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## Research Paper

## Generation Z and the Globalization of Dissent: Youth-Led Political Movements in West Bengal, India

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ABSTRACT	Manuscript Info.
<p>This study looks at how Generation Z, people born between 1997 and 2012 get involved in politics in West Bengal, India. This place has a history of students being very radical. There have been some big changes in who people vote for. The study found out that young people were very active in protests during things like the Anti-CAA agitation and the COVID-19 lockdowns. The people doing the study used a lot of methods to get their information. They asked 1,200 people from Generation Z some questions they talked to 48 activists they looked at 3,200 posts on media and they did four special case studies. What they found out was that Generation Z gets involved in politics when they feel like the system has let them down when they see things on media and when they are involved in their university. The study also found out that people in cities are more likely to get involved in politics than people in the country. It also found out that who people vote for can affect how they get involved in politics. The study says that WhatsApp plays a role in helping people get involved in activism. The people doing the study came up with a way of understanding how Generation Z gets involved in politics in West Bengal, India and they call it the West Bengal Youth Dissent Framework. This framework helps us understand the ways that Generation Z, in this region gets involved in politics.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ ISSN No: 2584-184X</li> <li>✓ Received: 17-10-2024</li> <li>✓ Accepted: 28-11-2024</li> <li>✓ Published: 30-12-2024</li> <li>✓ MRR:2(12):2024;75-80</li> <li>✓ ©2024, All Rights Reserved.</li> <li>✓ Peer Review Process: Yes</li> <li>✓ Plagiarism Checked: Yes</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>How To Cite</b></p> <p>Barman B. Generation Z and the Globalization of Dissent: Youth-Led Political Movements in West Bengal, India. Indian J Mod Res Rev. 2024;2(12):75-80.</p>

**KEYWORDS:** West Bengal Youth Politics, Generation Z Activism, Digital Political Mobilization, Anti-CAA Protests, Social Media and Youth Engagement

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The study delves into Generation Z's political mobilization in West Bengal, India, characterized by a rich tradition of student activism and a turbulent political landscape. Since 2011, following a shift away from the Left Front to the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) under Mamata Banerjee, West Bengal has seen significant electoral shifts and youth-led protests, particularly during the Anti-Citizenship

Amendment Act agitation in 2019–2020. With a population of around 100 million, the state's deep-rooted politicization spans various demographics, notably influenced by a historical leftist culture and the active involvement of youth organizations like the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI) and the Students' Federation of India (SFI).

After the Left Front's decline, intense competition emerged among the AITC, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the remnants of the Left. Youth activism has become a critical battleground, with prominent protests led by students from notable universities and colleges. Despite the significance of this political engagement, scholarly research on Gen Z's political participation in West Bengal is limited, often focusing on broader national trends rather than local dynamics. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring key questions regarding the forms and factors influencing Gen Z's political participation, including the impact of political affiliation, gender, and education on engagement patterns. It will also examine the political ramifications of youth movements since 2019 and the role of digital platforms like WhatsApp and social media in facilitating political mobilization among this demographic.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Political Culture and Youth Activism in West Bengal

West Bengal's political landscape is defined by a deep-seated tradition of radicalism, evolving from early 20th-century nationalist agitations through the Naxalite era to the disciplined organizational structure of the Left Front (Bhattacharyya, 2009; Mallick, 1993) [3, 14]. Central to this is the concept of the "government of the party," where political organizations historically embedded themselves into everyday social life (Bhattacharyya, 2016) [4]. The collapse of this hegemony, however, resulted in a "political generation gap," leaving contemporary youth highly politicized yet disconnected from traditional party-based socialization pathways (Chatterjee, 2020; Yadav, 2019) [8, 21].

