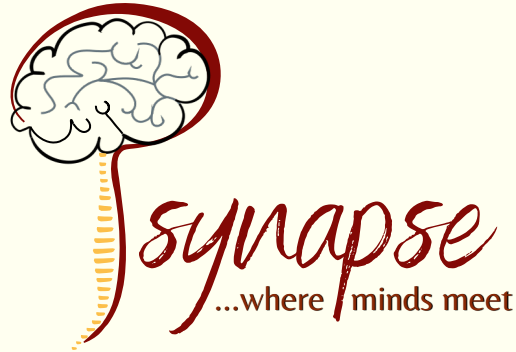




Government of Maharashtra

Dr. Homi Bhabha State University, Mumbai
Elphinstone College



**A Quarterly Magazine
by The Department of Psychology
JAN - MAR 2026**

CROWD. CONTROL & CONSCIOUSNESS

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"To be a premier institution of higher learning, committed to academic excellence, research, innovation, and social transformation, that prepares future leaders for a sustainable and equitable world."

MISSION

- Our mission is to provide high-quality education, foster critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity and encourage innovative research that leads to social transformation.
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FOREWORD

PROF. VILAS PADHYE
HEAD, DEPARTMENT OF
PSYCHOLOGY



Humans were one of the weakest species under the open skies of the primitive world. Forming groups would have been more of a necessity than choice to our ancestors as it increased their chances of survival. Both offence and defence work better in groups than alone – unless you are a celluloid superhero – with the precondition that there is coordination among group members.

Coordination has had some exciting consequences over the ages. From cooperation, communication, and language development to culture, religions, and constitutions, all developed in tandem with human evolution. However, while group membership was pivotal for survival, members also strived for individuality, thus bringing about a tension between individual autonomy and group belonging. While individuality increased the chances of procreation, group membership increased the chances of survival.

Thousands of years of evolution have not yet resolved this tussle between the self and the collective. Means have changed, rules of engagement have transformed, terrains have altered, technology has advanced, but the core crisis remains unresolved. Morality has been thrust upon the populace, religions propagated, and Gods invoked, but power struggles have not ceased. Rather, these very ‘inventions’ have subsequently been used as pretexts to subdue the masses and wage wars in the name of higher ideals.

We have now moved into an era dominated by technological advances. Like any powerful tool, technology is a sword whose use depends on the hands that hold it. Politics has always been the art of the possible: from oil and ships to newspapers and mass media, every powerful tool has been more abused in the pursuit of power than used for human betterment. Our existence now is defined by modern tools, medieval values, and primitive instincts!

In the years ahead, crowd, control, and consciousness will take a fascinating turn as humanity will face some pertinent questions. Will machines become a crowd? Will the human-human conflict for control be replaced by a human-machine one? Will machines gain consciousness and sentience? Will they be granted citizenship rights and suffrage? Will civil liberty undergo a paradigm shift toward cognitive liberty—the freedom to think and act independent of machine influence? Will future inequalities no longer be defined merely by wealth, class, or gender, but by who can afford enhanced cognition, engineered biology, and technologically augmented intelligence? While Diella became the world’s first AI-generated government minister in Balkan Albania, will humans trust machines to run their national affairs more than fellow humans? Will machines be contesting elections!?

The world today stands at an unusual threshold: a journey from the Anthropocene to Anthropomorphism, where the struggle is no longer merely over territories, ideologies, and institutions, but over cognition, identity, technological agency, and the future of what it means to be human. Past tense, present participate, future imperfect.



CONCEPT NOTE

Politics today is no longer confined to parliaments, elections, or policy debates, it exists within our social media feeds, friendships, identities, and everyday conversations. Young people are growing up in an era marked by political polarization, digital activism, algorithm-driven information, global crises, and increasing emotional engagement with political issues. In such a climate, politics is not only a social phenomenon but also a deeply psychological one.

This edition of the magazine aims to explore the intersection between psychology and politics, with a particular focus on youth engagement in contemporary political culture. Moving beyond traditional discussions of governance and ideology, the issue seeks to understand the psychological processes that shape political thought and behaviour. Why do people become emotionally attached to political leaders and movements? Why do political disagreements feel personal? How do social media algorithms influence beliefs, outrage, and polarization? What role do identity, fear, belonging, and cognitive biases play in political decision-making?

