand. Negi (2019) noted that youth migration for education and employment has weakened community structures and eroded traditional forms of political participation in rural and semi-urban areas.

These findings suggest that youth in Uttarakhand, including Kotdwar, might be politically aware but often disengaged due to structural constraints and socio-economic shifts.

#### **2.4 The Role of Digital Media**

The advent of digital media has significantly altered the landscape of youth political participation:

Loader et al. (2014) argue that social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram provide new avenues for political engagement, allowing young people to bypass traditional gatekeepers like political parties and mainstream media.

Boulianne (2015) conducted a meta-analysis of 36 studies and found a positive relationship between social media use and political engagement, although the strength of this relationship varies across contexts.

In India, the rapid spread of smartphones and cheap internet access (post-Jio revolution in 2016) has dramatically increased youth access to political information. However, Banaji (2018) warns that digital engagement often remains shallow, leading to "slacktivism" rather than meaningful political action.

For regions like Lalpur, where physical access to political spaces might be limited, digital media offers new possibilities for youth political involvement but also presents challenges regarding the depth and sustainability of such engagement.

#### **2.5 Barriers to Youth Political Participation**

Several studies identify consistent barriers that prevent youth from actively participating in politics:

**Socio-economic Barriers:** Lack of economic security often forces youth to prioritize personal survival over political activism (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995).

**Political Cynicism:** Widespread perceptions of corruption, inefficiency, and nepotism in politics discourage young people from active engagement (Dalton, 2008).

**Generational Gaps:** In many communities, traditional elders dominate political decision-making, sidelining youth voices (Harriss, 2005).

**Educational Gaps:** Political education in schools is often inadequate, leaving youth ill-prepared to navigate complex political systems (Kumar, 2002).

In semi-urban areas like Lalpur, these barriers are intensified by factors such as migration, weaker institutional support, and socio-economic marginalization.

#### **2.6 Changing Forms of Youth Political Activism**

Youth political activism is evolving globally and in India:

**Issue-Based Activism:** Young people today are more likely to rally around specific issues like climate change (e.g., Fridays for Future), gender equality, and digital rights rather than align with traditional political parties.

**Leaderless Movements:** Many contemporary youth movements are decentralized and operate through loose networks rather than hierarchical structures (Gerbaudo, 2012).

**Intersectionality:** Modern youth activism often acknowledges the interconnectedness of caste, class, gender, and environmental issues (Crenshaw, 1991).

These changing forms suggest that studying youth political engagement in Lalpur requires attention not only to traditional metrics like voting but also to newer forms of participation, both online and offline.

The literature reviewed indicates that youth political engagement is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon influenced by structural conditions, socio-economic factors, digital technologies, and shifting cultural norms. While youth in India, including those in Uttarakhand, are politically aware, their engagement is often fragmented and mediated by broader socio-economic realities.

In the specific context of Lalpur, Kotdwar, factors such as migration, digital media exposure, economic pressures, and a lack of robust political platforms shape youth political behavior. This study builds upon the existing literature by offering a localized, sociological analysis of these dynamics, aiming to fill the gap regarding youth political participation in semi-urban and rural Indian settings.

### 3 . OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

There are many objectives of the study -

- 1) To critically examine the patterns, determinants, and challenges of political participation among youth in Lalpur, Kotdwar, through a sociological lens.
- 2) To analyze the socio-demographic profile of the youth in Lalpur and its correlation with their level and form of political participation.
- 3) To explore the role of digital platforms and social media in shaping political awareness, opinion formation, and informal modes of participation among youth.
- 4) To investigate the barriers-social, psychological, structural, and cultural-that inhibit active political participation among young people, particularly women and marginalized communities.
- 5) To assess the perception of political institutions, leaders, and processes among youth, and how this shapes their trust, aspirations, and willingness to engage in democratic activities.

### 4- AREA OF THE STUDY

The selection of the study area is a crucial aspect of sociological research as it directly impacts the relevance, scope, and applicability of findings. For this dissertation, the area chosen for investigation is Lalpur, a semi-urban locality situated in Kotdwar, a prominent town in the Pauri Garhwal district of Uttarakhand. The region's unique socio-political, cultural, and demographic character makes it an ideal site for examining the political participation of youth through a sociological lens. This chapter offers a detailed exploration of Lalpur's geographical, socio-economic, and cultural landscape to justify its selection and establish its importance in the context of youth political engagement.

#### 4.1 Geographical Profile Of Lalpur, Kotdwar

Lalpur is located on the outskirts of Kotdwar, one of the fastest-growing urban centers in the foothills of the Himalayas. Kotdwar serves as the gateway to the Garhwal region and has witnessed rapid infrastructural development over the past two decades. Lalpur, though administratively part of Kotdwar, retains a distinctly semi-rural identity. It is characterized by a mix of traditional village structures and emerging urban influences, making it a transitional space both geographically and sociologically.

The locality is accessible via well-connected road networks and lies in close proximity to schools, colleges, local markets, and political institutions such as the municipal board and MLA offices. Its geographical proximity to political and educational institutions plays a significant role in shaping youth awareness and exposure to political discourse.

### 5- METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE SIZE

The purpose of this study is to explore the role of politics among youth in Lalpur, Kotdwar, Uttarakhand, and to understand the factors that influence their political engagement. To achieve this, a systematic research approach is required to ensure that the findings are valid, reliable, and meaningful. This chapter outlines the research design, sampling methods, data collection tools, and data analysis techniques used in this study. It provides a detailed overview of how the study was conducted to investigate youth political participation in Lalpur, Kotdwar.