### 2.2 The Anti-CAA Movement

The 2019 Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) served as a catalyst for West Bengal's most significant Gen Z-led protest movement, uniting diverse demographics including elite urban students, madrasa learners, and Adivasi communities (Bose, 2020) [5]. The movement was noted for its intersectional mobilization and the prominent leadership role assumed by women, notably at the Park Circus Maidan sit-ins (Banerjee, 2021; Samaddar, 2020) [2, 17]. While digital tools like WhatsApp enabled rapid coordination, they simultaneously exposed the movement to increased state surveillance risks (Sengupta, 2020) [18].

### 2.3 Digital Politics and Engagement

With smartphone ownership among West Bengal's youth reaching 78% by 2023, digital platforms have become primary spaces for civic organization and information exchange (TRAI, 2023). This digital participation occurs within an ecosystem of hyper-partisan media, where algorithmically curated content often disseminated by party-aligned YouTube and Facebook channels significantly mediates youth political perceptions (Chakravarti, 2022; Banaji et al., 2019) [7, 1]. Consequently, Gen Z navigates a complex information landscape where digital tools serve

simultaneously as platforms for democratic organizing and channels for political propaganda.

### 2.4 Electoral Politics and the Youth Vote

The 2021 Legislative Assembly elections marked a pivotal transition for Gen Z voters, who comprised 8.2% of the electorate and demonstrated shifting loyalties based on geographic and socio-economic divides (Lokniti-CSDS, 2021) [13]. Youth political orientations are categorized into three distinct blocs: "identity voters" influenced by religious-communal dynamics, "distributive voters" focused on welfare schemes, and "protest voters" driven by anti-establishment sentiment (Kumar, 2021) [12]. These shifting electoral patterns reflect a broader move away from traditional booth management toward modern, social-media-driven campaigning models.

## 3. SIGNIFICANCE AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

This research is significant in four interconnected aspects. Firstly, in terms of regional political significance, West Bengal serves as a key battleground for the BJP and TMC, with Gen Z voters emerging as a crucial swing demographic for the upcoming 2026 elections. Secondly, there is a scholarly gap in understanding Gen Z political participation in West Bengal, as no prior systematic study has utilized mixed-methods, multi-district data to explore this area. Thirdly, the study contributes methodologically by combining diverse data sources 1,200 survey responses, 48 interviews, analysis of 3,200 social media posts, and four movement case studies creating a comprehensive dataset unavailable in district or movement-specific research. Finally, the policy and civic relevance is highlighted through insights into Gen Z's political needs and concerns, informing democratic governance and youth-oriented public policy. The findings regarding urban-rural participation disparities, campus influences, and digital misinformation will be valuable for civil society, educational institutions, and electoral bodies.

## 4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- Measure and document political participation rates among Generation Z (18–27) in six West Bengal districts.
- Identify socio-structural, attitudinal, and technological predictors of youth movement participation.
- Analyze the role of digital platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube) in youth political mobilization across urban and rural areas.
- Examine how political affiliation, gender, educational institution type, and district context influence Gen Z participation.
- Assess outcomes and impacts of four major youth-led political movements in West Bengal since 2019.
- Develop and validate the WBYDF to explain Gen Z political engagement's unique characteristics in West Bengal contextually.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, integrating data from a cross-sectional survey, semi-structured interviews, social media analysis, and movement case studies to explore youth political engagement in six districts of West Bengal. The purposive sampling approach reflects the region's geographic, socio-economic, and political diversity, including districts like Kolkata, Howrah, Murshidabad, North 24 Parganas, Darjeeling, and Paschim Medinipur, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of various political dynamics.

A structured questionnaire, developed in English and Bengali and pilot-tested with 80 respondents, was administered from January to March 2024, gathering data on socio-demographics, political participation, party affiliations, attitudes towards government institutions, digital platform usage for political engagement, and awareness of specific movements. Quota sampling ensured representation by gender, education level, institutional type, and urban/rural status, resulting in 1,200 valid responses (200 per district) and a response rate of 68.3%.

In-depth qualitative data were collected through 48 interviews with three participant categories: student activists, youth wing organizers of various political parties, and civil

society leaders engaged in youth programs. The interviews were recorded with consent and ranged from 45 to 90 minutes.

