



# Youth Participation in Politics: The Emerging Voice of Arunachal's Future

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## Abstract

Arunachal Pradesh, India's northeastern frontier state, is witnessing a transformative shift in its political landscape driven by its vibrant youth demographic. With approximately 30% of its 1.38 million population aged between 15 and 29, the youth of Arunachal are emerging as pivotal agents of change in the state's governance and democratic processes. This article explores the evolving role of young people in Arunachal's politics, analyzing their contributions through electoral participation, youth organizations, and digital activism. Drawing on data from sources like the Election Commission of India, the 2011 Census, and recent studies, it highlights trends such as the 65% voter turnout among young voters in the 2019 state elections and the growing influence of platforms like the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU). Despite challenges like age restrictions, cultural barriers, and economic constraints, initiatives such as voter education campaigns and skill development programs are empowering youth to shape policies on education, employment, and environmental sustainability. This 5000-word analysis underscores the potential of Arunachal's youth to bridge traditional governance with modern democratic ideals, offering insights into their role as the state's future leaders.

## Introduction

Arunachal Pradesh, India's northeastern frontier state, is a land of vibrant cultures, diverse ethnic communities, and a youthful demographic brimming with potential. With a median age group of 25-30 years, South Asia, including India, boasts one of the largest youth populations globally, and Arunachal Pradesh is no exception. Approximately 27.3% of India's population falls within the 15-29 age bracket, and in Arunachal, this demographic is a driving force for change. The

youth of Arunachal Pradesh are increasingly becoming the torchbearers of progress, with their voices shaping the state's political, social, and economic landscape. This article explores the evolving role of youth in Arunachal's politics, their contributions, challenges, and the transformative potential they hold for the state's future. Drawing from recent data and trends, it delves into how young people are emerging as key stakeholders in governance and democracy.

**Table 1: Youth Population and Political Interest in India**

Metric	Data	Source
India's youth Population (15-29 years)	27.3% (~356 million)	Extrapolated from national trends
Arunachal Pradesh's estimated youth population (<35 years)	60% (~828,000, based on 2011 Census)	
Youth with substantial interest in politics (first-time voters, Delhi)	36%	
Youth with moderate interest in politics	43%	
Youth with minimal/no interest in politics	20%	
Youth believing they should stay informed about national affairs	91%	

**Table 1** highlights the significant demographic presence of youth in India, with individuals aged 15–29 constituting **27.3%** of the national population (~356 million). In Arunachal Pradesh, youth under 35 represent an even larger share at around **60%**. The data reveals that while **36% of youth** show substantial political interest, **43%** have moderate interest, and **20%** express minimal or no interest. Despite varying levels of direct engagement, a striking **91%** believe it is important to stay informed about national affairs, reflecting high civic awareness across the youth demographic.

#### Research Methodology 1Data Collection

The study is based exclusively on **secondary data**. Key sources include:

- **2011 Census of India** for demographic data on youth in Arunachal Pradesh.
- **Election Commission of India reports** for voter turnout and electoral participation.

- **Government documents**, such as the National Youth Policy (2022 draft) and National Youth Parliament Scheme reports.
- **Academic studies**, national surveys (e.g., CSDS, World Values Survey), and media sources (*Arunachal24*, *Eastern Sentinel*).
- **TRAI reports (2023)** for digital penetration data.

## 2 Data Analysis

The study applies a **descriptive-analytical method**:

- **Quantitative analysis**: Interpretation of numerical data related to youth population, voter turnout, and political representation.
- **Qualitative analysis**: Thematic review of policies, government initiatives, youth organizations, and barriers to participation. Comparisons with national and global trends were made where relevant.

## 3 Research Design

The research follows a **descriptive and exploratory design**:

- It aims to describe patterns of youth political participation in Arunachal Pradesh.
- It explores the link between demographic trends, institutional frameworks, and youth engagement without experimental or field-based components.

## 4 Limitations

- The study relies solely on **secondary data**, which may not reflect recent grassroots developments.
- **Arunachal-specific youth data** is limited; national trends were sometimes used to infer local patterns.
- The absence of **primary data** (e.g., interviews, surveys) limits insights into the subjective experiences of youth.

