

# The Impact of the **Millennials and Gen Z** on Democracy in Northeast Asia

Asia Democracy Research Network

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In 2024, Asia Democracy Research Network (ADRN) selected the political impact of younger generation, namely Millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z), as the subject of joint research conducted by ADRN members in four Northeast Asian countries: Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia.

Reaffirming the significance of youth participation in democracy to ensure sustainability of democratic governance, ADRN published this report with the aim of comprehending how the younger generation perceives democracy and providing recommendations for stakeholders including governments, political parties, and civil society organizations.

The report investigates contemporary questions such as:

- How can governments represent the interests of emerging generation such as the Millennials and Gen Z in the democratic political processes?
- How can political parties establish the effective communication channels to connect with the opinions of the Millennials and Gen Z in the formal political space?
- How can civil society organizations engage with the actions of the Millennials and Gen Z in the public spheres?

Drawing on a rich array of resources and data, this report offers country-specific analyses, highlight areas of improvement, and suggests policy recommendations to fill the discrepancy between the traditional political institutions and the emerging political actors in each country and the larger Asia region.

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# Executive Summary

**Jung Kim**

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How can governments represent the interests of emerging generations such as Millennials and Gen Z in democratic political processes? How can political parties establish effective communication channels to connect with the opinions of Millennials and Gen Z in the formal political space? How can civil society organizations (CSOs) engage with the actions of Millennials and Gen Z in public spheres?

This collaborative work by Chikako Kodama (Japan), Woo Chang Kang (South Korea), Chin-en Wu (Taiwan), and Bontoï Damba Ganbat (Mongolia) endeavors to answer these questions and generate policy-relevant recommendations for governments, political parties, and CSOs that are confronting the challenges of emerging younger generation. While governments recognize the differences of interests for public policies between the older and younger generations, they are far from good at reflecting the interests of Millennials and Gen Z in representative institutions. While political parties understand the significance of the younger voters in electoral competition, they lack effective communicative tools to incorporate the opinions of Millennials and Gen Z in mediating inter-generational conflicts. While CSOs are sensitive to the growing importance of younger cohorts in organizing

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collective actions, they frequently encounter challenges in mobilizing Millennials and Gen Z to become engaged citizens. The collective research outcomes shed light on the ways that fill the gaps between the traditional political institutions such as governments, political parties, and CSOs and the emerging political actors such as Millennials and Gen Z.

In her analysis of Japan, Kodama finds out that the political participation of Millennials and Gen Z is similar to that of older generations when they were young. In other words, there is little evidence to support the notion of a generational effect. Most of the observed changes in their values, interests, trust and affiliation are identical to those observed in other age groups, suggesting that the time effect is at play. With the exception of signing a petition, the vast majority of individuals aged 18-24 have not engaged in political action, such as strikes, boycotts or demonstrations. The proportion of people who have taken political action has not changed much since 1981. The percentage of this age group is only slightly lower than the average of all respondents, indicating the overall low level of political action in Japan. A persona analysis of politically active young people offers insights into their engagement with public issues. They are all motivated by personal expenses and concerns, find partners to start an organization or business from their friends and networks who share the same values, and take advantage of online/digital tools, actively communicating with people in their age group and proactively using learning opportunities. She indicates that fostering civic

*Fostering civic engagement among youth requires a systems approach: it would need collective action by government, political parties, NGOs and businesses.*

engagement among youth requires a systems approach: it would need collective action by government, political parties, NGOs and businesses because solutions entail changes in culture, education, politics and economy. It is a good starting point to create more practical opportunities for Millennials and Gen Z to participate in politics and to make a difference. Also, it is critical to increase public interest in politics.

According to Kang, terms like “N-po Generation” and “Hell Joseon” reflect more than just economic hardship among Korean youth. They represent a fundamental shift in how young people understand their social and economic challenges. While previous generations held strong beliefs that individual hard work could lead to upward social mobility, today’s young people increasingly recognize their struggles as manifestations of deeper structural problems within Korean society. The systemic nature of these challenges suggests that effective solutions must necessarily involve political and policy changes, as individual efforts alone cannot address problems rooted in social structures, economic systems, and policy frameworks. The relationship between youth political participation and representation in Korea offers important insights into broader questions of democratic development. In South Korea, increasing political awareness and participation among young people, driven by recognition of structural challenges, has not automatically translated into greater descriptive representation. The divergent patterns between voting behavior and electoral success suggest that formal political participation alone may not be sufficient to ensure representation. Addressing the persistent underrepresentation of youth in Korean politics requires substantive institutional reforms in two key areas. First, the issue of the disparity in opportunities faced by young candidates in the nomination process must be addressed. Current quota systems remain largely advisory rather than mandatory. It is therefore necessary to develop consensus around quota systems while designing implementation methods that address concerns regarding fairness and minimize potential backlash. Equally important is the establishment of a sustainable youth political training pipeline. The current gap between the rise in youth voter participation and limited representation suggests that short-term nomination advantages are insufficient. Long-term investment in political education programs, internships in local councils, policy workshops, and participatory budgeting initiatives would create systematic pathways for youth engagement. This approach requires a shift in the recruitment strategies of political parties, moving from an external focus to an internal cultivation of future leaders through structured and

*Addressing the persistent underrepresentation of youth in Korean politics requires substantive institutional reforms in two key areas.*

inclusive mechanisms. These institutional reforms would require substantial support from civil society actors, who can both advocate for implementation and hold political parties accountable for achieving meaningful rather than symbolic change.

Wu suggests that 'Taiwan' s major political parties have implemented mechanisms to strengthen their strategies for engaging young people and encouraging them to seek candidacy. Major political parties also organize summer camps to attract and train young people who are interested in politics and public

*The participation of young people in political parties also positively impacts the development of the parties themselves.*

affairs. The participation of young people in political parties also positively impacts the development of the parties themselves. This is especially evident in former authoritarian parties like the KMT, where ideological inflexibility, candidate selection, and decision-making processes have exhibited signs of

stagnation. However, there are instances in which the political participation of young individuals is manipulated by political parties and populist leaders. Despite the tendency of young people exhibit comparatively low levels of political participation in formal electoral processes, in recent years, they have been active in non-electoral political participation, especially participating in various protest movements. One key factor that has fueled this shift is the political stance and historical legacy of KMT. As the former authoritarian ruling party during the martial law era, the KMT is still regarded by many as representing conservative, pro-establishment interests. Its comparatively friendly attitude toward China has also been a point of contention, particularly among younger generations who are more inclined to support a distinct Taiwanese identity and to resist closer ties with Beijing.

Ganbat's research underscores the pivotal role of trust in democratic institutions and active citizen participation in the ongoing development of democracy in Mongolia. Notably, the democratic values, political education, and engagement of the younger generation will play a decisive role in shaping the future of Mongolia's democratic system. The future of democracy, particularly in a transitioning society like Mongolia, will largely depend on the development of beliefs, values, understanding of democracy, and political participation of the younger generation. In 2021, the Mongolian government established a "Youth parliament" under the patronage of the Speaker of Parliament G. Zandanshatar. This platform



aims to provide young people with the opportunity to engage directly in political dialogue. It functions as a mechanism for young people to express their views and concerns, thereby serving as a liaison between the youth and the government. As part of a parliamentary initiative, local Mini Parliaments were supported in all 21 provinces and the capital city, to select through competition among young student's representatives for the "Youth parliament." The "Youth parliament" is part of a broader effort to foster democratic engagement among younger generations, such as Millennials and Gen Z. Mongolian political parties can play a crucial role in shaping the political landscape by establishing effective communication channels that address the opinions and concerns of these new generations. The new generations have become well-versed in technology and anticipates engaging with political affairs in dynamic, transparent, and responsive ways. Given their distinctive characteristics, political parties still need to adapt their communication strategies to resonate with these younger voters. Over the past 30 years of democracy, CSOs have flourished, and citizens have increasingly mobilized based on their interests. This has resulted in the proliferation of over 40,000 NGOs in Mongolia nowadays. The majority of these NGOs serve their members only, while a few engage the public in enlightenment, civic education, and the mobilization of citizens to address public issues. It is widely accepted that CSOs shall play a crucial role in facilitating the integration of young people into social, political, and economic life. Given the relatively youthful demographic profile of Mongolia, CSOs could be central to promoting youth engagement, empowerment, and development. These organizations typically focus on a variety of areas, including education, health, social inclusion, and civic engagement.

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In sum, the collaborative work has illuminated the existence of both similarities and differences among Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia in terms of youth politics on the governments, political parties, and CSOs in their countries. It is our collective aspiration that our collective research outcomes give interesting and important implications for those who are interested in the future of democracy across nations in Northeast Asia.





## Case 1: Japan

# The Impact of the Millennials and Gen Z on Democracy in Japan

**Chikako Kodama**

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## 1. Introduction

The year 2024 has been called “the biggest election year in human history” (UNDP 2024), and Japan has had a number of major elections. Whenever there is an election, the lower turnout of young voters is a typical concern (*The Yomiuri Shimbun* 2024-11-05). To encourage young people to vote, Japan lowered the voting age from 20 to 18 in 2015. Still, the minimum age for eligibility to run for the House of Representatives remains at 25 years of age.<sup>1</sup> In the Lower House election in 2024, the turnout among individuals in their 10s, 20s, and 30s is still as low as 39.4 percent, 34.6 percent and 45.5 percent respectively (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2025).<sup>2</sup> In the 2024 elections, it was also reported that younger voters contributed to unexpected results in the local elections as their main source of information is SNS (*Nikkei* 2024-11-19 and 2025-01-16).

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<sup>1</sup> The eligibility age for House of Councilors and governors' office is at 30 or older.

<sup>2</sup> The statistics is based on the announcement by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications on 14 February 2025, <https://www.soumu.go.jp/senkyo/50syusokuhou/index.html>, accessed 12 April 2025. The average turnout rate for the 20s and 30s are calculated by the author.

## *Why do some Millennials and Gen Z participate in politics while others do not?*

These media reports indicate a contrast in the impact of Millennials and Gen Z<sup>3</sup> on democracy<sup>4</sup>: 'The majority of them do not usually vote, yet when they do, it creates

political phenomena. Why do some Millennials and Gen Z participate in politics while others do not? Is it because of their generation or do age and time influence their political participation? The overall aim of the joint research is to develop policy recommendations for government, political parties and NGOs to engage Millennials and Gen Z. To this end, this paper seeks to understand the political participation of these birth cohorts, with a focus on their values, interests, trust, and associability, which existing research suggests influence political participation and preferences (Inglehart 1971; Inoguchi 2002; Putnam et al. 1993). In doing so, the analysis clarifies the differences between age, period, and generational effects on political behavior (Braungart and Braungart 1986; Mifune and Nakamura 2009; Watanuki 1994). Through a brief review of the results of the World Values Survey (WVS), this paper argues that the political participation of Millennials and Gen Z appears to be similar to that of older generations when they were young, i.e., there is little generational effect. Most of the observed changes in their values, interests, trust and affiliation are identical to those of the other age groups, suggesting that the time effect is a contributing factor. However, persona analysis of politically active young people provides some insight into the way they engage with public issues. The paper concludes with some recommendations for governments, political parties and NGOs. Although promoting young people's political participation requires a systems approach, the paper suggests starting with the following: increasing opportunities for young people to get involved in practical ways while increasing the number of people who feel that politics is relevant to their lives.

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<sup>3</sup> The definitions of millennials and Gen Z vary. In this paper, Millennials and Gen Z are used similar to the concept of the birth cohort: Millennials are those who born between 1985 and 1994 (aged 30 to 39 in 2024) and Gen Z are people born between 1995 and 2010 (aged 14 to 29 in 2024). When they are used as a generation that shares common attitude, behavior and consciousness, it is specified that.

<sup>4</sup> Given the theme of the research project - the impact and representation of the Millennials and Gen Z on democracy, the paper focuses on the dimension of participation out of two "theoretical dimensions of democratization", i.e., participation and contestation suggested by Dahl (1971: 4)

## 2. Contributing Factors for Political Participations

This section begins by clarifying the concepts of age, time, and generational effects on political participation. Subsequently, it analyzes the values, interests, associability, and trust of Millennials and Gen Z as they relate to political participation (Inoguchi 2002; Mifune and Nakamura 2009; Putnam 1993; Watanuki 1994).

### 2.1. Generation Factor

According to Braungart and Braungart, a political generation is “a specific age group in history that becomes aware of its uniqueness and joins together to work for social and political change” (1989: 207). A particular political generation exhibits divergent political attitudes and behaviors, which persist regardless of changes in age and time. The extant literature suggests that the earlier birth cohorts in Japan have created such a political generation. For example, Mifune and Nakamura (2009) identified a generational effect on elections using cohort analysis.<sup>5</sup> According to them, the 1961-85 birth cohorts share a common political attitude: they engage in politics only when their interests are at stake. Such a political attitude is the generational effect, which differs from earlier birth cohorts and has contributed to the persistently low voter turnout in Japan (Mifune and Nakamura 2009). Miyajima (1985) argues that rapid economic growth from the late 1950s to the early 1970s caused a change in the Japanese value system, leading to “privatization (*shiseikatsu-ka*)”, defined as the tendency to value private life (1985: 131). He adds that privatization could exert a dual influence on political participation, either negative or positive (Miyajima 1985). Watanuki (1994), on the other hand, focuses on changes in the proportion of “postmaterialist” who prioritize political participation and freedom of speech over maintaining order and fighting rising prices.<sup>6</sup> Watanuki

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<sup>5</sup> Cohort analysis is to understand some characteristics of cohorts, which are often identified on the basis of birth, i.e., birth cohort (Glenn 1977). Cohort analysis compares cohorts at two or more points in time. In doing so, the analysis can distinguish generational characteristics from those of age and period.

<sup>6</sup> Inglehart (1971) uses the terms “acquisitive” and “post-bourgeois”. The former are those who value maintaining order and fighting price increases, and the latter value political participation and freedom



identifies the increase in the postmaterialist index from 1972 to 1993 through three surveys and suggests a correlation between the expansion of the postmaterialist value and changes in preferences for political parties (Watanuki 1994: 64).<sup>7</sup> Inoguchi (2002), in anticipation of changes in Japanese social capital among the new generations (millennials and beyond), suggests three directions of change: first, an increase in the activities of civic organizations; second, an increase in postmaterialist values; and third, an increase in civic consciousness (2002: 287-288).

## 2.2. Millennials and Gen Z

The literature reviewed above suggests that a significant socio-economic experience in childhood and adolescence could shape a generational effect. The question is whether Millennials and Gen Z have undergone a collective experience with the potential to the creation of a new political generation.

Economically, Millennials and Gen Z grew up during the so-called “lost three decades” or the thirty-year depression unlike rapid economic growth experienced by earlier generations. Socially, the period has been characterized as one of deepening social polarization. At the same time, the rapid development of digital technology is affecting Millennials and Gen Z. Demographically, Millennials account for 11 percent and Gen Z for 15.2 percent of the total population in 2024 (Statistics Bureau of Japan 2024).<sup>8</sup> Unlike previous birth cohorts that experienced two “baby booms”, the size of the populations is comparatively small.

Recognizing the differences in the economic and social experiences of Millennials and Gen Z, the paper seeks to find any generational effects in their political participation through a brief analysis of the WVS. Following the existing literature, the political participation of Millennials and Gen Z is examined through their values, interests, trust and affiliation. The WVS has been conducted seven times from 1981 to 2019. Millennials and Gen Z are represented by the 18-24 and 25-34 age group in the 2019 survey.<sup>9</sup> Despite the absence of statistical analysis, the

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of speech (1971: 993-4). He hypothesizes that “post-bourgeois” prefer left-wing political parties.