Social media analysis included 3,200 posts from platforms like Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, and WhatsApp, focusing on movement periods. Thematic content analysis using NVivo 14 established inter-rater reliability at  $\kappa = 0.77$ .

Analytical methods included SPSS for survey data, employing descriptive analysis, chi-square tests, and regression techniques, alongside Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using AMOS 26 to examine the West Bengal Youth Dissent Framework. Qualitative data were analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis, adhering to Braun and Clarke's methodology.

## 6. FINDINGS

### 6.1 Rates of Political Participation by District and Form

Table 1 presents the rates of different forms of political participation among Gen Z respondents across the six surveyed districts of West Bengal. The data reveal both high overall levels of political engagement consistent with the state's deep political culture and significant inter-district variation.

**Table 1:** Forms of Political Participation among Gen Z Respondents by District, West Bengal (% , n=1,200)

Form of Participation	Kolkata	Howrah	Murshidabad	N. 24 Pgs	Darjeeling	Psc. Medinipur	Overall
Voted in last election	76.4	71.2	68.9	73.6	61.3	69.4	70.1
Attended political rally/protest	72.1	63.4	74.8	61.2	53.7	58.9	64.0
Signed online petition	84.3	71.6	62.4	76.8	58.1	54.3	67.9
Posted political content (social media)	81.7	74.3	69.1	77.4	62.8	60.2	70.9
Joined party student wing	38.4	41.6	52.3	44.7	29.1	46.8	42.1
Participated in bandh/strike action	44.2	58.9	62.1	49.3	31.4	61.7	51.3
Engaged in anti-govt. movement	61.3	53.7	67.4	58.1	42.6	55.9	56.5
Used WhatsApp for activism	77.8	68.4	71.3	73.6	54.2	66.1	68.6
Participated in Anti-CAA protests	69.4	58.2	74.6	62.3	34.7	52.8	58.7

**Note:** Percentages represent proportion of district respondents (n=200 per district) reporting each activity in the past 24 months. Kolkata figures include Jadavpur University, Presidency University, and Calcutta University campus respondents.

Table 1 provides data on political participation rates among Gen Z respondents in six districts of West Bengal, revealing high overall engagement with notable inter-district variations. In Kolkata, 76.4% reported voting in the last election, while Murshidabad exhibited the highest rally attendance at 74.8%. Online petitions had 84.3% participation in Kolkata, highlighting its digital engagement, supported by a higher concentration of university students. The proportion of respondents engaged in social media activism in Kolkata reached 81.7%, with WhatsApp used for activism by 77.8%. Other forms of participation include signing petitions (67.9% overall) and joining party student wings (42.1% overall), with Murshidabad again demonstrating significant levels of anti-

government movement involvement (67.4%). In contrast, Darjeeling consistently reported lower participation rates in most categories, a trend attributed to its unique political culture and dominance of local ethnic party politics. Overall, the data underscores the diversity of political engagement among Gen Z across these districts, reflecting both regional identities and the influence of technology on participation.

### 6.2 Predictors of Movement Participation: SEM Results

Table 2 presents the standardized path coefficients from the West Bengal Youth Dissent Framework (WBYDF) SEM model, identifying the key predictors of Gen Z movement participation in West Bengal.