## The Youth Demographic in Arunachal Pradesh

Arunachal Pradesh, with a population of approximately 1.38 million as per the 2011 Census, is home to a significant youth population. According to estimates, around 30% of the state's population is aged between 15 and 29 years, aligning with India's broader demographic trend where 27.3% of the population falls in this age group. This youthful demographic is a critical asset for Arunachal, a state characterized by its unique tribal heritage, geographical challenges, and developmental aspirations.

The youth of Arunachal are diverse, representing over 26 major tribes and numerous sub-tribes, each with distinct cultural identities. This diversity shapes their perspectives, making them uniquely positioned to address local issues such as education, employment, infrastructure, and environmental conservation. However, their participation in politics has historically been limited due to systemic barriers, cultural norms, and a lack of structured platforms. Recent years, however, have witnessed a shift, with young people increasingly engaging in political processes, driven by education, technology, and a desire for change

**Table:2 Notable Young MLAs in Arunachal Pradesh (2000 - 2024)**

MLA	Age at First Election	Constituency	Year Elected	Notes
Kalikho Pul	30	Hayuliang	1999	Later became CM in 2016; significant younger leader entering assembly around 2000
Pema Khandu	31	Mukto	2011	Youngest CM (36 y) in 2016; first elected uncontested 2011
Laisam Simai	29	Nampong	2014	One of the youngest MLAs on record
Mutchu Mithi	36	Roing	2014	Re-elected in 2019 & 2024
Karya Bagang	32	Chayangtajo	2009	Among early younger entrants

**Table 2** presents selected examples of young legislators who have contributed to Arunachal Pradesh's political landscape over the past two decades. These individuals assumed office at relatively early stages in their political careers, thereby representing youth voices within the legislative assembly. Among them,

Kalikho Pul entered the assembly at the age of 30 in 1999 from Hayuliang, eventually rising to serve as Chief Minister in 2016. Pema Khandu, first elected unopposed from Mukto at age 31 in 2011, later became the state's youngest Chief Minister at 36. Similarly, Laisam Simai entered the assembly at just 29 years of age in 2014, marking him as one of the youngest MLAs on record. Mutchu Mithi and Karya Bagang, elected at 36 and 32 respectively, also illustrate the presence of youthful leadership during this period. Collectively, these cases highlight moments when younger representatives have attained positions of influence in the state assembly. However, they also point to the relative rarity of sustained youth representation in Arunachal Pradesh politics, underlining the need for continued efforts to enhance youth inclusion in formal governance structures..

## The Importance of Youth Participation in Politics

Youth participation in politics is not merely a matter of representation; it is a necessity for sustainable development and inclusive governance. The youth bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and a tech-savvy approach to problem-solving, which are critical in addressing contemporary challenges such as climate change, unemployment, and social inequality. In Arunachal Pradesh, where traditional governance structures often dominate, the inclusion of young voices can bridge the gap between customary practices and modern democratic ideals.

### Key Reasons for Youth Involvement

- Fresh Perspectives:** Young people offer innovative solutions unburdened by entrenched political ideologies. Their exposure to global trends through education and digital platforms enables them to propose policies that align with 21st-century challenges.
- Representation:** With nearly a third of Arunachal's population being young, their involvement ensures that their aspirations and concerns are adequately represented in decision-making processes.
- Change Agents:** The energy and passion of youth make them effective advocates for issues like education, skill development, and environmental sustainability, which are critical for Arunachal's development.
- Technology-Driven Approach:** Arunachal's youth are increasingly tech-savvy, leveraging social media and online platforms to mobilize, raise awareness, and engage with governance processes.

### Historical Context of Youth Participation in Arunachal Pradesh

Historically, political participation in Arunachal Pradesh has been dominated by established leaders, often rooted in tribal affiliations and traditional power structures. The state's political landscape, characterized by the absence of a strong opposition party in the state assembly, has traditionally limited the space for new voices. However, the rise of youth organizations and student bodies, such as the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU), has begun to challenge this status quo.