<sup>7</sup> The postmaterialist value is increasing across all age groups in three years of survey (1972, 1983, 1993). Therefore, Watanuki (1994) assesses that it is the period effect not generation effect.

<sup>8</sup> For Millennials, the age groups 30-34 and 35-39, and for Gen Z, the age groups 15-19, 20-24, 25-29 are used. The total population is as of 1 August 2024 (final estimate).

<sup>9</sup> Respondents in the WVS in Japan are over the age of 18. All tables from the WVS in this report are based on the data generated by the World Values Survey Data online analysis tool.

WVS provides a rough idea of the age, period, and cohort effects by comparing results within the same survey year and between different age groups as well as following the same birth cohort in different survey periods.<sup>10</sup>

## Values

This section examines social, political and postmaterialist values. Firstly, Table 1 shows that “privatization” is on the rise.<sup>11</sup> The overall proportion of respondents who consider family and leisure time important has increased, as has the proportion in the 18-24 and 25-34 age groups.

Focusing on respondents choosing “very important”, the increase is more obvious: 62 percent in 1990 to 88 percent in 2019 for the 18-24 age group. The percentage of individuals within the same age group who say that leisure time is of significant importance increased from 47 percent in

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1990 to 78 percent in 2019. In the case of politics, the proportion of people who consider politics as important has increased from 49 percent (1990) to 64 percent (2019), exceeding the majority. For the population aged 18-24 and 25-34, the importance of politics has increased by the same amount.

As for the postmaterialist index, the overall share of “postmaterialist” increased from 4.3 percent in 1981 to 9.4 percent in 2000,<sup>12</sup> which aligns with Watanuki’s (1994) findings. Later, however, it declines or fluctuates (represented by the blue line in Figure 1).<sup>13</sup> Figure 1 also shows that the percentage of “postmaterialist”

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<https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>

<sup>10</sup> Strictly speaking, this is not a cohort analysis because it only fixes one of three aspects. For more information on cohort analysis, please refer to Glenn (1977) and Mifune and Nakamura (2009).

<sup>11</sup> The results are derived from the following question: “For each of the following, indicate how important it is in your life: Family, friends, leisure time, politics, work, religion,” with five response options: very important, rather important, not very important, not at all important, and don’t know.

<sup>12</sup> The question in the WVS is to choose the most important of four options: (i) maintaining order in the nation, (ii) giving people more say in important government decisions, (iii) fighting rising prices, and (iv) protecting freedom of speech. The WVS asks which one is the most important and which is the next most important. The results cited in this report are the percentages of people who selected them as the most important.

<sup>13</sup> Figure 1 shows the percentage of postmaterialists in each survey year. The postmaterialist index consists of materialist, mixed, postmaterialist and missing/unknown (four categories). In 2019, although the overall percentage of postmaterialists increased as suggested by the blue line, the percentage of materialists also

among respondents aged 18 to 24 is as low in 2019 as it was in 1981 (represented by the orange line in Figure 1).<sup>14</sup> However, more people in this age group prioritize participation as the most important of the four items, although the proportion has declined since 2005 (Figure 2). Prioritizing participation over maintaining order and controlling prices has been unique to this age group since 1981.

**Table 1.** Importance in life (% of “very important” + “rather important”)

<b>Family</b>	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2019
18-24	95	97	98	98	97	99
25-34	98	98	97	98	99	98
35-44	99	99	98	100	97	99
45-54	97	98	97	98	99	99
55-64	97	98	97	96	98	98
65 and above	92	99	97	95	96	96
Overall	97	98	98	98	98	98
<b>Leisure time</b>	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2019
18-24	93	95	98	94	94	96
25-34	93	93	92	96	94	96
35-44	85	92	93	94	95	96
45-54	77	91	94	91	94	96
55-64	66	83	84	90	86	92
65 and above	46	77	72	79	79	82
Overall	80	89	88	90	88	90
<b>Politics</b>	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2019
18-24	35	40	43	31	54	50
25-34	37	54	41	47	53	52
35-44	51	59	61	58	64	54
45-54	58	67	72	64	70	63
55-64	58	70	77	74	72	69
65 and above	54	73	74	71	70	74
Overall	49	61	63	61	66	64

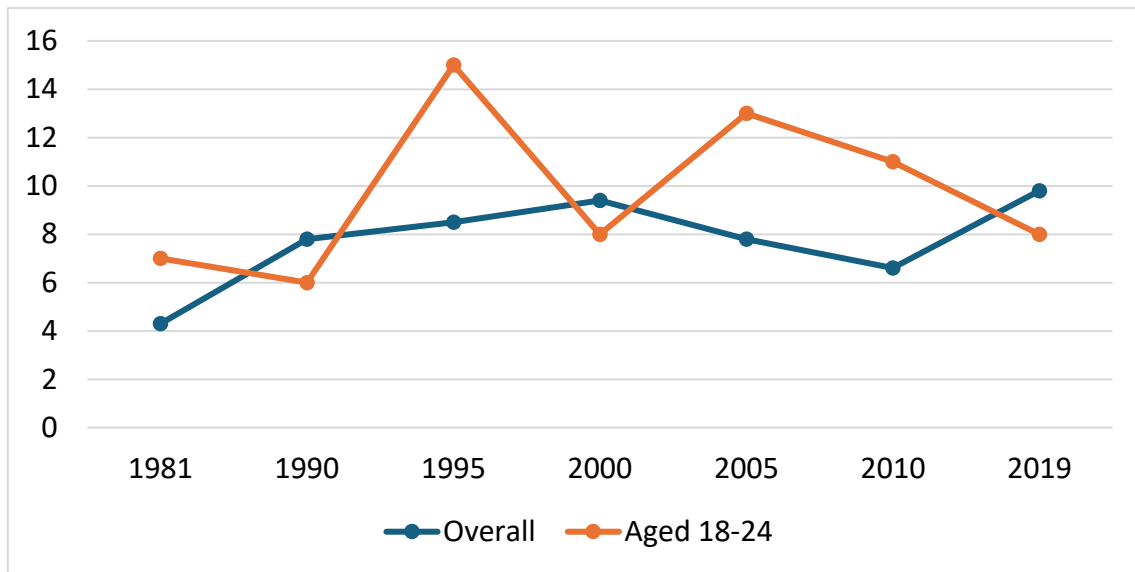
Source: World Value Survey data, accessed 24 January 2025. The table is developed by the author based on the WVS online data analysis (<https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>).

increased. This means that the share of people classified as “mixed” decreased.

<sup>14</sup> The increase in the percentage of people who answered “don’t know or no answer” is also shown in Figure 2.

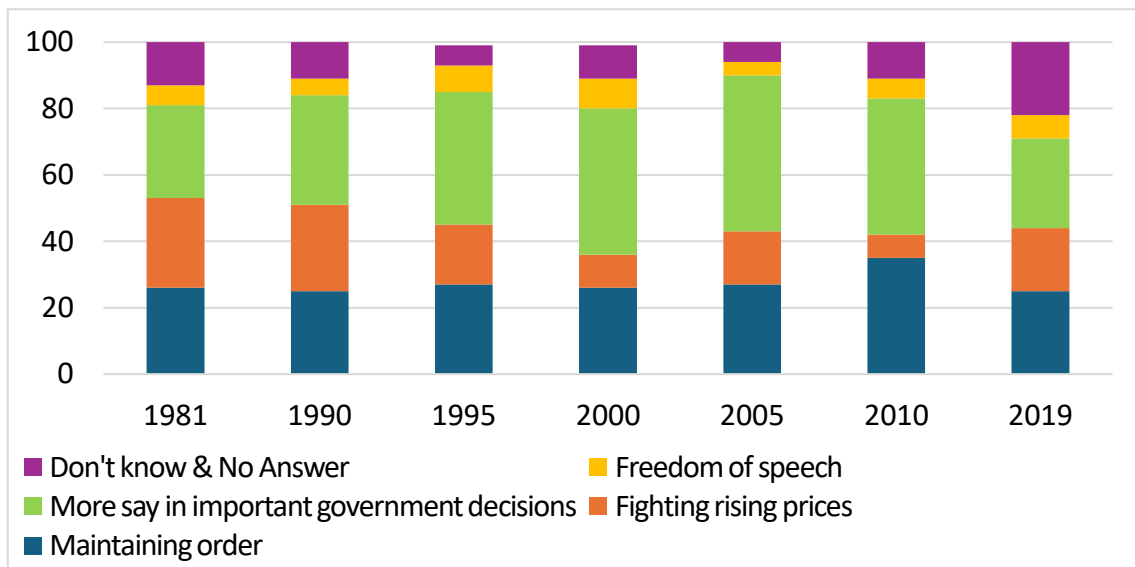


**Figure 1.** Percentage of Postmaterialist (%)



Source: World Value Survey data, accessed 24 January 2025. The table is developed by the author based on the WVS online data analysis (<https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>).

**Figure 2.** Importance of Four Items for Respondents Aged 18-24 (%)



Source: World Value Survey data, accessed 24 January 2025. The table is developed by the author based on the WVS online data analysis (<https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>).

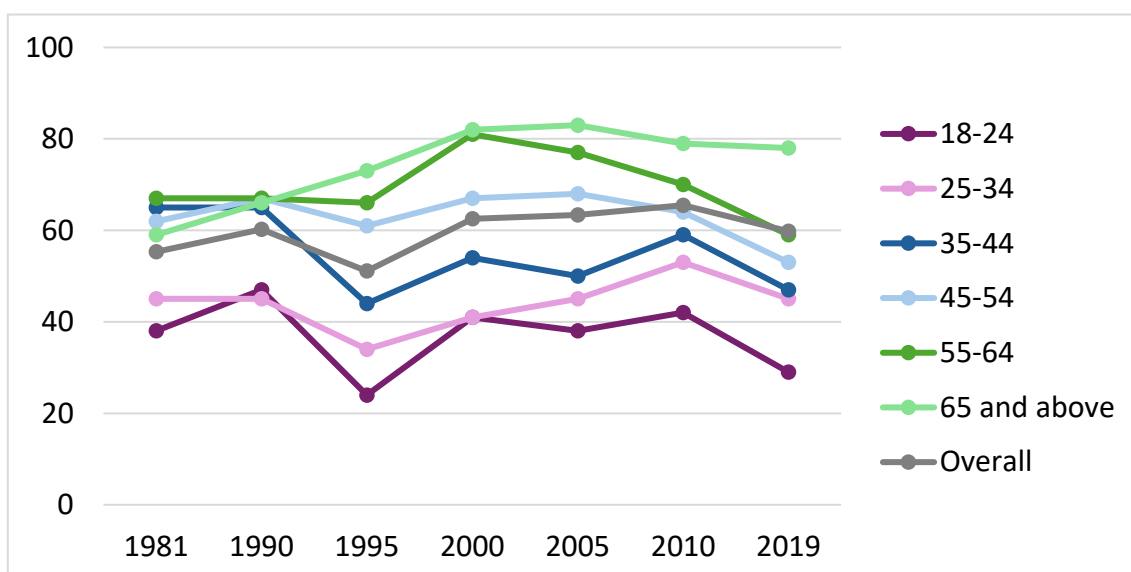
## Interests

This section explores Millennials' and Gen Z' attention to politics. The percentage of people between the ages of 18 and 24 who respond they are interested in politics ranges

*Respondents in Japan between the ages of 18 and 39 identified two primary reasons for their lack of interest in politics: i) they do not have any expectations from politics, and ii) nothing will change even if they vote.*

from 35 to 45 percent (Figure 3).<sup>15</sup> As people age, they tend to develop a heightened interest. According to a separate survey conducted by the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE) in 2023, respondents in Japan between the ages of 18 and 39 identified two primary reasons for their lack of interest in politics: i) they do not have any expectations from politics, and ii) nothing will change even if they vote.<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 3.** Percentage of People Interested in Politics (%)



Source: World Value Survey data, accessed 24 January 2025. The table is developed by the author based on the WVS online data analysis (<https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>).

<sup>15</sup> The exceptions are 1990 (slightly above the range) and 1995 (well below the range). The same pattern is observed for other age groups as well as for the overall percentage. Therefore, the time effect may have played a role.

<sup>16</sup> This question is asked to those who responded “not at all interested”, “not very interested” and “neither interested nor uninterested” in politics. The percentage who chose these three answers is 56 percent. The survey has been conducted twice in 2022 and 2023. The 2023 survey included 440 respondents aged 18 to 39 from Japan.

As an indicator of attention, Inoguchi (2002) used the frequency of watching TV news programs. According to Table 2, TV news is still the most used media across all age groups.<sup>17</sup> Table 2 also shows that there is the greatest difference in the use of social media between the younger and older age groups.

**Table 2.** Source of information in 2019 (% of respondents selecting “daily” + “weekly” + “monthly” + “less than monthly” as frequency of use)

	News paper	TV	Radio	Mobile	Email	Internet	Social media	Talk with friends
18-24	48	99	26	45	25	94	83	78
25-34	48	97	32	47	39	96	81	89
35-44	58	95	47	40	40	95	62	90
45-54	74	99	51	46	54	93	52	89
55-64	83	98	56	46	51	81	44	87
65 and above	91	98	51	45	35	48	16	87
Overall	75	98	48	45	42	76	44	88

Source: World Value Survey data, accessed 24 January 2025. The table is developed by the author based on the WVS online data analysis (<https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>).

## Affiliation

Numerous scholars have examined the relationship between associability and democracy (Putnam et al. 1993, 2002). The WVS asks respondents about their affiliation with the 12 voluntary organizations listed, and Figure 4 compiles the proportion of respondents who are active and inactive members of the organizations.<sup>18</sup> The figure shows that a small percentage of Japanese belong to voluntary organizations. An upward trend was observed until around 2005,<sup>19</sup> but since then, the percentage has been declining or has remained consistently low in

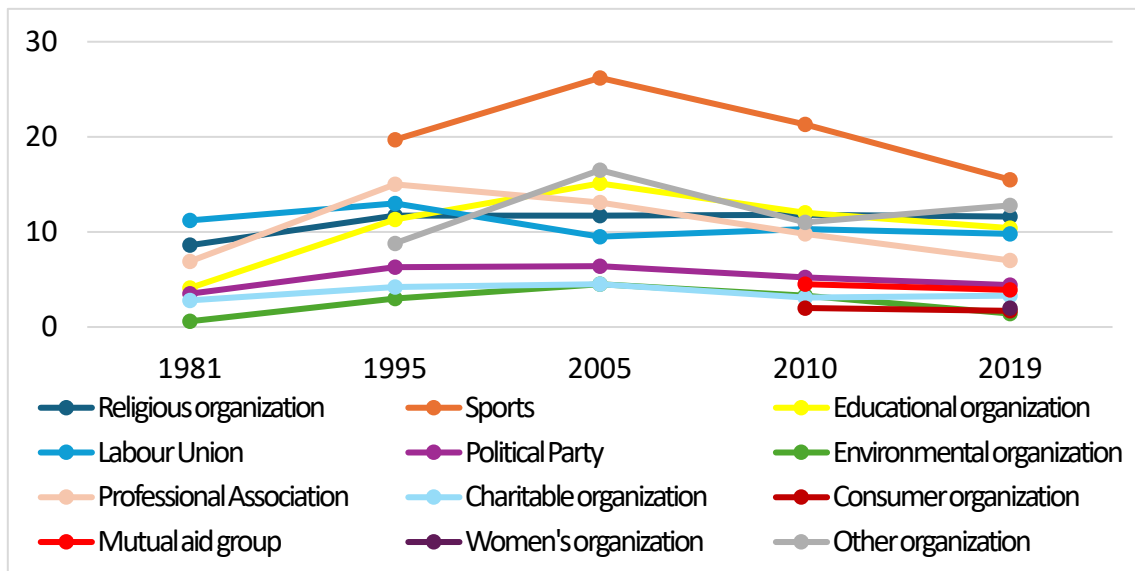
<sup>17</sup> The options for the source of information are newspaper, TV news, radio news, mobile phone, email, Internet, social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and talking with friends or colleagues. The option of social media was added only in the 2019 survey. The frequency options include “daily”, “weekly”, “monthly”, “less than monthly”, “never” and “no answer”. Table 3 indicates the percentage of people who use the media daily, weekly, monthly and less than monthly.