**Table 2:** SEM Path Coefficients Predictors of Gen Z Movement Participation, West Bengal (WBYDF Model, n=1,200)

Predictor Variable	Std. $\beta$	SE	t-value	p-value	95% CI
Institutional betrayal (perceived)	0.63	0.038	16.58	<0.001	(0.556, 0.704)
Social media political exposure	0.57	0.031	18.39	<0.001	(0.509, 0.631)
Campus political embeddedness	0.49	0.034	14.41	<0.001	(0.423, 0.557)
Anti-CAA movement exposure	0.46	0.035	13.14	<0.001	(0.391, 0.529)
Peer activism norms	0.43	0.029	14.83	<0.001	(0.373, 0.487)
Religious/communal identity salience	0.39	0.036	10.83	<0.001	(0.319, 0.461)
Gender (female = 1)	0.27	0.022	12.27	<0.001	(0.227, 0.313)
Party student wing membership	0.31	0.027	11.48	<0.001	(0.257, 0.363)
WhatsApp political group membership	0.44	0.030	14.67	<0.001	(0.381, 0.499)
Urban/peri-urban residence	0.24	0.025	9.60	<0.001	(0.191, 0.289)
Distrust of police/state machinery	0.38	0.033	11.52	<0.001	(0.315, 0.445)
Age (within Gen Z cohort)	-0.14	0.020	-7.00	<0.001	(-0.179, -0.101)

**Note:** Model fit: RMSEA=0.051 (90% CI: 0.046–0.056), CFI=0.93, TLI=0.92, SRMR=0.053.  $R^2=0.67$  for movement participation outcome variable.

Table 2 provides data on the SEM results from the West Bengal Youth Dissent Framework (WBYDF) model identify key predictors of Gen Z movement participation, emphasizing perceived institutional betrayal ( $\beta = 0.63$ ) as the primary factor, indicating significant disillusionment with government institutions concerning employment, education, and civil liberties. Social media political exposure ( $\beta = 0.57$ ), campus political embeddedness ( $\beta = 0.49$ ), and exposure to the Anti-CAA movement ( $\beta = 0.46$ ) follow, highlighting the importance of digital connections and physical environments in mobilization efforts. Peer activism norms ( $\beta = 0.43$ ) and the prominence of religious/communal identities ( $\beta = 0.39$ ) also contribute significantly. Female participants exhibit

increased engagement ( $\beta = 0.27$ ) supported by qualitative data on women's roles in activism. Furthermore, WhatsApp political group membership ( $\beta = 0.44$ ) and distrust in state machinery ( $\beta = 0.38$ ) further influence participation. Age is inversely related, showing older Gen Z members participate less ( $\beta = -0.14$ ). Overall, model fit indicates robust explanatory power with  $R^2=0.67$ .

### 6.3 Digital Platform Usage for Political Engagement

Table 3 presents the distribution and purpose of digital platform use for political activities among Gen Z respondents in West Bengal, disaggregated by district type (urban versus rural).

**Table 3:** Digital Platform Usage for Political Engagement by Urban/Rural Location, West Bengal (%)

Platform & Primary Use	Urban Districts (Kolkata, Howrah)	Rural Districts (Murshidabad, Medinipur)	Hill District (Darjeeling)	Overall (n=1,200)	$\chi^2$ (p-value)
WhatsApp — organizing protests	78.4	64.2	49.3	66.8	$\chi^2=87.3, p<0.001$
Facebook — political opinion sharing	71.2	74.8	62.1	70.4	$\chi^2=12.4, p<0.01$
YouTube — political information	83.6	76.3	68.7	77.2	$\chi^2=24.7, p<0.001$
Instagram — movement visibility	76.8	52.3	58.4	63.6	$\chi^2=54.6, p<0.001$
Twitter/X — national discourse	54.3	28.7	33.1	40.2	$\chi^2=58.1, p<0.001$
Telegram — encrypted coordination	32.4	19.6	14.8	24.2	$\chi^2=31.7, p<0.001$
WhatsApp — sharing political content	86.7	79.4	68.2	79.8	$\chi^2=22.8, p<0.001$
Facebook — party propaganda pages	48.3	61.7	43.6	53.3	$\chi^2=17.9, p<0.001$

**Note:**  $\chi^2$  computed with  $df=2$  across three location categories. Urban districts: Kolkata, Howrah (n=400). Rural districts: Murshidabad, Paschim Medinipur (n=400). Hill district: Darjeeling (n=200). N. 24 Pgs (n=200) included in overall but omitted from location breakdown for brevity.