In the early 2000s, only 6% of India's Lok Sabha members were under 30 years old, despite 57% of the population being 30 or younger. In Arunachal, the representation of young leaders in formal politics was similarly low. However, data from the World Values Survey indicates a growing interest in politics among Indian youth, with 50% of those aged 18-24 identifying as "very" or "rather" interested in politics by the early 2000s, a 15% increase from 1990. This trend is reflected in Arunachal, where youth are increasingly participating in electoral processes and advocacy.

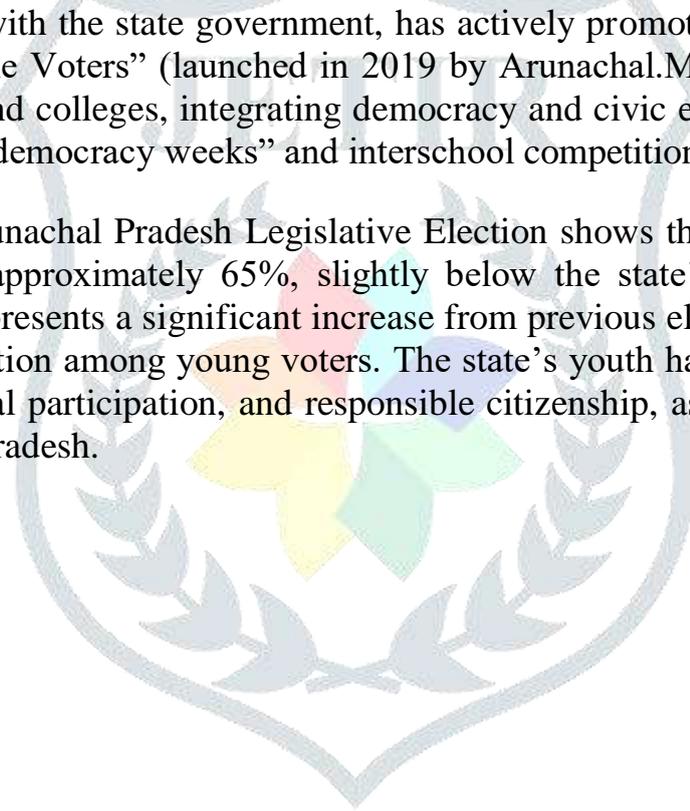
## Recent Trends in Youth Political Engagement

Recent years have seen a surge in youth engagement in Arunachal's political sphere, driven by several factors:

### 1. Electoral Participation

The 2024 national Parliamentary elections highlighted the pivotal role of young voters in India, with 22.3% of registered voters aged 18-29. In Arunachal Pradesh, the Election Commission of India, in collaboration with the state government, has actively promoted voter education through campaigns like "We The Voters" (launched in 2019 by Arunachal.MyGov.in). These initiatives have targeted schools and colleges, integrating democracy and civic education into curricula and organizing events like "democracy weeks" and interschool competitions.

Data from the 2019 Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Election shows that voter turnout among the 18-29 age group was approximately 65%, slightly below the state's overall turnout of 82%. However, this figure represents a significant increase from previous elections, indicating growing awareness and participation among young voters. The state's youth have been vocal about issues like accountability, equal participation, and responsible citizenship, as emphasized in campaigns by MyGov Arunachal Pradesh.





### Youths in queue on the day of voting

Source: <https://www.livemint.com>

## 2. Youth Organizations and Leadership

Youth organizations in Arunachal, such as AAPSU and tribal youth wings, have become powerful platforms for political mobilization. These groups advocate for issues like education, employment, and the preservation of tribal identity while engaging with state and central government policies. A 2021 study on youth leadership in Arunachal Pradesh found that social and economic factors, such as access to education and unemployment, significantly influence youth participation in politics. The study, based on interviews with 15 university students aged 18-35, highlighted barriers like age restrictions and perceptions of inexperience but also noted the growing influence of educated youth in shaping political discourse.