<sup>18</sup> The 12 organizations are (1) church or religious organization, (2) sport or recreational organization, football/baseball/rugby team, (3) art, music or educational organization, (4) labor union, (5) political party, (6) environmental organization, (7) professional association, (8) humanitarian or charitable organization, (9) consumer organization, (10) self-help group, mutual aid group, (11) women’s group and (12) other organization.

<sup>19</sup> It is reported that the number of NGOs has increased in responding to refugees from Indochina in the early 80s and the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995 (Tate and Hasegawa 2023).

the case of environmental organizations, charitable organizations and political parties. The percentage of members in organizations among the 18-24 age group is even lower than the overall percentage, with the exception of sports organizations.

**Figure 4.** Members of voluntary organization (% of “active” + “inactive”)



Source: World Value Survey data, accessed 24 January 2025. The table is developed by the author based on the WVS online data analysis (<https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>).

## Trust

This section reviews both social and political trust. The former examines the extent of trust other people (e.g., family and people who they meet for the first time), and the latter assesses the level of confidence in organizations. With regard to social trust, Table 3 seems to confirm the continuation of the type of trust suggested by Inoguchi (2002: 389).<sup>20</sup> Inoguchi argues that “American trust is broader and more open, whereas Japanese trust is narrower and more closed” (2002: 389).<sup>21</sup> The 2019 WVS

*In general, younger people exhibit a lower level of trust in comparison to older people.*

still indicates that Japanese people extend their trust to family and acquaintances, but much less to people they meet for the first time or to those of a different nationality. In general, younger people exhibit a lower level

<sup>20</sup> The WVS included the questions from 2010 (wave 6), i.e. two surveys in Japan and the two results do not demonstrate a big difference.

<sup>21</sup> Inoguchi (2002) notes that there may be a cultural factor in this result (202: 383).

of trust in comparison to older people. In contrast, approximately 40 percent of people in the United States responded that they trust people they meet for the first time in 2017 (28 percent of people aged 18-24 extend trust to the people they meet for the first time).<sup>22</sup>

**Table 3.** Social trust in 2019 (% of “trust completely” + “trust somewhat”)

	Family	Neighborhood	Know personally	Meet first time	Another nationality	Another religion
18-24	99	42	76	8	16	10
25-34	99	42	80	5	15	10
35-44	97	59	85	11	17	12
45-54	98	58	87	11	15	13
55-64	98	67	85	11	16	14
65 and above	97	66	83	11	16	14
Overall	97	60	84	10	16	13

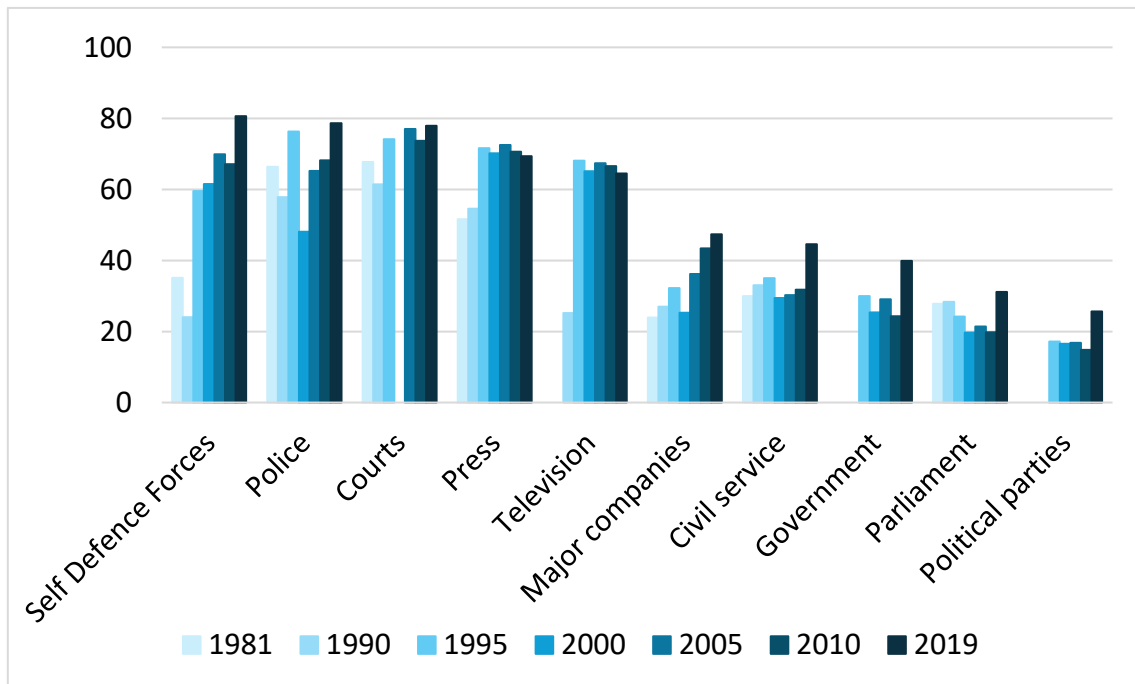
Source: World Value Survey data, accessed 24 January 2025. The table is developed by the author based on the WVS online data analysis (<https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>).

Regarding confidence in organizations, Inoguchi (2002) finds that Japanese trust nonpartisan institutions (such as “courts, police, civil service, and military”) more than partisan institutions (for instance, “parliament, parties, elected government, political leaders, big business, and mass media”) (2002: 378). Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the same trend. Figure 5 shows the percentage of people who expressed a high level of trust in these organizations, ranging from 1981 to 2019. Figure 6 focuses on people aged 18 to 24. Both figures demonstrate an overall similar trend and movements (ups and downs) depending on the year of the survey, except for the press and television.<sup>23</sup> The percentage of respondents between the ages of 18 and 24 who express trust in partisan organizations is lower than that of all respondents.

<sup>22</sup> The wave 7 survey is conducted in the USA in 2017.

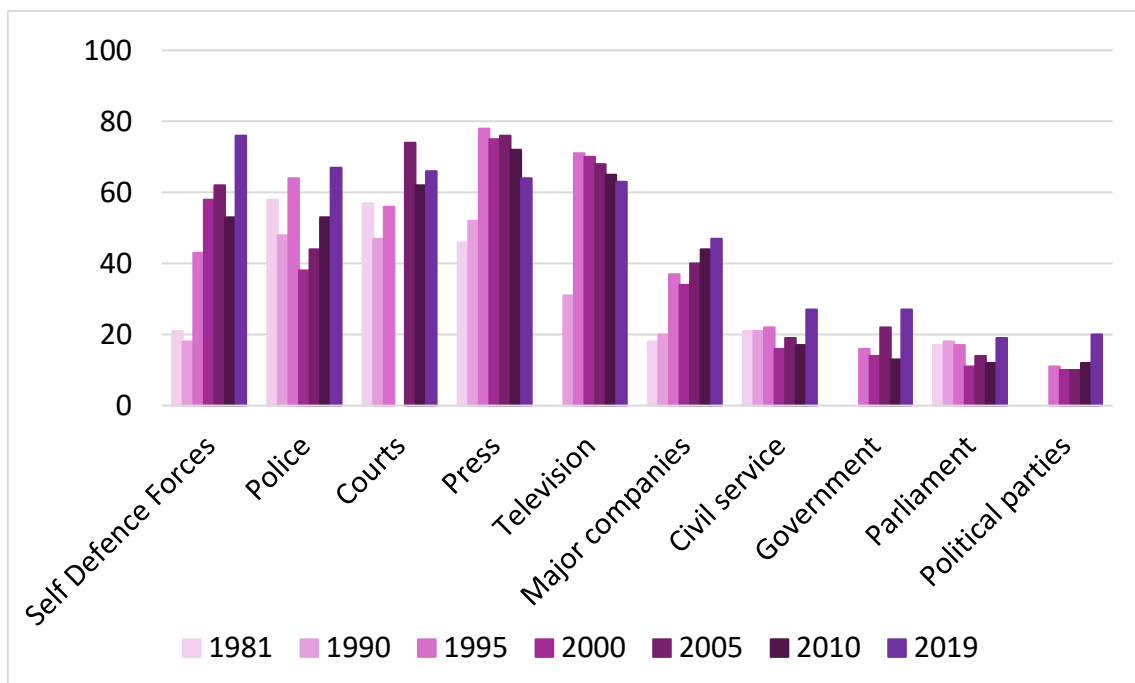
<sup>23</sup> There has been a decline in the proportion of 18-24 years old who have confidence in the press and television. This may be related to the decline in the number of people using these media in this the age group.

**Figure 5. Confidence in Organizations (%) – Overall**



Source: World Value Survey data, accessed 24 January 2025. The table is developed by the author based on the WVS online data analysis (<https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>).

**Figure 6. Confidence in Organizations (%) – Aged 18-24**



Source: World Value Survey data, accessed 24 January 2025. The table is developed by the author based on the WVS online data analysis (<https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>).

In summary, age and time seem to influence most of the changes observed in the four factors. Millennials and Gen Z find private life and politics more important than young people in the 1990s, but their interest in politics remains low: for Gen Z (the 18-24 age group in the 2019 survey), it is only 29 percent.

*Millennials and Gen Z find private life and politics more important than young people in the 1990s, but their interest in politics remains low.*

Indeed, “privatization” is on the rise across all age groups, and Japanese in general remain disinterested in politics. The separation between the public and private spheres and the Japanese expectation of the government to solve public issues, as argued by Ichihara (2024), seems to persist even among the young population. According to the WVS, the extent to which Japanese believe it is the government’s responsibility to provide for people’s needs has actually increased since 1990.<sup>24</sup> Concurrently, political trust in partisan organizations remains low, especially among younger people although it has been gradually increasing since 2000.

The nature of social trust in Japan does not seem to be changing from the “narrow and more closed” suggested by Inoguchi (2002). Furthermore, younger people show less trust in people they do not know. The findings seem to be consistent with Hamaguchi’s argument that “Japanese social trust is created on the basis of face-to-face and group settings”, cited by Inoguchi (2002: 383). Some positive signs emerged during the 1980s and 1990s in the proportion of people who adhere to postmaterialist values and in membership of voluntary organizations, but the tide seems to have reversed. In the case of membership in political parties and charitable organizations, it has been constantly low, even including inactive members, for both the 18-24 and 25-34 age groups: less than five percent from 1981 to 2019. Miyajima emphasizes the importance of the transformation from a sense of selfhood to a sense of citizenship as “privatization” deepens (1980:162). However, this change may not be observable, at least from the surveys.

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<sup>24</sup> The question asks whose responsibility it is, either the government or their own, to provide what people need, and people answer on a scale (1 as “People should take more responsibility” and 10 as “The government should take more responsibility”). The average level was 6.78 in 1989 and increased slightly to 7.05 in 2019 (the average is 7 of six surveys).

## 2.3. Political Participation

The WVS provides updates on the political participation of Millennials and Gen Z. Tables 4 and 5 summarize the level of political action among respondents aged 18-24. With the exception of signing a petition, almost no one aged 18-24 has taken

*With the exception of signing a petition, almost no one aged 18-24 has taken political action, including strikes, boycotts or demonstrations.*

political action, including strikes, boycotts or demonstrations. Moreover, the proportion of people who have taken political action has remained stable since 1981. The percentage of this age group is marginally lower than the average of all respondents, thereby indicating a general absence of political action in Japan.<sup>25</sup>

**Table 4.** Percentage of people aged 18-24 who have done following political action

	1981	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2019
Signing petition	21	26	20	35	19	12	19
Unofficial strikes	1	0	0	0	n.a.	1	0
Boycott	2	0	5	2	0	1	0
Peaceful demonstrations	2	2	1	2	0	1	0

Source: World Value Survey data, accessed 24 January 2025. The table is developed by the author based on the WVS online data analysis (<https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>).

**Table 5.** Percentage of people aged 18-24 who have done following actions using Internet and social media

	2019
Encouraging others to conduct political action	1
Organizing political events	0
Searching information about politics	18
Signing an electronic petition	0

Source: World Value Survey data, accessed 24 January 2025. The table is developed by the author based on the WVS online data analysis (<https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>).

<sup>25</sup> The percentage of overall respondents who use Internet and social media for the search of political information is less than those aged 18-24 (13.6 percent in 2019). The questions concerning online political action is included only in the wave 7 (2019 in Japan).



Due to the page limitations, this section does not disaggregate the survey results by other socioeconomic conditions (e.g., gender, income, education, urban-rural). Previous literature has found differences in these factors across political generations (Watanuki 1994) and correlations between socioeconomic factors and participation (Inoguchi 2002). Therefore, this section concludes by identifying some gaps and needs for further research.

### **3. Gen Z Persona Analysis**

The review of the WVS above presents that the changes in value, interest, associability, and attention appear to be related to the age and period. As for the generational effect, it is difficult to identify, partly because Gen Z is only covered in the latest survey. It would also be because the generational change may take a longer period of time than before due to the diversification of the life course and the absence of a drastic and major event such as rapid economic growth that affected an entire society (Asano 2024: 270-272). Therefore, this section explores at the individual level why some Gen Z engage with and participate in politics. What are the commonalities among these positive deviants? To answer these questions, the paper develops a few personas.

The first one is based on conversations with a college student who, along with other students, founded a social business in 2020 to promote citizen participation in administration. Through the experience of supporting a local councilor's election campaign, he recognized the limitations of existing communication channels between citizens and government. He identified pain points for both: Citizens do not believe that their voices are heard and will make a difference, therefore do not engage in public issues, whereas governments do not know how to address the diverse opinions of citizens and incorporate them into policy and service delivery even though they want to hear them. Leveraging these pain points, he developed an online participatory and consensus-building platform. The online platform was awarded by the UNDP Social Innovation Challenge Japan in 2021 and has actually been used by 60 municipalities (Digital Agency 2024). What is important for him is not starting a business but providing a solution to governments and local communities. A social business is identified as the most appropriate means to promote the idea.

Another persona is developed from an article in the Nikkei (“Hiyaku,” 2024-01-01: 19). The persona is an activist who initiated a project that aims to increase the number of women in their 20s and 30s in local councils. According to her interviews with the university newspaper, her interest in politics started in 2017 when she volunteered to support an election campaign. It provided her with an opportunity to reflect on the low voter turnout among young people and the negative image of political participation in Japan (*Keio Jyukusei Shimbun* 2024-12-15). She studied in Denmark where the youth voter turnout rate is notably high and found that people even in their early 20s can run for office (*Keio Jyukusei Shimbun* 2024-12-15). She started her activities with the friends she met while studying in Denmark.