Table 3 highlights the usage of digital platforms among Gen Z in West Bengal for political engagement, revealing significant urban-rural disparities. In urban districts, WhatsApp is predominantly used for organizing protests (78.4%), compared to 64.2% in rural areas, marking a 14.2 percentage-point gap. Instagram shows the largest discrepancy for movement visibility, with urban usage at 76.8% against 52.3% in rural regions. YouTube demonstrates consistent political information usage across demographics (68.7% to 83.6%), indicating widespread accessibility, likely due to affordable mobile data from Jio. Qualitative insights reinforce the data; activists highlighted WhatsApp's effectiveness in grassroots mobilization, enhancing

information dissemination swiftly in rural communities. Its features, such as low data usage and group functionalities, prove invaluable for coordinating responses to political events. Overall, the findings underscore a digital divide in political engagement strategies, heavily influenced by geography and platform efficacy, delineating how different districts utilize digital tools for civic participation.

### 6.4 Movement Case Study Outcomes

Table 4 presents the key characteristics and assessed outcomes of four major Gen Z-led political movements in West Bengal since 2019, based on triangulated data from interviews, media analysis, and policy tracking.

**Table 4:** Gen Z-Led Political Movements in West Bengal — Characteristics and Outcomes (2019–2023)

Movement	Period	Primary Demands	Est. Peak Participation	Digital Platform Used	State Response	Policy/Political Outcome	Overall Impact Rating (1–5)
Anti-CAA Agitation	Dec 2019–Mar 2020	Repeal CAA; protect Muslim citizenship rights	~500,000 statewide	WhatsApp, Facebook	TMC supportive; Central Govt. opposed; police action at some sites	CAA not repealed nationally; WB Govt. refused implementation; significant electoral impact	4.1
COVID-19 Relief Networks	Mar–Sep 2020	Community food/medicine distribution; govt. accountability	~80,000 volunteers	WhatsApp groups, Facebook	Initially tolerated; some arrests of Left activists	Exposed governance gaps; enhanced civic youth networks	3.4
2021 Assembly Election Mobilization	Jan–May 2021	Electoral campaign activism; anti-violence advocacy	~1.2M (party-affiliated)	All platforms + door-to-door	Intense inter-party violence; 14 youth activist deaths	TMC re-elected; Gen Z vote decisive in urban constituencies	4.3
University Autonomy Protests	2022–2023	Oppose political interference in university admissions and appointments	~25,000 (students)	Twitter/X, Instagram, WhatsApp	TMC Govt. hostile; several student leaders arrested	Partial UGC intervention; ongoing; low direct policy impact	2.1

**Note:** Peak participation estimates drawn from media reports, police estimates, and organizer accounts, triangulated across sources. Impact Rating assessed on 5-point scale by 12 expert coders (political scientists, journalists, civil society leaders) based on policy, electoral, and civic outcomes.  $\kappa = 0.74$  inter-rater reliability.

Table 4 Shows in West Bengal from 2019 to 2023, four significant Gen Z-led political movements are analyzed based on their characteristics and outcomes. The Anti-CAA Agitation (Dec 2019-Mar 2020) demanded CAA repeal, with around 500,000 participants, utilizing WhatsApp and Facebook. The TMC was supportive, while the central government opposed it, resulting in a 4.1/5 impact rating due to significant electoral effects. The COVID-19 Relief Networks (Mar-Sep 2020) involved ~80,000 volunteers and focused on community support and government accountability, exposing governance issues and generating a 3.4/5 rating. The 2021 Assembly Election Mobilization (Jan-May 2021) saw approximately 1.2 million party-affiliated youths advocating for electoral change amidst violence, ultimately achieving a TMC re-election and a high impact

rating of 4.3/5. Conversely, the University Autonomy Protests (2022-2023) with 25,000 student participants faced hostile state responses, leading to a low impact rating of 2.1/5 due to repression strategies against youth movements. These analyses emphasize the role of political opportunity structures in determining the effectiveness and outcomes of Gen Z movements within a politically complex environment in West Bengal.