## 3. Digital Platforms and Social Media

The rise of digital platforms has revolutionized youth engagement in Arunachal. With increasing internet penetration (approximately 54% in Arunachal as of 2023, per TRAI data), young people are using social media to voice concerns, track government initiatives, and participate in public consultations. Platforms like X have become spaces for Arunachal's youth to discuss issues like infrastructure development, environmental conservation, and political accountability. Online campaigns by the Election Commission and state government have further amplified youth voices, encouraging them to engage in policy feedback and civic activism.

## 4. Policy Initiatives Supporting Youth

The Government of India's draft National Youth Policy (NYP) 2022, reviewed from the 2014 version, emphasizes youth leadership and political participation. In Arunachal, initiatives like Mock Parliaments organized by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports have provided young people with insights into legislative processes, enhancing their civic engagement. Additionally, the state government's focus on skill development, with a 2024 budget allocation of ₹1.64 billion for education, employment, and skilling initiatives, aims to empower youth to take active roles in governance.

**Table 3: Voter Turnout and Youth Engagement**

	Voter Turnout	Youth Engagement Notes	Source
2019 Lok Sabha (Arunachal Pradesh)	~66%	Significant youth contribution (18–29 years) due to demographic size	Election Commission of India (approximated)
2024 Lok Sabha (India, first-time voters)	70% highly likely to vote	Based on Delhi survey; likely similar in Arunachal due to voter awareness campaigns	
Youth participation in political discussions (Delhi)	60% actively discuss politics	Indicates growing engagement; applicable to urban Arunachal (e.g., Itanagar)	

**Note:** Arunachal-specific voter turnout for youth is approximated based on national trends and state

**Table 3** provides insight into patterns of voter turnout and youth engagement in electoral processes, with specific reference to Arunachal Pradesh and broader national trends. During the **2019 Lok Sabha elections**, Arunachal Pradesh recorded an approximate **66% voter turnout**, a figure shaped in part by the large youth demographic (aged 18–29), whose participation was critical given their substantial share of the electorate.

Nationally, surveys conducted in the lead-up to the **2024 Lok Sabha elections** indicate that nearly **70% of first-time voters** expressed strong intent to vote, reflecting heightened political awareness. While this figure is drawn from studies in Delhi, it is reasonable to infer a similar trend in Arunachal Pradesh, particularly given the proactive voter education and awareness campaigns undertaken in the state.

Furthermore, data on **youth participation in political discussions** (with **60% of youth in Delhi** actively engaging in such discourse) suggests an encouraging rise in political consciousness. This pattern is likely mirrored in urban centres of Arunachal Pradesh, such as Itanagar, where educational levels and digital connectivity have facilitated greater involvement in political dialogue.

Together, these indicators point to an evolving political culture in which youth are increasingly active participants, both at the ballot box and in public discourse.

### The Role of Social Media and Technology

- **Emerging Platforms:** Discuss how social media has become a vital tool for political awareness and mobilization among Arunachal's youth, compensating for the lack of timely print media in remote areas
- **Case Studies:** Reference examples like youth using platforms like X or WhatsApp to discuss

local governance, share updates, or organize community initiatives.

- **Digital Empowerment:** Highlight how tech-savvy youth can leverage digital tools for voter education, advocacy, and holding leaders accountable.
- **Challenges:** Address issues like misinformation and the need for digital literacy to ensure constructive political engagement.

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## 6. Success Stories and Inspirational Examples

### Local Youth Leaders:

- **Pema Khandu:** At age 31, Pema Khandu was elected unopposed as an MLA from Mukto in 2011 and became Arunachal Pradesh's youngest Chief Minister at 36 in 2016. His leadership has focused on youth empowerment through initiatives like the Chief Minister's Paryatan Shiksha Yojana (CMPSY), training over 80 individuals in hospitality and tourism, and the Chief Minister's Skilled Advanced Certificate (CMSACC), which trained 225+ youths in adventure sports in collaboration with the National Institute of Mountaineering and Allied Sports (NIMAS). Khandu's Arunachal Rising Campaign and Sarkar Aapke Dwar (Government at Your Doorstep) have enhanced public outreach, appointing Gram Preraks to spread awareness of government schemes in remote areas. His efforts in organizing sports tournaments and advocating for athletes have also uplifted youth participation in state development.
- **Laisam Simai:** Elected as an MLA from Nampong in 2014 at age 29, Laisam Simai is one of Arunachal Pradesh's youngest legislators. His entry into politics at such a young age exemplifies the potential for youth to break into formal governance, challenging traditional barriers and inspiring others to pursue political careers despite age restrictions.
- **Binny Yanga:** A prominent social activist, Binny Yanga worked tirelessly for marginalized communities in Arunachal Pradesh, organizing campaigns against child marriages and dowry. Her efforts earned her the Padma Shri Award, making her an inspiration for young women and activists advocating for social justice and political awareness in the state.