The last persona is found in an interview with Change.org.<sup>26</sup> She was a university student who alone started an online petition to reduce the tax rate on menstrual products in 2019. Her research for the graduation thesis revealed that menstrual products were not included in the list of reduced sales tax items (Change.org Japan 2022-12-26). She later founded a nonprofit organization with other students from the same university, hoping to address menstrual issues as a universal concern (Minna no seiri, “About Us”). According to the 2019 WVS, the percentage of people using online petitions remains low. However, Change.org Japan reported 4.43 million users and 1,092 online petitions launched in 2023 (Change.org Japan 2024).

These are just a few examples of the active engagement of Gen Z in politics. Despite the limited scope of the present study, it is possible to identify some commonalities among these personas. Firstly, they are all motivated by issues they have experienced firsthand and care about. Secondly, they found partners to start an organization or business from their friends and networks who share the same values. Thirdly, they take advantage of online and digital tools (e.g., online petition, online platform), actively communicate with people in their age group, and proactively use learning opportunities (e.g., campaign support from Change.org Japan).

## 4. Recommendations

This section commences with a response to the question posed at the beginning of the paper: Why do some Millennials and Gen Z participate in politics and others do

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<sup>26</sup> Change.org Japan started online petition in Japan in 2012.

not? According to the WVS, Japanese society, not exclusively Millennials and Gen Z, exhibits a general disinterest in politics and a lack of engagement in political activities, although more Japanese than before consider politics important. A contributing factor appears to be the perception among many Millennials and Gen Z;

*Millennials and Gen Z do not see it as their responsibility to solve public problems and do not believe they can make a difference.*

They do not see it as their responsibility to solve public problems and do not believe they can make a difference. Consequently, Millennials and Gen Z members who actively engage with public issues are considered atypical. According to the persona analysis, they are driven by personal experiences and issues to which they attach importance. In addition, Millennials and Gen Z who are interested in politics may perceive digital tools as a natural means of addressing public issues. However, in general, social trust in Japan works better when there is a face-to-face relationship. This may be of particular pertinence for partisan organizations that lack the confidence of the general public.

The above answer suggests that fostering civic engagement among youth requires a systems approach: it would need collective action by government, political parties, NGOs and businesses because solutions entail changes in culture, education, politics and economy. That said, the paper suggests a series of initiatives to create more practical opportunities for Millennials and Gen Z in political engagement and to enable their meaningful contribution to the political process. Concurrently, it is critical to increase public interest in politics. Even if more opportunities for participation are created, those who are not interested may remain unaware of them and therefore do not participate. More specific recommendations for governments, political parties, and NGOs are provided below.

#### 4.1. For Governments

First, governments, particularly local ones, can create opportunities for young people to participate in policy making and budget allocation. More local governments are introducing digital tools to facilitate citizen participation (see the first persona), aligning with the recommendation. Another example comes from Yuza machi in Yamagata Prefecture, where a “youth assembly”—which possesses

its own budget for policy implementation—has been in operation since 2003 (NHK 2022-06-24). The assembly consists of 10 members and a town mayor, with junior high school and high school students having the right to run and vote (NHK 2022-06-24). In this approach, it is important not only to engage young people but also to make them feel that they can make a difference. To increase interest in politics, it would be useful to clarify the definition of politics and link it to school and community activities in which young people usually participate. For example, Uno

*An efficacious approach to addressing the separation between the public and private spheres would be to link it to young people's everyday lives.*

(2018) explains to the junior and high school students that making decisions in class such as deciding the destination of a school trip is part of politics (2018: 57-59). An efficacious approach to addressing the separation between the public and private spheres would be to link it to young people's everyday lives.

#### 4.2. For Political Parties

Political parties already have various means of engaging young people, which could be reinforced. For example, according to the persona analysis, the experience of election volunteers facilitated their engagement with public issues. Some political parties and members of parliament also accept internships. In partnership with universities, credit for internship experience will further facilitate participation. Another option is to extend support to younger election candidates. The minimum age of eligibility to run for the House of Representatives remains at 25, a matter that merits discussion. However, even under the current system, the percentage of members of parliament is very low. For individuals under the age of 30, the figure stands at 0.9 percent for men and 0 percent for women. For those under 40, it is 5 percent for men and 2.6 percent for women (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2024). The proportion is even lower than their share of the populations (see Section 2.2). A particular challenge is to involve those who are not interested. Communication in partnership with youth organizations and building trust through face-to-face opportunities could be further explored. According to the JCIE survey, young Japanese people believe that more information through TV and social media is needed to improve youth political participation, even though many political parties

use the Internet and social media (Shibata 2024).<sup>27</sup> This finding suggests that their messages and information are not reaching the intended audience. To address this issue, youth organizations may be able to provide guidance on effective communication and message dissemination from the youth's perspective. The WVS reports that young people lack confidence in political parties, which is another reason to work with youth organizations, as young people may trust them more. In the same vein, Japanese seem to build social trust through face-to-face interaction. There are examples of youth brunches in political parties, which organize various opportunities for interaction, study, and workshops together with Millennials and Gen Z. Such an approach, in addition to social media communication, will be useful to familiarize the roles of political parties.

*Youth organizations may be able to provide guidance on effective communication and message dissemination from the youth's perspective.*

### 4.3. For NGOs

NGOs, including academics, have a variety of expertise. Firstly, they can provide practical coaching and creating learning opportunities, to develop an organization or business based on their experience and knowledge. For example, various organizations have already provided start-up support for social businesses, which can be further expanded. In addition, NGOs could facilitate the expansion of networks among young people in Japan, thereby enabling Millennials and Gen Z to acquire skills and strategies from people with similar objectives. Thirdly, NGOs could connect the activities of Millennials and Gen Z to politics. For younger people, politics is not initially a part of their lives (which may be part of the reason why young people are not interested in politics as noted above). However, the changes they seek may require policy, regulatory and legal changes that require the support

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<sup>27</sup> This is in response to the questions “What is needed to improve youth political engagement? Please choose up to three options from the following list: (1) information through TV and SNS, (2) learning about politics and elections in school, (3) create an opportunity in school to discuss and build consensus on issues they care about, (4) online elections, (5) increased the number of politicians in the same generation, (6) lowering the age of the eligibility for elections”.

*For younger people, politics is not initially a part of their lives. However, the changes they seek may require policy, regulatory and legal changes that require the support of political actors.*

of political actors. Existing NGOs could facilitate the initial connection and broaden their voice. Finally, participatory and practical citizenship education outside of formal education also familiarizes people with public engagement and provides an entry point for addressing social challenges at the local level.



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# Case 2: South Korea

## How Are Young People Represented in Korea?

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### 1. Introduction

The terms “N-po Generation”<sup>1</sup>, “Satori Sedai,” “Strawberry Generation,” and “Boomerang Generation,” while originated from different countries, share a common thread in reflecting the economic hardships faced by young generations, particularly in the post-2008 global financial crisis era. In Japan, “Satori Sedai” emerged in the aftermath of the prolonged recession of the 1990s, describing youth who seek minimal satisfaction. Taiwan’s “Strawberry Generation” refers to those born during periods of economic prosperity but facing employment challenges. The “Boomerang Generation” in Western countries describes young adults returning to their parents’ homes due to financial constraints. In South Korea, the “N-po Generation” exemplifies this trend. The prefix “po-” is derived from the Korean word “포기” (pogi), which means “giving up.” Initially coined as “3-po (sampo) Generation” -

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<sup>1</sup> Kim, Bo-eun. “Young South Koreans Giving up on Marriage, Childbirth and Relationships.” *The Hankyoreh*. October 7, 2019.; Brasor, Philip. “Life Is Too Short for an Undesirable ‘Satori.’” *The Japan Times*. March 31, 2013.; London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). “The Boomerang Generation: Young People Stuck Living with Parents.” *LSE News*. March 2018.; Schott, Ben. “Strawberry Generation.” *The New York Times*. November 30, 2008.

referring to those giving up dating, marriage, and childbirth - it evolved to “5-po”, “9-po”, and finally “N-po” as economic pressures mounted. Terms like “880,000 won generation”<sup>2</sup> and “Hell Joseon”<sup>3</sup> further illustrate young people’s sense of despair amid economic instability. These circumstances have sparked increased interest in youth politics, though political representation remains limited.

The terms “N-po Generation” and “Hell Joseon” reflect more than just economic hardship among Korean youth; they represent a fundamental shift in how young people understand their social and economic challenges. While previous

*Today’s young people increasingly recognize their struggles as manifestations of deeper structural problems within Korean society.*

generations held strong beliefs that individual hard work could lead to climbing the social ladder, today’s young people increasingly recognize their struggles as manifestations of deeper structural problems within Korean society. The systemic nature of these challenges suggests that effective solutions must encompass political and policy changes,

as individual efforts alone are insufficient to address issues originating from social structures, economic systems, and policy frameworks. In this sense, this report examines youth political engagement in Korea through two key dimensions: voting patterns across different age groups and the representation of young people among political candidates and elected officials.

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<sup>2</sup> The term “880,000 won Generation” (팔십팔만원 세대) emerged in 2007 through a book titled “880,000 won Generation”. This term specifically describes young people in their 20s in South Korea who face precarious employment conditions and low wages. The figure “880,000 won” (approximately \$800 at the time) represented the average monthly income of temporary or irregular workers in their 20s during that period. In contemporary discussions, the “880,000 won Generation” is often referenced alongside other terms describing youth economic precarity, indicating when Korean society first began widely acknowledging the systematic economic challenges facing its young people.

<sup>3</sup> The term “Hell Joseon” (헬조선) emerged around 2015 in South Korean internet culture, combining the English word “hell” with “Joseon”, the name of Korea’s last dynastic kingdom (1392-1910). This term represents a scathing critique of contemporary Korean society, particularly from the perspective of young people.

## 2. Youth Voter Turnout

In representative democracy, voting serves as a primary means of expressing political will (Dalton 2004). Voting enables citizens to exercise influence over policy decisions, while governments gain legitimacy through electoral victories (Riker and Ordeshook 1968). Voting participation both reflects and cultivates democratic values and political efficacy, making turnout rates a key indicator of democratic health (Oser et al. 2022). Figure 1 examines age-based variations in voter turnout in Korean elections from 1996 to 2022, including both the National Assembly Election and the Local Election. Note that the minimum voting age in Korea has gradually lowered from 20 to 19 in 2005, and to 18 in 2020.<sup>4</sup>

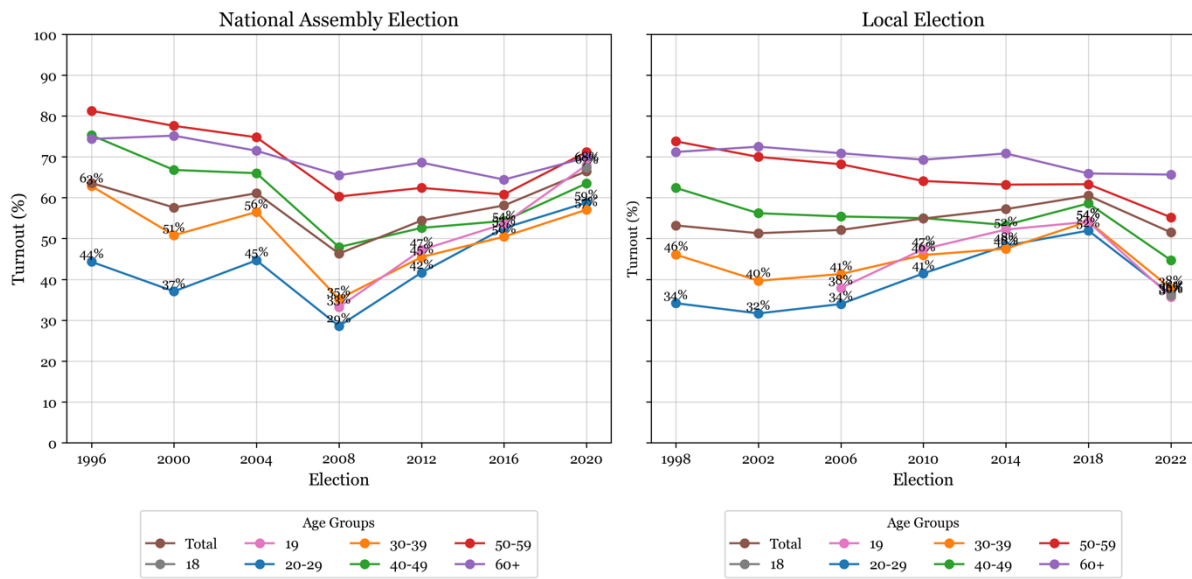
Turnout in the National Assembly Election reveals three distinct phases in youth participation. The first phase (1996-2008) was marked by a decline in turnout across all age groups, particularly among voters in their 20s. The 1996 election showed significant age-based disparities: while voters in their 20s showed 44% turnout, those in their 30s reached 63%, and older age groups demonstrated even higher participation with 60+ at 74% and 50s at 81%. The decline in youth voter turnout has continued, reaching its lowest point in 2008 at 29%. The second phase (2008-2016) witnessed a gradual recovery in participation rates. Youth turnout increased steadily: 42% in 2012, 53% in 2016, and 59% in 2020. The third phase, particularly evident in the 2020 election, demonstrated a remarkable convergence of turnout rates across age groups. First-time voters aged 18-19 showed especially high participation at approximately 68%, contributing to the smallest age-based turnout gaps. However, local election patterns reveal a different narrative. The overall turnout has remained relatively stable between 50-60%, but age-based participation gaps persist. While the 2018 election saw peak youth participation with voters in their 20s reaching 52%, the 2022 election showed decreased turnout across all age groups except those over 60. This decline was particularly pronounced among voters under 40, maintaining a 20-30 percentage point gap between youngest and oldest voters.

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<sup>4</sup> The National Election Commission analyzes turnout using systematic random sampling of approximately 5% of registered voters, combining individual voter data on gender, age, and region to calculate demographic-specific turnout rates.



**Figure 1.** Changes in Turnout by Age Groups



*The fluctuating youth turnout rates, particularly sensitive to electoral competitiveness, suggest that young voters are more strategic in their political participation rather than habitual voters.*

These patterns in voter turnout offer significant insights about youth political participation in Korea. The fluctuating youth turnout rates, particularly sensitive to electoral competitiveness, suggest that young voters are more strategic in their political participation rather than habitual voters. This is evident in both the 2008 National Assembly Election and the 2022

Local Election, where youth turnout dropped significantly when election outcomes seemed predictable. The contrast between the National Assembly Election and the Local Election patterns further indicates that young people perceive varying degrees of efficacy between central and local politics. A particularly noteworthy aspect is the high turnout (approximately 68%) among first-time voters aged 18-19 in recent elections, suggesting that new voters can be effectively mobilized through targeted engagement efforts. Moreover, the overall increase in youth turnout since 2008 coincides with the emergence of terms like “Hell Joseon” and “N-po Generation,” indicating that young people’s growing recognition of systematic challenges may be leading to increased political participation. Then, how does Korea’s political system reflect this increasing input from young voters in both electoral and policy-making processes? The following section examines this question by analyzing the presence

of young candidates and elected officials in both National Assembly and local elections, providing insight into the state of youth representation in Korean politics.

### 3. Low Descriptive Representation of Youth

Political representation can be understood through two key dimensions: descriptive representation, which pertains to the extent to which representatives reflect the demographic composition of their constituents, and substantive representation, which concerns the degree to which constituents' interests are effectively reflected in policy decisions (Pitkin 1969). Descriptive representation particularly influences voters' sense of political efficacy, which in turn impacts substantive representation. Voters often believe representatives with similar backgrounds will better understand and advocate for their experiences and needs (Arnesen and Peters 2018; Hayes and Hibbing 2017; Lowande, Ritchie, and Lauterbach 2019).