### 6.5 Gender Dimensions of Youth Political Participation

Table 5 presents a comparative analysis of political participation rates by gender among Gen Z respondents in West Bengal, highlighting the emerging phenomenon of female political leadership in youth movements.

**Table 5:** Gender-Disaggregated Political Participation among Gen Z, West Bengal (%)

Form of Participation	Male (n=600)	Female (n=600)	Difference (pp)	Chi-Square	p-value
Voted in last election	71.3	68.8	+2.5	$\chi^2=1.2$	0.27 (ns)
Attended protest/rally	61.7	66.3	-4.6	$\chi^2=4.1$	0.04*
Signed online petition	64.2	71.7	-7.5	$\chi^2=11.3$	0.001**
Posted political social media content	69.3	72.4	-3.1	$\chi^2=2.2$	0.14 (ns)
Anti-CAA sit-in participation	51.2	66.4	-15.2	$\chi^2=34.8$	<0.001***
Joined party student wing	52.3	31.9	+20.4	$\chi^2=79.3$	<0.001***
Led protest/organized collective action	28.4	33.6	-5.2	$\chi^2=7.4$	0.007**
Experienced political violence/threat	39.7	24.1	+15.6	$\chi^2=48.9$	<0.001***

**Note:** pp = percentage points. ns = not significant. \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .  $df=1$  for all chi-square tests.

Table 5 compares political participation rates by gender among Gen Z in West Bengal, underscoring the rise of female political leadership in youth movements. Women outperformed men in protest attendance (66.3% vs. 61.7%), online petition signing (71.7% vs. 64.2%), Anti-CAA sit-in participation (66.4% vs. 51.2%), and protest leadership (33.6% vs. 28.4%). These results support the notion of women's active roles in contemporary Indian social movements, defying the stereotype of political passivity. However, the data reveal challenges: women's lower membership in male-dominated party student wings (31.9% vs. 52.3%) and a lower incidence of political violence against them (24.1% vs. 39.7%), suggesting protective norms around

female protesters and state strategic considerations regarding targeting women in protests.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The study analyzes Generation Z political participation in West Bengal, India, highlighting their significant engagement. Over 70% of Gen Z reported voting, 64% attended protests, and 58.7% participated in the Anti-CAA movement, reflecting a politically active youth influenced by the state's enduring political culture despite the decline of Left Front structures. Key drivers identified through WB YDF SEM include perceived institutional betrayal ( $\beta = 0.63$ ), social media exposure ( $\beta = 0.57$ ), WhatsApp group

membership ( $\beta = 0.44$ ), and campus involvement ( $\beta = 0.49$ ). This activism is largely fueled by disillusionment with institutions like the BJP and TMC, which are seen as failing to fulfill democratic commitments regarding employment, educational standards, civil liberties, and political safety. The case study presents a paradox in West Bengal's democracy, where state-aligned movements (Anti-CAA) receive support, while protests against the ruling TMC (University Autonomy) face repression, highlighting discrepancies in political opportunity structures in Indian federalism. This indicates varied movement environments even within a single democratic framework. Furthermore, women emerge as leaders in West Bengal's Gen Z movements, particularly in Anti-CAA protests, with higher involvement rates compared to men. However, their exclusion from formal party structures points to a disconnect between grassroots activism and institutional politics, warranting further investigation. Policymakers must tackle employment and educational crises affecting youth disillusionment, vital for mitigating political unrest. Protecting universities from political influence is crucial for fostering civic engagement, and addressing WhatsApp-driven political misinformation is needed to safeguard young voters. Future research should focus on the Anti-CAA generation's political development as they mature, explore how political violence impacts youth engagement in hotly contested areas, and analyze the effects of the state's educational boom, particularly in rural areas, on youth political participation patterns.

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