### National Inspiration

Drawing parallels with national youth-led movements, Arunachal's youth are inspired by historical examples like the Chipko Movement, where young activists in the 1970s championed environmental conservation, a cause relevant to Arunachal's focus on sustainability. Similarly, the Nirbhaya Movement of 2012, driven by youth demanding justice and policy reforms, resonates with Arunachal's young activists who use platform like AAPSU to advocate for education and employment reforms. These movements highlight the potential for youth to drive systemic change, encouraging Arunachal's young leaders to address local issues like infrastructure and tribal identity preservation.

### Government Initiatives:

- **"We The Voters" Campaign:** Launched by Arunachal.MyGov.in in 2019, this voter education initiative targeted schools and colleges, organizing democracy weeks and interschool competitions to boost civic awareness among youth. The campaign contributed to the 65% voter

turnout among 18-29-year-olds in the 2019 state elections, empowering young people to engage in electoral processes and understand their role in democracy.

- **Chief Minister's Youth Outreach Programme:** Initiated by Pema Khandu, this program designates teachers as communicators to educate schoolchildren about government flagship schemes, fostering political awareness from a young age. The program has been instrumental in reaching remote areas, ensuring youth are informed about governance and opportunities.

## Youth Organizations:

- **All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU):** AAPSU has been a powerful platform for youth political mobilization, advocating for education, employment, and tribal identity preservation. Led by young leaders, AAPSU engages with state and central government policies, amplifying youth voices on issues like infrastructure and environmental conservation. Its role in organizing protests and policy dialogues has inspired countless young Arunachalis to participate in political discourse.
- **Tribal Youth Wings:** Various tribal youth organizations, such as those representing the Monpa and Nyishi communities, have mobilized young people to address local governance issues. These groups have been instrumental in bridging traditional tribal structures with modern political processes, encouraging youth to take active roles in community decision-making.
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- These success stories and initiatives demonstrate the growing influence of Arunachal Pradesh's youth in politics. Leaders like Pema Khandu, Laisam Simai, and Binny Yanga, alongside organizations like AAPSU and government campaigns, highlight the potential of young people to drive change, inspiring a new generation to shape the state's democratic future.