**Table 1.** Changes in Youth Candidates and Elected Representatives  
in the National Assembly Election

	Whole			20s		30s		40s		50s		60s+	
	N Cand	N Elected	Ratio	Can	Elec	Can	Elec	Can	Elec	Can	Elec	Can	Elec
1988	1039	224	4.6	21 (2%)	0	130 (13%)	11 (5%)	429 (41%)	81 (36%)	382 (37%)	109 (49%)	77 (7%)	23 (10%)
1992	1047	237	4.4	25 (2%)	0	142 (14%)	7 (3%)	289 (28%)	52 (22%)	492 (47%)	145 (61%)	99 (9%)	33 (14%)
1996	1385	253	5.5	37 (1%)	0	198 (14%)	7 (3%)	388 (28%)	54 (21%)	596 (43%)	142 (56%)	196 (14%)	50 (20%)
2000	1038	227	4.6	35 (3%)	0	134 (13%)	13 (6%)	308 (30%)	60 (26%)	334 (32%)	87 (38%)	227 (22%)	67 (30%)
2004	1167	243	4.8	9 (1%)	0	151 (13%)	23 (9%)	470 (40%)	84 (35%)	326 (28%)	97 (40%)	211 (18%)	39 (16%)
2008	1113	245	4.5	26 (1%)	0	132 (12%)	4 (2%)	438 (39%)	76 (31%)	375 (34%)	119 (49%)	152 (14%)	46 (19%)
2012	902	246	3.7	13 (1%)	0	20 (2%)	3 (1%)	236 (26%)	66 (27%)	433 (48%)	118 (48%)	200 (22%)	59 (24%)
2016	934	253	3.7	40 (2%)	0	50 (5%)	1 (0%)	197 (21%)	42 (17%)	458 (49%)	140 (55%)	209 (22%)	70 (28%)
2020	1101	253	4.4	15 (1%)	0	54 (5%)	6 (2%)	178 (16%)	28 (11%)	536 (49%)	157 (62%)	318 (29%)	62 (25%)



*The proportion of young candidates and elected officials has steadily declined.*

Table 1 shows changes in the number and proportion of candidates and elected representatives across age groups in the National Assembly Election since Korea's transition to democracy in 1987.<sup>5</sup> Overall, it shows that the proportion of young candidates and elected

officials has steadily declined. The 1988 election saw 21 candidates (2%) in their 20s and 135 candidates (13%) in their 30s. While no candidates in their 20s were elected, 11 representatives (5%) in their 30s won seats. The representation gap between younger and older age groups was already evident, with candidates in their 50s and 60s demonstrating a higher propensity to win seats in comparison to their proportion among all candidates. This age disparity has widened significantly over time. By the 21st National Assembly election in 2020, candidates in their 50s and 60s comprised 71% of all candidates and 87% of elected representatives. The decline in the number of young representatives is particularly stark: the 17th National Assembly had 23 members in their 30s (9%), but this number dropped to just 6 (2%) in the 21st Assembly. Representatives in their 40s also exhibited a decline, from 84 (35%) to 28 (11%).

Table 2 shows that turnout patterns across different age groups generally show similar patterns with slight differences. While the overall trend indicates a decline in youth representation, the change has been less dramatic than that observed in the National Assembly elections. Indeed, the proportion of candidates in their 20s and 30s actually increased from 7% to 11% between the 7th and 8th local elections, suggesting potentially positive developments in youth representation at the local level. This contrast between national and local trends suggests that local politics may provide more accessible avenues for young politicians to enter the political arena. This shift is not unrelated to a series of institutional changes implemented prior to the 8th Local Election of 2022, which created a more favorable environment for youth political participation.

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<sup>5</sup> The figures presented in this table focus exclusively on district constituency elections. They do not include youth candidates who were either nominated for proportional representation lists or elected through the proportional representation system.

**Table 2.** Changes in Youth Candidates and Elected Representatives  
in the Local Council Election

	Whole			20s		30s		40s		50s		60s+	
	N Cand	N Elected	Ratio	Can	Elec	Can	Elec	Can	Elec	Can	Elec	Can	Elec
1995	11936	4541	2.6	55 (0.5%)	22 (0.5%)	1391 (12%)	524 (12%)	3771 (32%)	1545 (34%)	5187 (43%)	1973 (43%)	1532 (13%)	477 (11%)
1998	7723	3489	2.2	26 (0.3%)	6 (0.2%)	939 (12%)	357 (10%)	2752 (36%)	1297 (37%)	3013 (39%)	1409 (40%)	993 (13%)	420 (12%)
2002	8353	3485	2.4	22 (0.3%)	4 (0.1%)	716 (9%)	227 (7%)	3079 (37%)	1348 (39%)	3162 (38%)	1386 (40%)	1374 (16%)	520 (15%)
2006	7968	2513	3.2	46 (1%)	6 (0.2%)	699 (9%)	165 (7%)	2991 (38%)	1061 (42%)	3049 (38%)	996 (40%)	1183 (15%)	285 (11%)
2010	5822	2512	2.3	27 (0.5%)	8 (0.3%)	347 (6%)	128 (5%)	1962 (34%)	881 (35%)	2486 (43%)	1140 (45%)	1000 (17%)	355 (14%)
2014	5377	2519	2.1	37 (1%)	6 (0.2%)	285 (5%)	82 (3%)	1362 (25%)	619 (25%)	2628 (49%)	1358 (54%)	1065 (20%)	454 (18%)
2018	5318	2541	2.1	74 (1%)	22 (1%)	302 (6%)	144 (6%)	1067 (20%)	535 (21%)	2586 (49%)	1315 (52%)	1289 (24%)	525 (21%)
2022	4445	2601	1.7	91 (2%)	54 (2%)	353 (8%)	231 (9%)	805 (18%)	486 (19%)	1880 (42%)	1122 (43%)	1314 (30%)	708 (27%)

#### 4. Nomination Process and Youth Representation

In December 2021, the eligibility age for candidacy was lowered to 18 years. The 8th Local Election, being the first election in the wake of this change, gave rise to considerable expectations for youth political participation. In response, major Korean political parties introduced various measures designed to enhance youth engagement in politics.

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The People Power Party (PPP) implemented the People Power Aptitude Test (PPAT) to expand youth representation.<sup>6</sup> This measure was introduced with the expectation that young candidates, who typically lack connections, financial resources, and organizational strength compared to established candidates, could compete on more equal terms through an assessment of their capabilities. In the

<sup>6</sup> The specific details of each party's nomination system are generally described based on Park et al. (2024).

nomination process, the PPP awarded additional points of up to 20% of votes received to young candidates participating in primaries for local government heads, metropolitan council members, and local council members. Additionally, to mitigate economic barriers to entry, the party reduced nomination screening fees by 50% for candidates under the age of 45.

**Table 3.** Party Nomination Systems for Youth Representation in South Korea

Feature	People Power Party (PPP)	Democratic Party (DP)
Definition of “Youth”	Under 45 years old	Under 45 years old
Candidate Requirements	PPAT (Preliminary Candidate Competency Test) required	No PPAT; internal party vetting
Nomination Fee	50% discount for youth	Waiver or reduction for youth candidates
Nomination Quota for Youth	Not mandatory	30% quota for youth candidates (20% for metropolitan, 30% for basic councils)
Youth Candidate Incentives	Up to 20% additional points in nomination score	Up to 25% additional points in nomination score
Youth Training System	Lacks institutionalized training mechanisms	Limited support through party programs

The Democratic Party (DP) also established various nomination systems to enhance youth representation. The party included a provision requiring efforts to include at least 30% young candidates when recommending candidates for local elections. Particularly for the 2022 local elections, the DP upgraded this initiative by stipulating that 30% of local council positions must be allocated to youth candidates, and it incorporated the compliance with youth nomination criteria as an evaluation item in the party duty audit of each regional committee chairperson. The party also implemented a differentiated bonus point system based on age: 25% for those under 29, 20% for those aged 30-35, 15% for those aged 36-42, and 10% for those aged 43-45. To alleviate economic barriers, the DP fully exempted primary deposit fees for candidates under 29 and reduced fees by 30% for candidates under 39. Furthermore, the party stipulated that a separate budget within 3% of regular subsidies should be allocated to support youth political development and nurture young candidates.

Despite these institutional arrangements, there has been no substantial improvement in the situation experienced by young politicians in field. Park et al. (2024) conducted in-depth interviews with 10 youth candidates aged 30 or below who ran or were elected in the 2022 local elections. According to the analysis, the most significant factor affecting the electoral success of young candidates is the ability to secure nominations from major parties. As one interviewee noted, “The so-called ‘independent candidate miracle’ is just a dream-like story that can only happen to established politicians.” However, in a context where regional chairpersons and party cooperation chairpersons monopolize nomination rights and organizational management authority, it is practically difficult for young politicians to participate and compete in the nomination process. Although the DP set a mandatory youth nomination ratio of 30%, the absence of enforcement mechanisms rendered the initiative’s implementation deficient. The bonus points awarded to youth candidates by both the PPP and DP were insufficient to overcome the structural barriers faced by young candidates.

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Another issue contributing to the underrepresentation of youth is the limitation of systems to nurture young politicians. Interviewees pointed out that current parties tend to focus on ‘showcase nominations’ in the immediate period preceding elections, lacking long-term systems for developing young political talent. Despite the existence of programs such as youth committees and political schools, young talents who have undergone these processes are not effectively utilized in actual political settings. One interviewee noted, “Instead of utilizing talents developed by the party, they often use outsiders through talent recruitment, leaving young political talents blocked from candidacy and living as so-called ‘political ronin’.” Another participant mentioned, “The political establishment should be cognizant of the methods to

*Despite the existence of programs such as youth committees and political schools, young talents who have undergone these processes are not effectively utilized in actual political settings.*

develop and utilize young people who are active from the grassroots level,” adding that “friends who have been active in politics from an early age, such as in university committees or youth committees, often end up being disposable tools for the political establishment.” These responses highlight the need for effective youth organizations within parties where young people can learn and grow with sufficient autonomy, similar to German-style youth organizations.

## 5. Discussion

The relationship between youth political participation and representation in Korea offers important insights into broader questions of democratic development. In South Korea, an increase in political awareness and participation among the youth

*In South Korea, an increase in political awareness and participation among the youth population, driven by recognition of structural challenges, has not automatically led to a corresponding descriptive representation.*

population, driven by recognition of structural challenges, has not automatically led to a corresponding descriptive representation. The discrepancy between voting behavior and electoral success suggest that formal political participation alone may not guarantee representation. These challenges are not unique to Korea. Japan and Taiwan face similar demographic pressures from low birth rates and aging populations. The generational divide in

economic experiences is also a prevalent occurrence across numerous developed democracies (Stockemer and Anlar 2024), as evidenced by the emergence of terms like “Satori Generation” in Japan and the “Strawberry Generation” in Taiwan. These parallel experiences suggest that the question of youth political representation is part of a broader challenge facing contemporary democratic societies, one that Korea has recently attempted to address through institutional reforms.

Prior to the 2022 local elections, notable institutional changes were implemented to enhance youth representation. These reforms encompassed the reduction of the eligibility age for candidacy to 18 years and the introduction of various reform measures by major political parties. These efforts yielded modest improvements in youth representation compared to the 7th local elections. While

these developments cannot be dismissed as insignificant, youth representation remains disproportionately low relative to population demographics. This gap between reform intentions and outcomes reveals the persistence of deeper structural barriers beyond formal eligibility requirements.

Addressing the persistent underrepresentation of youth in Korean politics requires substantive institutional reforms in two key areas. First, it is imperative to address the inequitable conditions confronting young candidates in the nomination process. Current quota systems remain largely advisory rather than mandatory. Although recent meritocracy and fairness debates have generated varying perspectives on quota systems among younger generations themselves (Hur 2021), research on women's quotas demonstrates that such systems can effectively mitigate representation gaps in the short term. It is therefore necessary to develop a consensus around quota systems while designing implementation methods that address concerns regarding fairness and minimize potential backlash.

The establishment of a sustainable youth political training pipeline is of equal importance. The current gap between the rise of youth voter participation and limited representation suggests that short-term nomination advantages are insufficient. The creation of systematic pathways for youth engagement would be best achieved through long-term investment in political education programs, internships in local councils, policy workshops, and participatory budgeting initiatives. This approach requires political parties to shift from external recruitment strategies toward internal cultivation of future leaders through structured and inclusive mechanisms.

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These institutional reforms would require substantial support from civil society actors. These actors must advocate for the implementation of the reforms and hold political parties accountable for meaningful, rather than symbolic, change. Beyond these practical considerations, however, the importance of addressing youth representation extends beyond the immediate policy concerns. As democracies evolve, maintaining meaningful dialogue and power-sharing across generations becomes crucial for their sustainability. Young people bring not only different

*The challenge of youth representation should be understood not simply as a matter of electoral politics, but as a fundamental issue of democratic sustainability.*

perspectives and priorities but also unique understandings of emerging social, economic, and technological changes. The effective representation of these groups in political institutions is essential for democracies to remain adaptive and responsive to evolving societal needs.

Moreover, ensuring youth representation helps maintain democratic legitimacy by demonstrating that political systems can effectively incorporate the voices and concerns of emerging generations. Therefore, the challenge of youth representation should be understood not simply as a matter of electoral politics, but as a fundamental issue of democratic sustainability. How political systems adapt to incorporate younger generations' perspectives and experiences will likely determine their long-term resilience and legitimacy.



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## Case 3: Taiwan

### Youth in the

# Democratic Political Processes in Taiwan

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In this article, an examination is conducted into 'the political participation of young individuals, with an initial focus on their engagement in voting and running for office. Next, an analysis of youth participation through political parties will be conducted. The focus of this analysis will be on how parties engage with young people, encourage their involvement in party organizations and training programs, develop loyal supporters, and select youth candidates for elections. Finally, we consider non-conventional forms of youth political participation, with a particular focus on social protests. In each dimension, an assessment is conducted to determine the impact of youth participation on representative democracy and the broader function of democracy.

## 1. Election Participation

Table 1 presents a comprehensive overview of the age and gender distribution of parliamentary candidates across years. It can be observed that the rate of youth participation has not increased significantly, remaining below 20%. This means that candidates under the age of 40 constitute less than 20% of the total, a proportion that does not proportionate to the demographic composition of the younger population. With regard to gender difference, while male candidate participation has

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remained relatively high, female participation has exhibited an upward trend over the years, from 29% in 2008 to 41% in 2024, denoting the rising female participation in politics.