#### 5.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The use of mixed methods allows for a comprehensive understanding of youth political participation by integrating numerical data with rich, narrative insights. A mixed-methods approach is particularly useful in this context as it helps capture the complexity of political behaviors and attitudes, while also offering statistical evidence of patterns across a larger group of participants.

#### 5.2 Quantitative Approach

The quantitative component of the research focuses on collecting numerical data on the political participation patterns of youth in Lalpur. The aim is to identify the extent of political engagement, examine demographic variables (e.g., age, education, employment status), and assess the factors influencing participation.

#### 5.3 Qualitative Approach

The qualitative component aims to explore the underlying reasons behind the political behaviors and attitudes of youth in Lalpur. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), this study gathers personal perspectives and experiences regarding political engagement. This approach allows for an exploration of the nuances and motivations that are not easily captured through quantitative measures alone.

## 6- SAMPLING METHODS

The research targets youth residing in Lalpur, a semi-urban locality in Kotdwar, Uttarakhand. For both the quantitative and qualitative components, stratified random sampling will be used to ensure that various sub-groups of youth are represented in the study. Stratification is based on factors such as gender, age, education level, and employment status, as these variables may influence political participation patterns.

### 6.1 Sampling for the Quantitative Study

For the quantitative survey, the sample will consist of 200 youth (ages 18-30), chosen from different educational backgrounds (high school, undergraduate, post-graduate), employment statuses (employed, unemployed, students), and gender categories (male, female, others). A stratified random sampling technique ensures that the sample includes representatives from each of these groups in proportion to their presence in the population. Participants for interviews and FGDs will be selected based on purposive sampling, ensuring a wide range of perspectives on political participation. The selection criteria will include factors such as political awareness, the extent of online engagement (e.g., social media activity), and involvement in local political events or movements.

### 6.2 Data Collection Tools

To gather data, this study uses two main tools: a structured questionnaire for the quantitative study and semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) for the qualitative research. Both tools are designed to collect comprehensive data on political participation patterns, attitude and motivations.

## 7- DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The data collected from the 50 respondents was analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and correlation analysis to provide insights into the political participation patterns of the youth in Lalpur, Kotdwar.

### 7.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The respondents were categorized based on their demographic characteristics. A summary of the key demographic data is as follows:

Gender:

44% of respondents identified as male.

40% identified as female.

16% identified as other (gender non-conforming).

Age:

32% were between 18-20 years old.

50% were between 21-25 years old.

18% were between 26-30 years old.

Educational Background:

28% had completed secondary education (high school).

40% had completed undergraduate education.

32% had completed postgraduate education or higher studies.

### 7.2 Employment Status:

42% of respondents were employed full-time.

34% were students.

24% were unemployed.

#### 9.2.2 Political Awareness

In terms of political awareness, the respondents demonstrated varying levels of knowledge:

National Politics: 70% of the respondents reported having a good understanding of national politics, citing news media and social media as their primary sources.

State Politics: 62% were aware of political issues at the state level (Uttarakhand), with many mentioning the importance of local governance and its impact on daily life.

Local Politics: Awareness of local political issues specific to Lalpur was lower, with only 50% expressing familiarity with local candidates, issues, or recent local elections.

### 7.3 Frequency of Political Engagement

**Voting:** 60% of the respondents reported voting in the most recent national or state election. Among these, 70% were aged between 21-25 years.

**Political Events:** 38% of respondents had attended political rallies, meetings, or protests in the past year. These were primarily individuals with higher educational qualifications (undergraduate and postgraduate).

**Social Media Engagement:** 78% of respondents used social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram for political discussions, sharing news, or following political figures. 58% of respondents actively participated in online political debates.

The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) was analyzed using thematic analysis. The emerging themes provide deeper insights into the political engagement of youth in Lalpur.

#### **Themes Emerging from Interviews and FGDS**

Several key themes emerged from the qualitative analysis:

### 7.4 Political Awareness and Socialization

Many youth respondents indicated that their political awareness came from various sources such as family, school, and social media. Respondents often noted that while their families were politically active, schools offered limited exposure to politics. A 25-year-old male participant noted, "Most of what I know about politics, I learned from my parents and social media. The education system doesn't teach us much about the political system in depth."

### 7.5 Role of Social Media

Social media played a critical role in shaping political opinions. Many youth respondents considered social media as a space for discussing politics and staying informed. However, some participants noted that online debates often remained superficial. A 27-year-old female participant mentioned, "Social media is good for staying updated, but the political discussions often end up being arguments or spreading misinformation."

### 7.6 Political Disillusionment

A significant theme in the qualitative analysis was disillusionment with the political system. Several participants felt that politicians, irrespective of their party affiliation, often failed to address the concerns of youth. A 22-year-old male respondent explained, "I don't trust any political leader. They promise a lot during elections, but nothing ever changes. We don't see any tangible results in our community."

This disillusionment was prevalent across different educational backgrounds, especially among those with lower engagement in offline political activities.

### 7.7 Migration and Disengagement

Migration emerged as a key factor in political disengagement, especially for those who had moved from rural areas to urban centers for work or education. A 24-year-old male participant shared, "When I moved to Kotdwar for work, I stopped following local politics in Lalpur. It's difficult to stay connected to what's happening back home when you're away."

This indicates that migration, while providing better opportunities for employment or education, may weaken political participation in the individual's home region.

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