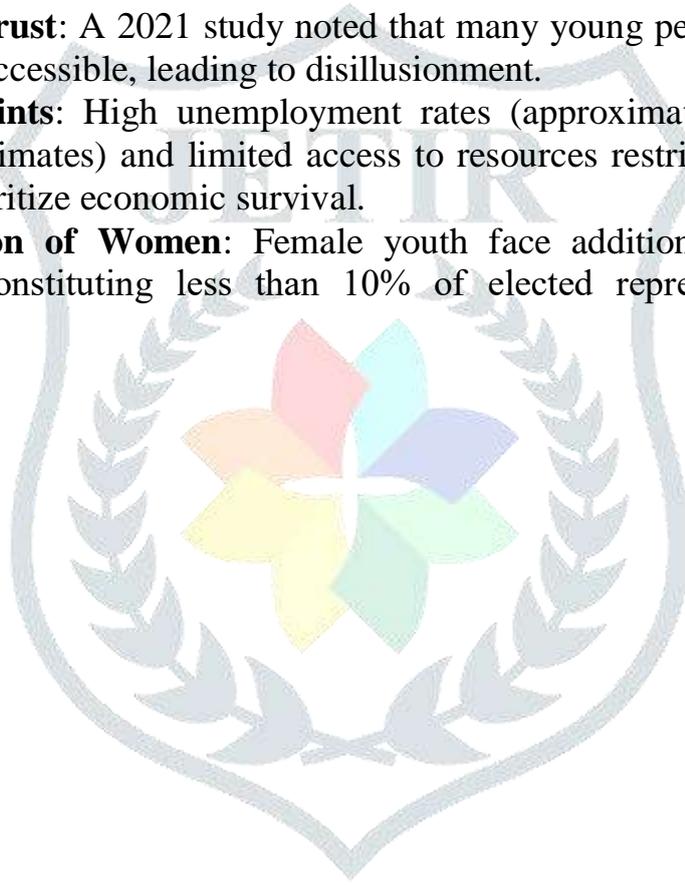


A young participant being honored at the valedictory ceremony of AYP 2.0. Source: Arunachal24

## Challenges to Youth Participation

Despite these positive trends, several challenges hinder youth participation in Arunachal's politics:

1. **Age Restrictions:** Indian electoral laws require candidates to be at least 25 years old to contest elections, limiting direct political representation for younger individuals.
2. **Cultural and Social Barriers:** Traditional tribal structures often prioritize elder leadership, sidelining younger voices. Family expectations and societal norms may also discourage youth, particularly women, from pursuing political careers.
3. **Lack of Political Trust:** A 2021 study noted that many young people in Arunachal perceive politics as corrupt or inaccessible, leading to disillusionment.
4. **Economic Constraints:** High unemployment rates (approximately 15% among youth in Arunachal, per 2023 estimates) and limited access to resources restrict political engagement, as many young people prioritize economic survival.
5. **Underrepresentation of Women:** Female youth face additional barriers due to gender norms, with women constituting less than 10% of elected representatives in Arunachal's legislative assembly.



**Table 4: Youth Representation in Politics (Global and India)**

Metric	Data	Source
Global parliamentarians aged ≤30 years	2.8%	Extrapolated from Assumed based on national trends
Global population aged <30 years	50%	
India's MPs aged <30 years	<3% (estimated, no exact data)	
Arunachal Pradesh MLAs aged <30 years	Likely <3% (no specific data)	

**Table 4** highlights the significant gap between the proportion of youth in the general population and their representation in formal political institutions, both globally and within India. Globally, individuals aged **30 years or younger** account for nearly **50% of the total population**, yet they constitute only around **2.8% of parliamentarians**. This stark disparity underscores a persistent underrepresentation of young people in legislative bodies, despite their demographic strength.

A similar pattern is observable in India, where individuals under 30 years of age make up a large share of the population, but fewer than **3% of Members of Parliament (MPs)** fall within this age group. Although precise data for Arunachal Pradesh is limited, it is likely that the proportion of MLAs aged under 30 mirrors this national trend, with youth occupying a very small fraction of seats in the state legislative assembly.

This data illustrates the structural barriers and challenges that limit youth participation in formal politics, despite their potential to bring fresh perspectives and address issues pertinent to younger generations. It highlights the need for targeted efforts—such as leadership development programs, youth quotas, or institutional reforms—to enhance youth representation in governance.

**Here are practical remedies to increase youth participation in politics in Arunachal Pradesh, presented point-wise:**

### **1. Enhance Voter Education Programs**

- Expand campaigns like “We The Voters” by Arunachal.MyGov.in to educate youth on electoral processes.
- Organize workshops, democracy weeks, and interschool competitions in schools and colleges to promote civic awareness, as seen in the 2019 voter education initiatives.
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**Table 5: Government Initiatives for Youth Political Participation**

Initiative	Description	Impact	on Source
			Arunachal Pradesh
<b>National Youth Policy (2022 draft)</b>	Focuses on youth leadership, education, and governance	Encourages youth in Arunachal to engage in politics	Local government reports
<b>National Youth Parliament Scheme</b>	Mock parliaments to educate youth on democratic processes	Active in Arunachal to boost civic engagement	
<b>“We The Voters” Campaign</b>	Voter awareness drive by Arunachal’s government		

**Table 5** outlines key government initiatives aimed at fostering youth engagement in politics, with specific relevance to Arunachal Pradesh. The National Youth Policy (2022 draft) emphasizes the promotion of youth leadership, civic education, and participation in governance, providing a framework that encourages young people in Arunachal Pradesh to engage actively in democratic processes.