**Table 1.** Engaging in Politics: Running for Office (2008-2024)

	percentage of candidates who are below 40	Percentage of male candidates	percentage of female candidates
2008	19%	71%	29%
2012	12%	68%	32%
2016	18%	66%	34%
2020	19%	62%	38%
2024	17%	59%	41%

Source: Central Election Commission

**Table 2.** Candidates for Legislature, Broken Down by Age

	Whole			Below 30		30-45		45-60		Above 60	
	N Cand	N Elected	Ratio	Can	Elec	Can	Elec	Can	Elec	Can	Elec
1998	498	225	0.45	3 (0.6%)	2 (0.9%)	196 (39%)	80 (36%)	258 (52%)	124 (55%)	41 (8.2%)	19 (8.4%)
2001	584	225	0.39	9 (1.5%)	5 (2.2%)	178 (30%)	82 (36%)	330 (57%)	118 (52%)	66 (11%)	20 (8.9%)
2004	493	225	0.46	5 (1%)	2 (0.9%)	146 (30%)	60 (27%)	273 (55%)	141 (63%)	69 (14%)	22 (10%)
2008	524	113	0.22	13 (2.5%)	1 (0.9%)	230 (44%)	25 (22%)	231 (44%)	71 (63%)	50 (9.5%)	16 (14%)
2012	410	113	0.28	8 (2%)	0 (0%)	117 (29%)	29 (26%)	216 (60%)	73 (65%)	69 (17%)	11 (9.7%)
2016	556	113	0.19	31 (5.6%)	1 (0.9%)	155 (28%)	35 (31%)	270 (49%)	62 (55%)	100 (18%)	15 (13%)
2020	647	113	0.17	26 (4%)	1 (0.9%)	173 (27%)	20 (18%)	300 (46%)	70 (62%)	148 (23%)	22 (19%)
2024	505	113	0.22	15 (3%)	1 (0.9%)	139 (28%)	20 (18%)	221 (44%)	71 (63%)	130 (26%)	21 (19%)

Source: Central Election Commission

In order to facilitate a comparative analysis of electoral participation in Taiwan, an examination is conducted of the election candidate participation rate, disaggregated by age groups, as illustrated in Table 2. As shown, the percentages of young people running as candidates and being elected are significantly lower compared to other age groups.

Next, we look at the voting participation rate, breakdown by age groups. In order to facilitate the analysis of electoral participation in Taiwan with that in other Asian countries, we utilize the fifth wave of the Asian Barometer Survey (ABS). We use the following question: “Thinking of whether you voted or not ever since you became eligible for voting, how would you describe yourself – have you voted in every election, voted in most elections, voted in some elections or hardly ever voted?” The respondents who indicated that they had voted in every election and in most elections were classified as frequent voters, while those who responded that they had voted in some elections and had hardly ever voted were classified as infrequent voters. The percentage of frequent voters among those under 40 is 34% lower than that of those 40 and older (Wu 2024).

Two electoral institutions designed to boost youth participation in the electoral process are currently under consideration. The first one is the reduction of the minimum age for voting. In 2018, the legal age to vote in national referenda was lowered from 20 to 18. The subject under discussion is the possibility of reducing the voting age for general elections to 18 years of age. In 2022, the Legislative Yuan approved a constitutional amendment that would lower the voting age to 18. The proposal was met with overwhelming support from all parties (*Taiwan News* 2022-03-25). However, the proposed amendment ultimately failed in the subsequent referendum, which took place at the end of the year, along with the city and county mayoral elections (*Taipei Times* 2022-11-28). The age of maturity in the Civil Code was set at 18 in 2023, creating a discrepancy whereby individuals aged 18 and 19 are required to pay tax but do not enjoy voting rights.

The second issue pertains to the introduction of absentee voting, which has been demonstrated to facilitate the exercise of the voting right by students, laborers, and aboriginal citizens who are not resident in their hometowns. Absentee voting has been demonstrated to be an effective method of encouraging voter participation. The current government endorses the concept of transfer voting (移轉投票), which allows voters living away from their hometown to cast their ballots in person at their

current place of residence. A series of public hearings demonstrated that this aspect enjoys a higher degree of social consensus (Central Electoral Commission 2020). The aspect of the proposal that has been the subject of debate is the inclusion of mail-in voting (通訊投票) for Taiwanese citizens residing abroad. The opposition has asserted that Taiwanese citizens living in China might be susceptible to the influence of the Chinese government, which could impinge on their capacity to exercise their right to vote freely (Pan 2021).

## 2. The Participation in Political Parties

In recent years, Taiwan's major political parties have implemented mechanisms to strengthen their strategies for engaging young people and encouraging them to run as candidates. For instance, the Kuomintang (KMT) has strengthened its

*In the recent legislative elections, the proportion of young candidates who have been nominated by political parties has increased.*

recruitment efforts among young people, encouraged their participation in primaries, and adjusted candidate selection methods to give greater weight to young candidates in the primary. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has eliminated clauses that guarantee the renomination of incumbent candidates, thereby creating more opportunities for new entrants.

In the recent legislative elections, the proportion of young candidates who have been nominated by political parties has increased. Moreover, an increasing number of young individuals are being included on the legislator-at-large list during elections. Additionally, political parties have strengthened their youth organizations, rendering them more institutionalized and granting them a role in party decision-making.

Major political parties also organize summer camps to attract and train young people who are interested in politics and public affairs. These political camps play a critical role in democratic development. Without them, parties would struggle to attract and retain talented individuals. In such cases, the selection of new candidates might become heavily concentrated among the second generation of political families. The strategic engagement of young people in political camps serves to prepare them for roles that include council assistants, party officers, campaign personnel, and local council candidates. Another purpose of these camps is to solicit



the input of young individuals regarding the enhancement of youth policies.

The participation of young people in political parties positively impacts the development of the parties themselves. This is especially evident in former authoritarian parties such as the KMT, where ideological inflexibility, candidate selection, and decision-making processes have exhibited signs of stagnation. For instance, the aging of candidates has become a significant concern, highlighting the potential for greater youth involvement to prompt necessary reforms within the party. In addition, while the older generations within the KMT tend to oppose same-sex marriage, the younger generations have openly expressed support for it. Additionally, younger KMT members are more likely to take a clear stance in favor of safeguarding democracy and in opposition to Beijing's aggressive actions. "The influence of young people has prompted the party to advocate for a reduction in the voting age to 18.

Political camps organized by parties can also result in unintended negative consequences, particularly in the deepening of political polarization. While these camps are designed to attract and cultivate young talent, their curricula often prioritize inter-party rivalry over substantive discussions of economic and social policies. For instance, in the training camps run by the DPP, significant attention is placed on

*Political camps organized by parties can also result in unintended negative consequences, particularly in the deepening of political polarization.*

the subject of political repression during the Cold War era, which occurred under the governance of the KMT. Another central theme of the camp is the portrayal of opposition parties as proxies for China, with their actions depicted as attempts to betray or sell out Taiwan. Such narratives can strongly influence and entrench particular political perspectives among the participants. This emphasis on political issues has the effect of sidelining discussions of significant socioeconomic issues, thereby creating a disconnect between the camps and the issues that concern the general youth population. Furthermore, the primary messages disseminated in the camps discourage mutual understanding and partisan cooperation, instead fostering a more confrontational ideology among the participants.

The DPP's alignment with the sentiments of young people regarding Taiwanese identity, as well as their stance against the KMT as a former authoritarian



party, has led to the establishment of close ties between the DPP and student unions. In numerous universities, student union officers frequently transition to roles within the campaign teams of DPP legislators or assume positions as legislative assistants. Joining a student union and becoming an officer often serves as a stepping stone for a career within the DPP. A similar pattern also occurs in the KMT, although to a lesser degree. A number of students who participate in the summer camps organized by the DPP often serve as student union officers. They tend to align with the DPP's positions on major issues and may act as online supporters, defending the ruling party's policies or challenging proposals put forth by opposition parties.

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The involvement of young people in political processes orchestrated by political parties has the potential to both strengthen democracy and pose challenges to it, reflecting the complex dynamics of their participation. On the positive side, they play a vital role in advancing democratic development. By advocating for transitional

justice, for instance, they seek to enhance accountability and reveal the truth. Youth movements often highlight the need for social change and inclusivity, making important contributions to the protection and expansion of civil rights, environmental sustainability, and social justice.

Nevertheless, there are instances in which the political participation of young individuals poses challenges to democracy. For example, in 2024, the emergence of a divided government saw the opposition parties, KMT and TPP (Taiwan People's Party) propose several bills aimed at fortifying the legislature's powers—policies previously championed by the DPP. In response, the president threatened that if the opposition parties insist to pass bills, young supporters would exert pressure on the opposition legislators. This raised concerns about the utilization of external forces by the elected president to influence internal decision-making processes within the representative system. This has led to apprehensions about the potential undermining of representative democracy.

The practice of labeling opposition parties as “pro-China” has gradually diminished the effectiveness of political mobilization. This phenomenon was exemplified during the 2024 presidential election, where the majority of young

people did not support the DPP candidate as many young voters have shifted their support to the centrist TPP. The electorate's motivations for voting against the DPP were twofold: first, the perception that the DPP's political agenda was detrimental to their economic well-being, and second, a general fatigue about the DPP's "anti-China, protect Taiwan" narrative. Many young people did not subscribe to the notion that the opposition candidates would sell out Taiwan. The failure to secure a majority of young voters in the 2024 presidential election is an important factor contributing to the decline in DPP's popular votes. To regain support from young voters, the DPP government opted not to revise its policies. Instead, the government relied on strategies like judicial actions and media campaigns targeting the centrist TPP. These efforts were aimed at weakening the TPP's influence and appealing to younger constituents.

### 3. Participate in Civil Society Organizations and Social Protests

Despite the tendency of young people to exhibit relatively low levels of political engagement in formal electoral processes, recent years have witnessed an increase in their participation in non-electoral political activities, especially in various protest movements. One key factor contributing to this shift is the political stance and historical

*Recent years have witnessed an increase in their participation in non-electoral political activities, especially in various protest movements.*

legacy of KMT. The KMT, having functioned as the former authoritarian ruling party during the martial law era, is still regarded by many as representing conservative, pro-establishment interests. Its comparatively accommodating stance toward China has also emerged as a contentious issue, particularly among younger generations who are more inclined to support a distinct Taiwanese identity and to resist closer ties with Beijing.

This tension was evident during the period between 2008 and 2016, when the KMT regained power and held both the presidency and a legislative majority. Policies and agreements that appeared to increase Taiwan's economic and political dependence on China, such as the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement, incited widespread protests. This movement was spearheaded by students and young

activists who occupied the Legislative Yuan to impede the agreement. This anti-establishment movement has directly led to the rise of two new parties, White Force and the NPP, both of which predominantly field young candidates.

A comparable surge of youth-led activism has resurfaced in the aftermath of the 2024 legislative elections, wherein the KMT once again secured a majority in the Legislative Yuan. The party has since proposed a series of legislative reforms, including efforts to expand the powers of the legislature. However, critics argue that these measures could potentially undermine democratic checks and balances and tilt the political system in favor of the KMT. These developments have incited a resurgence in resistance from civil society groups and young people, who fear a regression in democratic accountability. Activists, predominantly college students, have organized large-scale demonstrations. Moreover, certain individuals and organizations have taken additional measures by launching recall campaigns targeting over a dozen KMT lawmakers, aiming to hold them accountable through direct democratic means.

Some of the bills championed by the KMT—and now being cited by the DPP and certain civil society organizations (CSOs) as justification for recall campaigns—were, in fact, originally proposed by the DPP. This irony highlights the political maneuvering behind the recall efforts. These recall campaigns are being interpreted by many as an attempt by the ruling DPP to regain a majority in parliament. In fact, over 54% of young voters have expressed opposition to the recall campaign (Taiwanese Public Opinion Foundation 2025). While the utilization of recall mechanisms is a legitimate part of democratic processes when applied responsibly, their exploitation for political gain undermines their intended purpose. The potential repercussions of the ruling party's mobilization of youth and civil society under the banner of “defending democracy” to advance political agendas are significant, as it may lead to the exacerbation of social divisions.

Encouraging youth political participation without exposing them to the influence of political parties is challenging, particularly in Taiwan, where increasing political polarization—exacerbated by China's threat—complicates the issue. However, several potential strategies could help address this. First, political parties can nominate more young candidates who come from non-political backgrounds, such as professional or civic fields, rather than from parties' own farm systems. Second, civil society organizations and the media should play an active role in

overseeing the content of party-run training camps and how party mobilize the youth. Third, party camps should have a stronger focus on socioeconomic issues rather than partisan agendas. Finally, it would be ideal for major political parties to jointly organize these training camps, fostering dialogue and mutual understanding among young participants to expose to diverse political perspectives. We summarize the suggestions in the table below.

**Table 3.** Youth Participation:  
Strategies for Independence from Adverse Party Effects

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Description</i>
1. Nominate young candidates from non-political backgrounds	Encourage parties to select young candidates with experience in professional or civic sectors rather than party insiders.
2. Civil society and media oversight	Encourage the active involvement of civil society and media in supervising how parties conduct youth training and mobilization.
3. Focus on socioeconomic issues in training curriculum	Parties shift the emphasis of training programs toward socioeconomic challenges rather than partisan ideology.
4. Joint training camps by major political parties	Encourage collaboration among parties to jointly host training camps that promote cross-party dialogue and expose youth to diverse viewpoints.

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## Case 4: Mongolia

### The Youth of Mongolia:

### Their Perspectives and Political Participation

**Ganbat Damba**

Chairman of Board, Academy of Political Education of Mongolia

Mongolia transitioned to democracy 35 years ago, marking a significant milestone in its political history. Over the past two decades, scholars and research institutes have highlighted both the progress and setbacks in this democratic journey. Since 1990, there has been a marked evolution in citizens' understanding of and expectations from democracy. Trust in democratic institutions and active citizen participation are still critical indicators of the continued development of democracy in Mongolia. Notably, the democratic values, political education, and engagement of the younger generation will play a decisive role in shaping the future of Mongolia's democratic system.

The future of democracy, particularly in a transitioning society like Mongolia, will largely depend on the development of beliefs, values, understanding of democracy, and political participation of the younger generation. This article draws on recent survey data (Asian Barometer 2021) to examine the attitudes, perspectives, and engagement of

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Mongolian youth with democracy, thereby offering valuable insights into this critical case study. This analysis will be built upon to address the following questions.

How can governments represent the interests of emerging generations, such as Millennials and Gen Z, in the democratic political processes? How can political parties establish effective communication channels to connect with the opinions of Millennials and Gen Z in the formal political space? How can civil society organizations engage with the actions of Millennials and Gen Z in public spheres? At the end, this study develops policy suggestions that can generate policy impact, and also offers a comparative or regional perspective on a given topic.

## 1. The Image and Attitude of the Younger Generation

The initial step in this analysis is to examine the percentage of Millennials and Gen Z within Mongolia's age structure, based on statistical data. The age distribution of these groups was calculated using the Pew Research Center model, which was also applied to analyze the ABS data used in this article. As of 2023, individuals aged 0–44 comprise 75.61% of Mongolia's population, reflecting a relatively young society. Among them, Millennials represent 23.43%, while Gen Z accounts for 20.60%.

To initiate this investigation, an examination will be conducted into the level of political interest among the younger generation, focusing on their engagement with information related to politics and governance, as well as their participation in political processes such as social activism and elections. In this analysis, Millennials and Gen Z will be examined separately within Mongolia's age structure, while individuals from other age groups will be grouped together and categorized as “Others.”

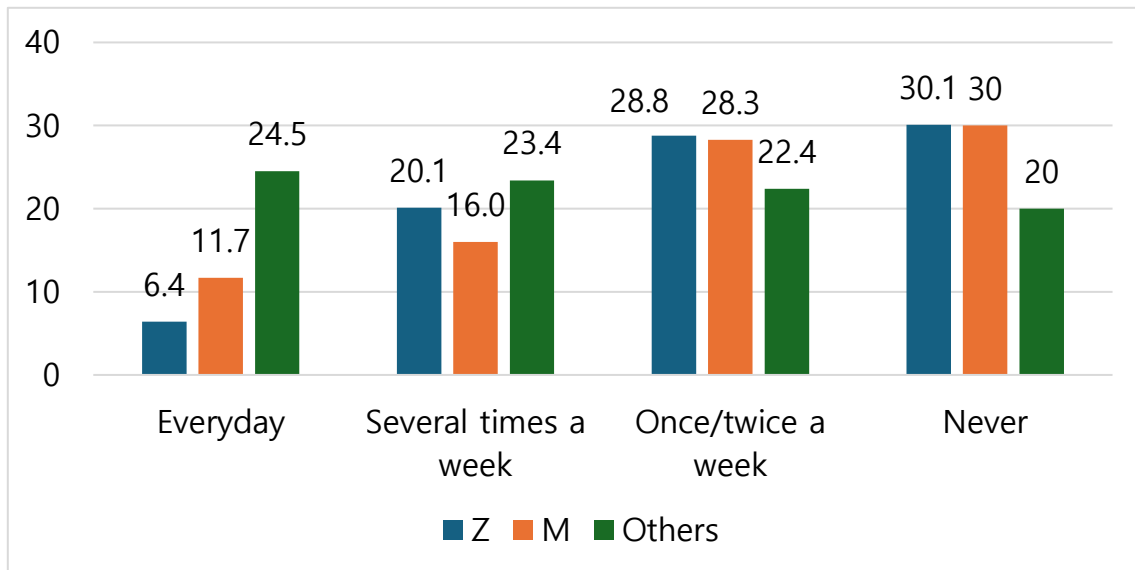
*72–79% of the two younger generations stated that they are “not very much” or “not at all” interested in politics.*

In response to the inquiry regarding their level of interest in politics, approximately one-third of the respondents aged 44 and above answered “Very interested” or “Somewhat interested.” In comparison, 26.8% of Gen Z and 20.3% of

Millennials provided the same response. Interestingly, older generations, who have been exposed to over seventy years of communist propaganda in Mongolia, exhibit relatively lower levels of interest in politics. Meanwhile, 72–79% of the two younger generations stated that they are “not very much” or “not at all” interested in politics.

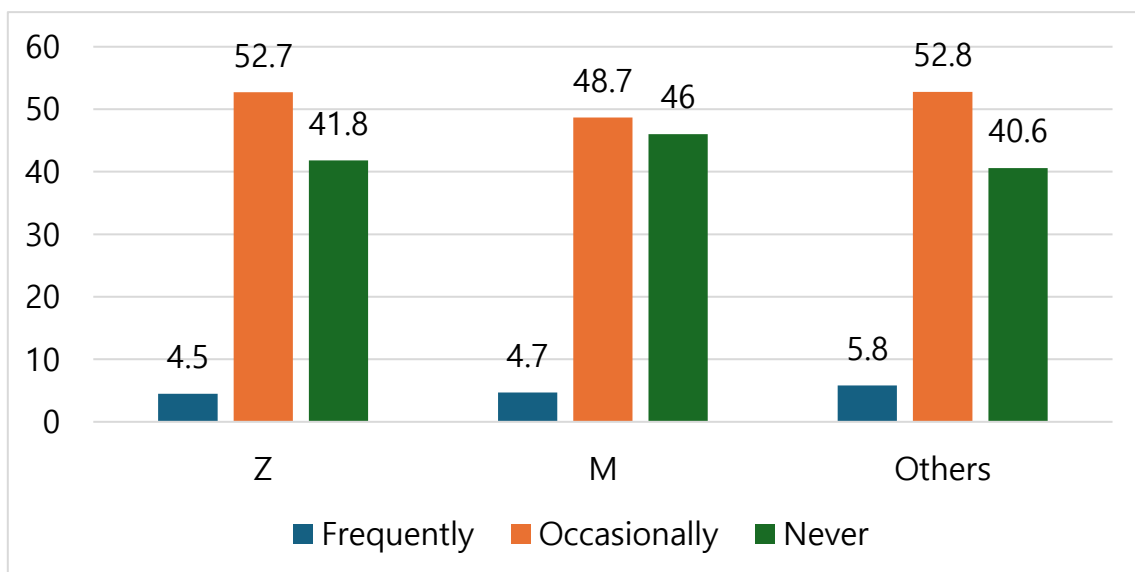


**Figure 1.** “How often do you follow new about politics and government”



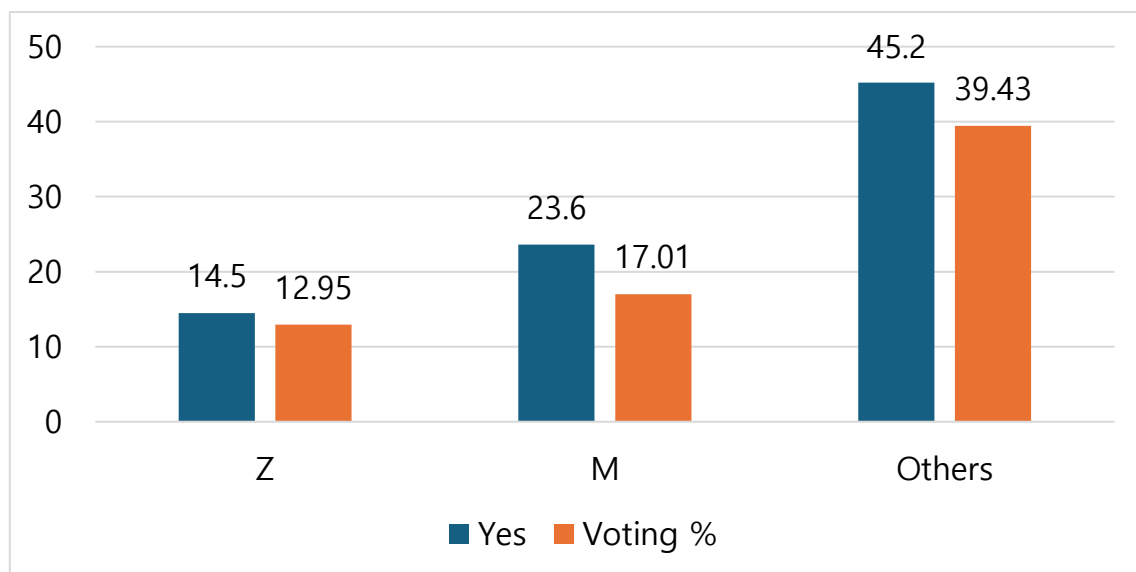
The “others” age group demonstrates a higher likelihood of following political news and related information. Among the younger generations, Millennials exhibit slightly more interest in politics compared to Generation Z. However, approximately one-third of both Millennials and Gen Z report little to no interest in political and governance-related information.

**Figure 2.** “How often do you discuss politics”



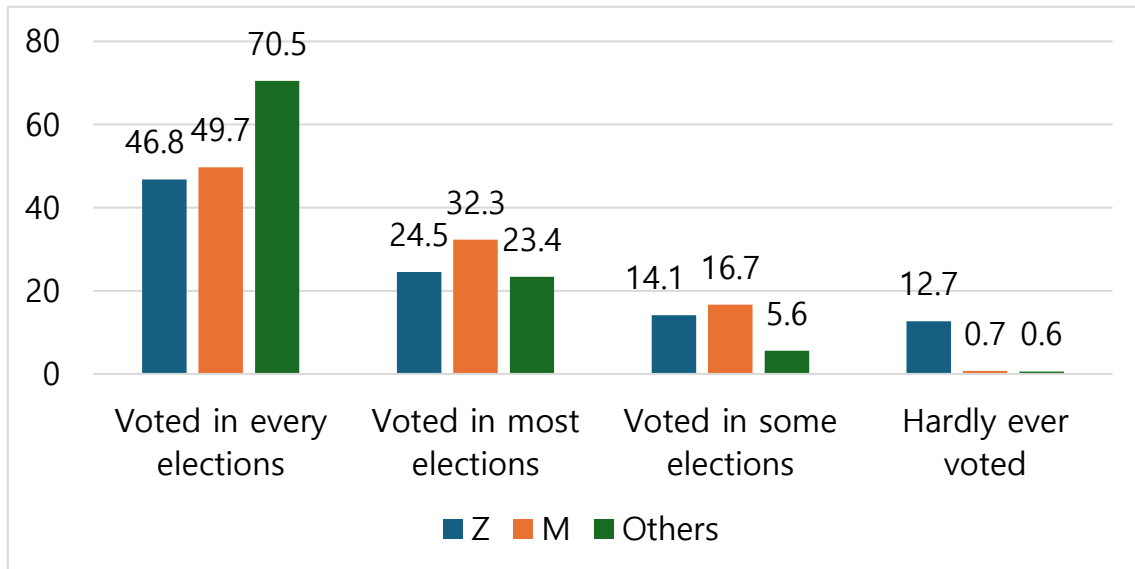
An important measure of civic engagement within a democratic society is a participation in elections. The ABS 6 survey included a question about voter participation in the 2021 presidential election, which was conducted in 2022. According to this data, 69.5% of Generation Z reported having participated in the 2021 election, constituting approximately 14.5% of all respondents who provided a positive response. For Millennials, 83.0 % answered positively about their participation in this election, which is 23.6 % of all samples in 2022. If we take a percentage comparison among all voters, even Generation M showed slightly higher participation than Gen Z, this figure remains lower—around 38%—compared to other age groups. This trend is consistent with the turnout ratios of Generations Z and M in the 2024 parliamentary elections. Both Generation M and Z together accounted for around 30% of all voters (Gen M 17.01 and Gen Z 12.95 respectively). The results of the 2024 parliamentary elections were derived from the official data provided by the General Election Commission (General Election Committee of Mongolia n.d.).

**Figure 3.** Election participation (2021/2024)



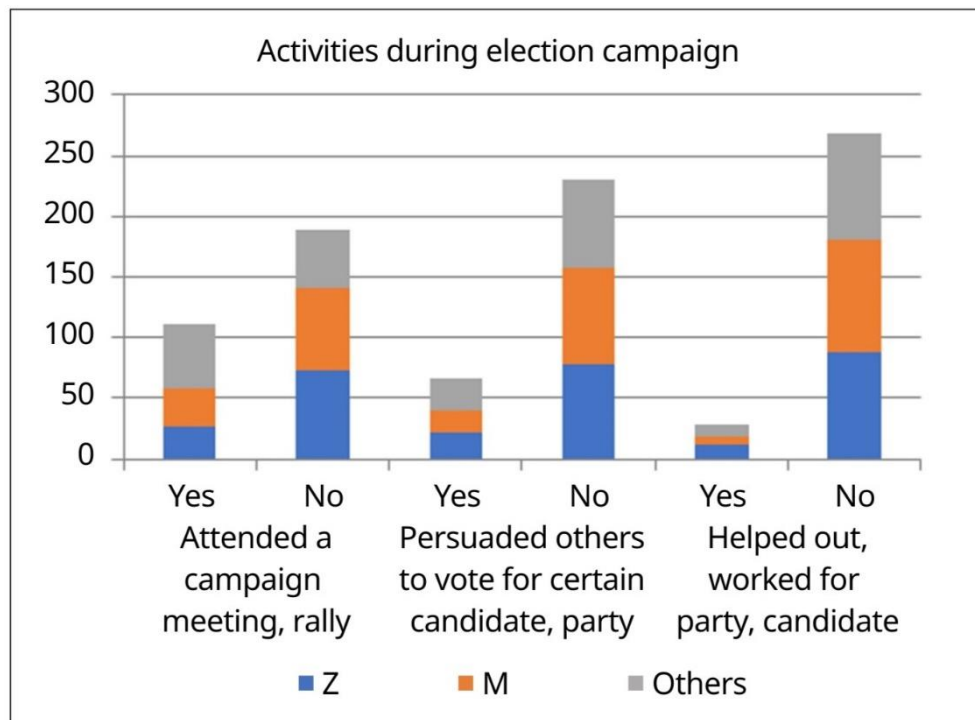
Overall, when examining voter participation in general elections since reaching voting age, the 44+ age group shows the highest level of engagement, with 70.5% reporting that they have voted in all elections. Among the younger generations, approximately 46.8–49.7% indicated that they voted in every election, while 24.5–32.3% reported voting in most elections.

**Figure 4.** Voting frequency



Beyond simply casting a ballot, engaging in more active election-related activities, such as supporting a candidate or party or attending a campaign meeting, serves as a more advanced indicator of political engagement. Among these forms of participation, attending candidate meetings and rallies is relatively common. However, younger generations tend to be less active in this regard, while the 44+ age group shows higher levels of involvement. On the other hand, encouraging others to vote for a candidate or participating directly in a candidate's campaign remains quite rare.

**Figure 5.** Activities during election campaign

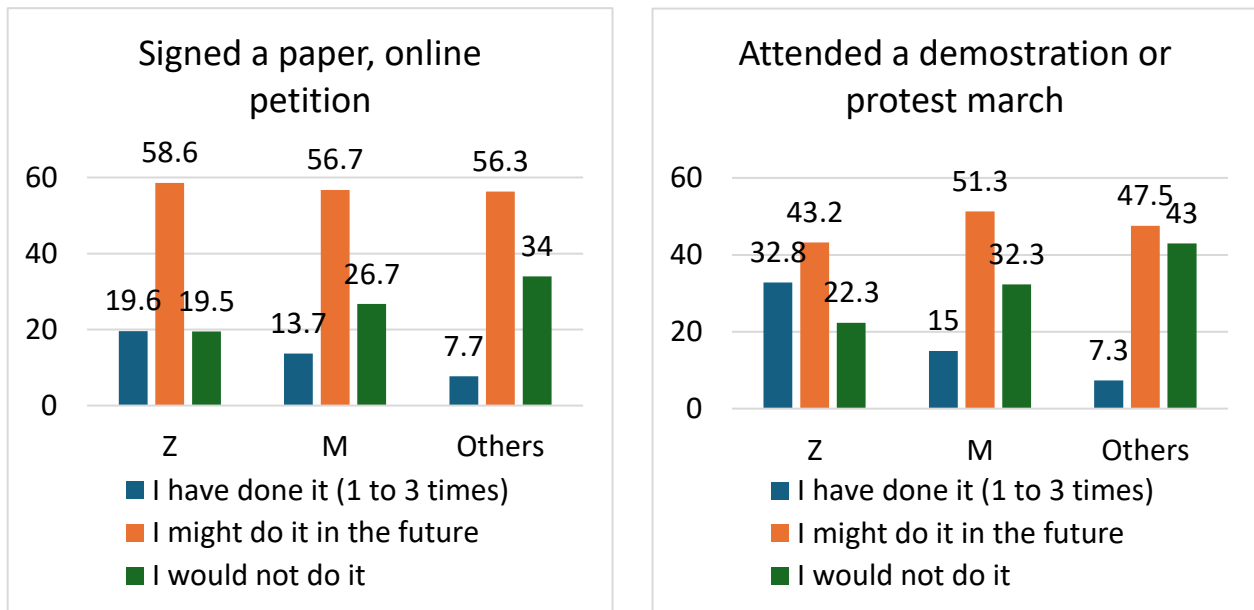


*32.8% of Gen Z reported participating in intensive forms of engagement, which is twice the rate of Gen M and more than four times the rate of other age groups combined.*

In addition to electoral participation, which is a key aspect of the political process, our survey data allow us to compare other forms of political engagement outside of elections. For instance, we examined participation in activities such as contacting elected officials, representatives, civil servants, or the news media. Alongside these routine actions, we also inquired