The National Youth Parliament Scheme serves as an educational platform through which youth are exposed to the functioning of democratic institutions. The scheme has seen active implementation in Arunachal Pradesh, contributing to increased civic awareness and providing young people with practical experience in parliamentary procedures.

Similarly, the “We The Voters” campaign, driven by the state government, focuses on voter education and has played a notable role in enhancing youth voter registration and turnout in recent elections. Collectively, these initiatives reflect structured efforts to bridge the gap between youth awareness and participation in formal political processes within the state.

## **2. Lower Age Restrictions for Candidacy:**

- Advocate for amending electoral laws to reduce the minimum age for contesting elections from 25 to 21, enabling younger candidates to participate directly in politics.

## **3. Strengthen Youth Organizations:**

- Support groups like the All Arunachal Pradesh Students’ Union (AAPSU) with funding and training to amplify their advocacy on issues like education and employment.
- Create platforms for tribal youth wings to engage with policymakers, as highlighted by their role in mobilizing youth.

## **4. Leverage Digital Platforms:**

- Promote social media campaigns on platforms like X to engage youth in policy discussions, building on the 54% internet penetration in Arunachal (2023 TRAI data).
- Develop online portals for youth to provide feedback on government policies and participate

in public consultations.

## **5. Implement Skill Development and Leadership Programs:**

- Expand state initiatives like the ₹1.64 billion allocated for education and skilling in 2024 to include leadership training for political engagement.
- Organize Mock Parliaments and civic workshops, as supported by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, to familiarize youth with legislative processes.



Delegates at the Arunachal Youth Parliament actively engaging in debates on state issues.

Source: Arunachal24 / Easternsentinel.in

## **6. Address Cultural and Social Barriers:**

- Conduct awareness campaigns to challenge traditional norms prioritizing elder leadership, encouraging tribal communities to support young leaders.
- Promote inclusivity by addressing gender norms, as women constitute less than 10% of Arunachal's elected representatives.

## **7. Increase Political Trust:**

- Launch transparency initiatives, such as public disclosure of government projects, to counter perceptions of corruption noted in the 2021 study on youth leadership.
- Engage youth in anti-corruption forums to rebuild trust in political institutions.

## **8. Tackle Economic Constraints:**

- Address the 15% youth unemployment rate (2023 estimates) through job creation and entrepreneurship programs, freeing youth to engage in politics.
- Provide financial support or stipends for young activists and candidates to reduce economic barriers to participation.

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## **9. Promote Female Youth Participation:**

- Introduce mentorship programs and quotas for young women in political roles to counter underrepresentation.
- Partner with NGOs to offer leadership training tailored for female youth, addressing cultural barriers.

## **10. Integrate Youth in Policy-Making:**

- Establish youth advisory councils at the state level to involve young people in drafting policies on education, employment, and sustainability.
- Encourage youth representation in local governance bodies like panchayats to foster grassroots political involvement.

These remedies, grounded in data and trends from Arunachal Pradesh, aim to empower the state's youth to actively shape its political future.

## **Conclusion**

Arunachal Pradesh's youth, comprising approximately 30% of the state's 1.38 million population, are emerging as a transformative force in its political landscape. With a 65% voter turnout among 18-29-year-olds in the 2019 state elections and growing engagement through platforms like the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) and digital spaces, young people are increasingly shaping governance and policy discourse. Initiatives like the "We The Voters" campaign and the National Youth Policy (2022 draft), alongside a ₹1.64 billion state budget allocation for education and skilling in 2024, have bolstered civic awareness and participation. However, challenges such as age restrictions, cultural norms prioritizing elder leadership, economic constraints,

and underrepresentation of women (less than 10% of elected representatives) persist. By addressing these barriers through targeted policies—such as lowering candidacy age limits, enhancing digital literacy, and supporting youth organizations—Arunachal's youth can bridge traditional governance with modern democratic ideals, positioning them as pivotal leaders in the state's sustainable and inclusive future.

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