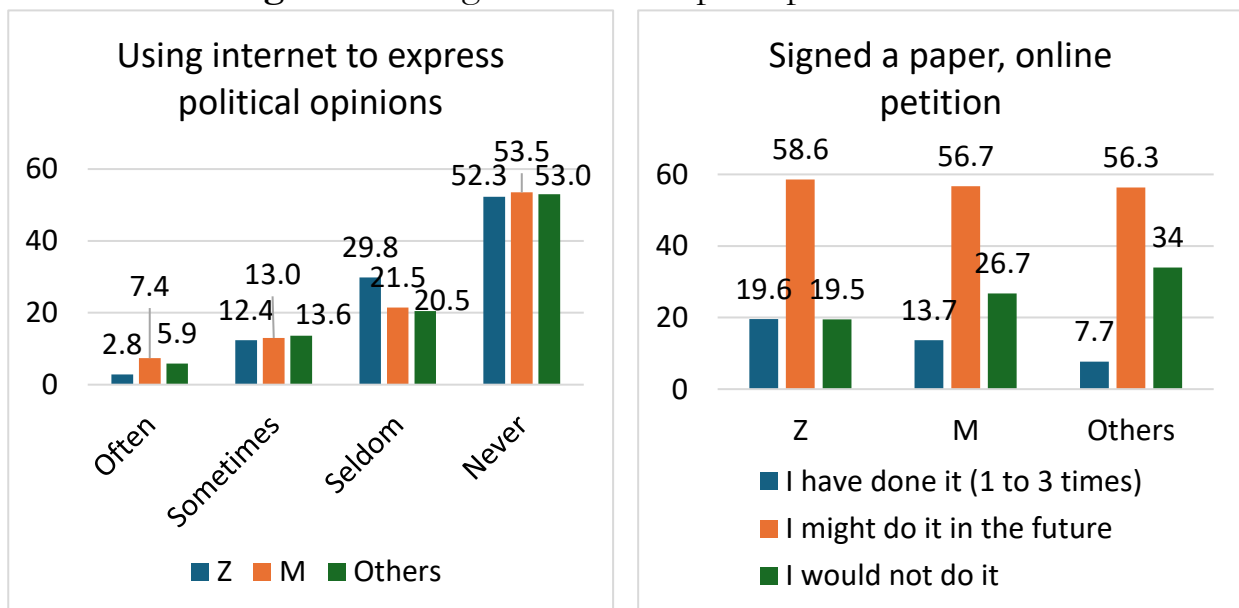
about more intensive forms of engagement, such as signing petitions, joining activist groups, or participating in demonstrations and protests. Notably, 32.8% of Gen Z reported participating in such events, which is twice the rate of Gen M and more than four times the rate of other age groups combined. At the same time, a significant portion of respondents indicated a willingness to participate in the future: 43.2% of Gen Z, 51.3% of Millennials, and 47.5% of those in the “others” category. In contrast, the percentage of those who stated they would never participate was relatively low: only 22.3% of Gen Z and 32.3% of Millennials.

**Figure 6.** Political participation forms



Also, in the era of scientific and technological development, these generations are more likely to be active in the social world. For instance, expressing political opinions online or showing and sharing support for various initiatives online is becoming a norm in Mongolia's political life. In the ABS survey data, respondents were asked whether they had engaged in such activities in the past three years, and it is noteworthy that a high percentage of respondents indicated that they would be willing to express their views in this way in the future, which is an important point of interest.

**Figure 7.** Using internet to express political view



## 2. How Young Generations Can Be Involved in the Political Processes in the Case of Mongolia

Recent literature suggests that these generations face unique challenges and concerns that differ from those of previous generations, such as economic inequality, evolving social status, climate change, digital rights, and social justice. Therefore, to effectively represent the interests of emerging generations like Millennials and Gen Z in democratic political processes, many governments are taking various measures to ensure that their interests are heard and addressed (Asia Development Bank 2018).

### 2.1. For Governments

In Mongolia, the government has taken several steps to represent the interests of emerging generations, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, in democratic political processes. Although there are still areas for development, various efforts have been made to engage these younger generations in political participation, address their concerns, and ensure that they have a voice in shaping the country's future. Some examples of actions taken by the Government of Mongolia:

#### Youth Representation and Participation

Mongolia has established a “Youth Parliament”<sup>1</sup> under the patronage of the Speaker of Parliament G. Zandanshatar (State Great Khural) in 2021, a platform aimed at providing young people with an opportunity to participate directly in political

*The Youth Parliament serves as a mechanism for young people to express their views and concerns and acts as a liaison between the youth and the government.*

dialogue. It serves as a mechanism for young people to express their views and concerns and acts as a liaison between the youth and the government. As part of this parliamentary initiative, local mini-parliaments were supported in all 21 provinces and in the capital to select young student representatives for the Youth Parliament through a competition. The Youth Parliament is part of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.youthparliament.mn>

a broader effort to foster democratic engagement among younger generations, such as Millennials and Gen Z.

Several measures and initiatives have been taken by the government, civil society and international organizations to encourage youth participation in elections. The Law on Supporting Youth Development, passed in 2017, aimed to enhance youth participation in social and political spheres. It included mechanisms to reflect youth opinions in elections and increase their engagement. For example, provisions allowing students and young workers to vote early were legally supported. International organizations such as the EU through the TACIS program in 1996-2000 and UNICEF have supported youth leadership in Mongolia to increase election participation. For instance, UNICEF's "Young Trainers" program has trained over 200 young people since 2023, equipping them with skills to influence their peers and explain the importance of elections in a democratic society. But youth voter turnout remains insufficient, especially in local elections. In the 2020 parliamentary election, youth made up 44% of eligible voters, but less than half cast their ballots. The Generation M and Z together made up about around 30% of all voters in the 2024 elections (Gen M 17.01 and Gen Z 12.95 respectively). This is attributed to a lack of trust in politics, inadequate information, or a limited understanding of the importance of elections in a democratic society.

### **Digital Engagement and Technology Use**

Digitalization in Mongolia has made significant strides in recent years, with the government and various organizations working to improve digital services and integrate technology into public administration, education, and communication. However, this rapid shift to digital platforms poses several challenges, particularly when it comes to protecting human rights in the digital sphere. Mongolia has embraced digital technology in various sectors to modernize its governance, education, economy, and public services. Several initiatives have been introduced to support this transition, such as "E-Government Services." The Mongolian government has developed e-government initiatives to make government services more accessible to citizens. Through the "E-Mongolia" platform, people can access a range of public services online, including applying for identification cards, registering businesses, paying taxes, and more.



The “One Student, One Laptop” initiative, which aimed to provide students with digital tools to support online learning, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, marked a significant step in promoting digital education in Mongolia. This program aimed to bridge the digital divide and ensure that students in rural and remote areas had access to the necessary tools for education. Universities and schools have increasingly incorporated digital learning platforms, giving students access to online courses and educational resources. Mongolia has made progress in expanding digital infrastructure, particularly in urban areas. The country has increased internet connectivity and mobile penetration, which are essential for digital inclusion. However, rural areas still face connectivity challenges, which hinder full access to digital services.

While digitalization offers many benefits, it also poses challenges, particularly with regard to the protection of human rights, privacy, and freedoms in the digital sphere in Mongolia. Mongolia currently lacks comprehensive data protection laws and frameworks that govern how personal data is collected, stored, and shared. While some regulations exist (such as the “Law on Information Technology”), they are not always sufficient to protect individuals’ privacy rights in the digital environment. The increased use of e-government services and digital platforms can lead to the potential misuse of personal information. There are concerns about how data collected by the government is handled and whether it is vulnerable to unauthorized access or surveillance. The growth of digital services also raises the risk of cyberattacks. As more citizens’ personal and financial information moves online, ensuring the security of this data becomes critical to protecting individual privacy and preventing data breaches.

Digital platforms have become critical to freedom of expression in Mongolia, but there have been attempts to regulate online content. For example, the short-lived “Law on Protecting Human Rights on Social Networks” (vetoed in January 2023) sought to give the government the power to monitor and censor social media. The Mongolian government has been criticized for potentially stifling free expression online. The country’s legal framework allows for the restriction of online content deemed harmful to national security, public order, or the well-being of society. This can lead to censorship, especially when it comes to critical or dissenting opinions, and limit freedom of expression in the digital space. While Mongolia has made substantial progress in digitalizing its economy and governance, protecting

human rights in the digital age remains a significant challenge. Ensuring privacy, combating online censorship, bridging the digital divide, and protecting workers' rights in the digital economy are all critical issues that need to be addressed as Mongolia continues to embrace digital technologies.

*While Mongolia has made substantial progress in digitalizing its economy and governance, protecting human rights in the digital age remains a significant challenge.*

## 2.2. For Political Parties

During communist past in the 20th century, Mongolia had only one political party with centralized system of governance. Thus, multiparty political system became a reality one since 1990, and parties still face challenges and problems of development to become important political institutions supporting democracy in the country. Nevertheless, even with numerous lacks of experience, Mongolian political parties can play a crucial role in shaping the political landscape by establishing effective communication channels that connect with the opinions and concerns of new young generations. The new generations are highly tech-savvy and expect to engage with politics in a way that is dynamic, transparent, and responsive. Given their distinct characteristics, political parties still need to adapt their communication strategies to resonate with these younger voters. Below are several ways that Mongolian political parties can establish effective communication channels to connect with Millennial and Gen Z opinions in the formal political space.

### **Youth-focused Policy Platforms**

Each party has its own strategy focused on youth policy that has been developed in concept and election manifest. Political parties have designed policy platforms that generally address similar key concerns of Millennials and Gen Z, such as affordable housing, unemployment, mental health, education reform, etc. Actually, by actively listening to young voters and designing solutions to their problems, political parties can establish credibility and relevance with these generations, which is still needed in society. Political parties should prioritize the inclusion of young voices in decision-making bodies. This can be achieved by nominating young people to run for office, forming youth wings within the party, and encouraging Millennials and

Gen Z to participate in local governance, policy development, and party activities. Millennials and Gen Z are highly attuned to social justice issues such as gender equality, economic betterment, unemployment, jobs and environmental protection. Political parties can demonstrate their commitment to these causes by incorporating progressive stances on human rights and social equality into their platforms.

Major political parties, such as the Mongolian People's Party and the Democratic Party, have established youth organizations such as Social Democratic Youth Union of MPP and Democratic Youth Union of DP, according to their

*Youth organizations are highly dependent on the leadership of their parties and are often criticized for lacking the ability to implement independent youth policies because they are heavily influenced by the party leadership and lack sufficient experience.*

internal party rules. These organizations have their own regulations, and there are age limits for membership. The organizations aim to attract young people, organize various political events among them, conduct training, and ultimately encourage young voters to cast their votes for the party. These youth wings often serve as stepping stones for young leaders to move into higher political roles. However, youth organizations are highly dependent on the leadership of their parties and are often criticized for

lacking the ability to implement independent youth policies because they are heavily influenced by the party leadership and lack sufficient experience. As a result, political parties' youth policies and activities aimed at young people have not yet developed effectively, which remains a common issue for political parties today.

### **Leveraging Digital and Social Media Platforms**

Millennials and Gen Z are digital natives who are highly active on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and Tik Tok. Live streaming, Q&A sessions, and behind-the-scenes content can humanize political figures and build a stronger connection with younger audiences. Political parties are trying to maintain a consistent presence on these platforms, and engage with young voters in formats that are visually appealing, concise, and interactive. Parties have shifted to digital platforms like Facebook and Instagram to connect with younger audiences. During the 2020 and 2024 parliamentary elections, both the MPP and

DP used influencers, livestream debates, and short videos to engage voters under the age of 35. Some young candidates gained popularity among youth for being relatable and digitally savvy. One of the true examples of the inclusion of young generations into political life may be the fact that nearly 80% of newly elected members of parliament today are newcomers.

To effectively connect with Millennials and Gen Z, Mongolian political parties need to embrace digitalization, engage with young voters on the platforms they use, provide clear and transparent communication, and demonstrate that they understand the issues that matter to these generations. By building youth-centered policies, creating accessible and engaging platforms for participation, and ensuring genuine representation, political parties can establish stronger connections with the next generation of voters and leaders, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and democratic political environment in Mongolia. Political parties should create interactive campaigns that encourage participation from Millennials and Gen Z. For instance, they could conduct polls, host online debates, or use hashtags to encourage discussions on key issues. Engaging young people directly in policy discussions on these platforms can help foster a sense of inclusion. Collaborating with local influencers and opinion leaders who resonate with Millennials and Gen Z can help spread political messages effectively. These influencers can help bridge the gap between political parties and younger voters by making political discourse more relatable and accessible in Mongolia (The Asia Foundation 2021).

*Political parties should create interactive campaigns that encourage participation from Millennials and Gen Z.*

### 2.3. For CSOs

During the previous communist political system, there were only a few mass organizations (NGOs) under the leadership of the party that were responsible for engaging the public such as women, youth, and labor organizations. Over the past 30 years of democracy, civil society organizations (CSOs) grew up and since citizens have been able to unite based on their interests, there are now over 40,000 NGOs in Mongolia. Most of these NGOs serve their members only, while a few involve citizens in enlightenment, civic education and encouraging them to become active

in solving public issues. Many believe that CSOs have a crucial role to play in integrating young people into social, political, and economic life. As Mongolia is a country with a relatively young population, CSOs could play a central role in promoting youth engagement, empowerment, and development. These organizations typically focus on a variety of areas, including education, health, social inclusion, and civic participation.

The Mongolian Youth Federation (MYF)<sup>2</sup> is one of the most prominent CSOs working to empower youth in Mongolia. With an extensive local network, MYF conducts leadership training programs, capacity-building workshops, and networking opportunities to help young people gain leadership skills, enhance their social responsibility, and become more involved in decision-making processes. They also promote youth participation in community development by organizing volunteer campaigns that encourage young people to take an active role in solving local problems.

The Open Society Forum is a CSO that focuses on strengthening democracy and promoting civic engagement, including youth involvement. They provide platforms where young people can discuss social issues, policies, and governance. The Forum also works with youth to ensure that they understand their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society. Through youth-focused educational campaigns, OSF trains young people to become advocates for their own rights and encourages them to actively participate in Mongolia's political process.

Children's Rights Center focuses on ensuring that all children and young people, particularly those from marginalized groups, have access to education and social services. They conduct programs that target vulnerable youth—such as those from rural areas, orphans, and young people with disabilities—offering scholarships, educational support, and mentorship to promote social inclusion. Their efforts also include initiatives to reduce school dropout rates, raise awareness of child protection issues, and promote the importance of education for a brighter future.

The Youth Development Center (YDC) works to prepare young people for the modern workforce by providing training in digital literacy, technology skills, and entrepreneurship. These programs help young people transition into the workforce and develop skills critical to economic independence. YDC also hosts career development workshops and events that help youth connect with professionals and gain insight into various industries.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nyc.mn>

While these efforts are effective, challenges remain. Rural youth often have less access to CSO services due to geographic and economic barriers. Also, many young people in Mongolia face limited employment opportunities, which can hinder their engagement in civic life.

*Many young people in Mongolia face limited employment opportunities, which can hinder their engagement in civic life.*

However, as these CSOs continue their work, they are also using new technologies (e.g., online platforms) to reach a wider audience, and enable more young people to participate in social and civic activities. CSOs in Mongolia are working to engage younger generations in civic life through empowerment, education, cultural engagement, mental health support, and activism. These organizations are helping to shape a generation that is more engaged, socially responsible, and equipped to meet the challenges of the modern world.

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# The Impact of the **Millennials and Gen Z** on Democracy in Northeast Asia

Asia Democracy Research Network (ADRN) is an independent network of democracy research institutions across Asia.

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