Drawing from political psychology, social psychology, cognitive psychology, and media studies, the magazine will examine themes such as voting behaviour, political identity, online activism, desensitization, echo chambers, performative politics, political leadership, and the emotional impact of constant exposure to global crises. The issue also aims to critically engage with current political realities, including rising polarization, digital misinformation, nationalism, youth activism, and the changing nature of democratic participation across the world.

At a time when politics increasingly shapes how individuals perceive themselves and others, this edition seeks to encourage reflection rather than reaction. By approaching political engagement through a psychological lens, the magazine hopes to foster nuanced dialogue about how beliefs are formed, reinforced, challenged, and performed in modern society.



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Meet the Team



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The Writers



Apoorva Sanodiya



Mitisha Tambe



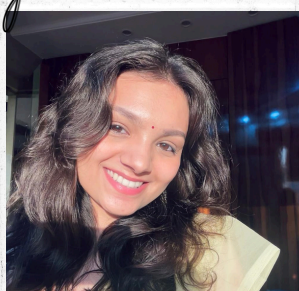
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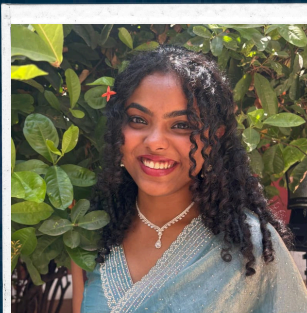


Eesha Prabha

Design



Abha Khan



Gretel Minatur



Sachin Yashwantrao

SO FAR



Makar Sankranti Celebration

A fun and exciting event, hosted by the cultural committee of the department on 14th of January. The joyous event included wishes written on the kites and healthy team efforts towards flying the kites.



Holi Celebration

The Holi event organised by the cultural committee of the department of psychology on 2nd of March. The event brought vibrant joyous moments filled with epic games, food and tons of engaging activities. The festival of colours surely brought colours of emotion to cherish with.

THE DEPARTMENTAL TRIP & WORKSHOP



The department conducted a nature-based experiential workshop at Kasara on 13th of March, 2026. The workshop was led under Ms. Mukta Joshi. The workshop provided psychology students with an opportunity to reconnect with nature and explore its role in promoting mental well-being. Through mindfulness activities, sensory awareness exercises, and reflective experiences in natural surroundings, students learned about the therapeutic benefits of nature in reducing stress, enhancing emotional balance, and fostering relaxation and self-awareness.

Under the departmental trip, our students had a wonderful, joyous moments along with our professors.

SO FAR

WORKSHOP

A workshop on How to Set Up a Private Practice was conducted by Ms. Irawati Joglekar, a Psychotherapist to guide students on building a career in psychology after completing their Master's, on 16th March, 2026. The facilitator was invited by Ms. Shubhangi Pingulkar and the session was organised by Ms. Mili Dass.

Government of Maharashtra
DR. HOMI BHABHA STATE UNIVERSITY
ELPHINSTONE COLLEGE
156, Mahatma Gandhi Marg, Fort, Mumbai 400 026
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

ORGANISES A SESSION ON
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Date:- 16 March, 2026 Time:- 10 AM - 12 PM

REGISTRATION FORM
Students can register to avail our services by filling a Google Form. Scan the QR Code to get started!

RESOURCE PERSON
Ms. Irawati Joglekar

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Department of Psychology
(Fourth Floor), Elphinstone College.

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VALENTINE'S DAY

Why not celebrate Valentine's day within the department? Hosted by bachelors on 14th February, it's time where we appreciated, expressed our feelings and thoughts to our fellow teammates, classmates and even teachers, the event came to be unexpected as it was a surprise by bachelors. The event included activities like one of which was anonymous note writing and one has to guess who wrote it along with it there were loving giveaways to the students. The highlight of the event was to love oneself first.

We're very grateful to our Head of the Department Sir to join us and share loving and most human experience.



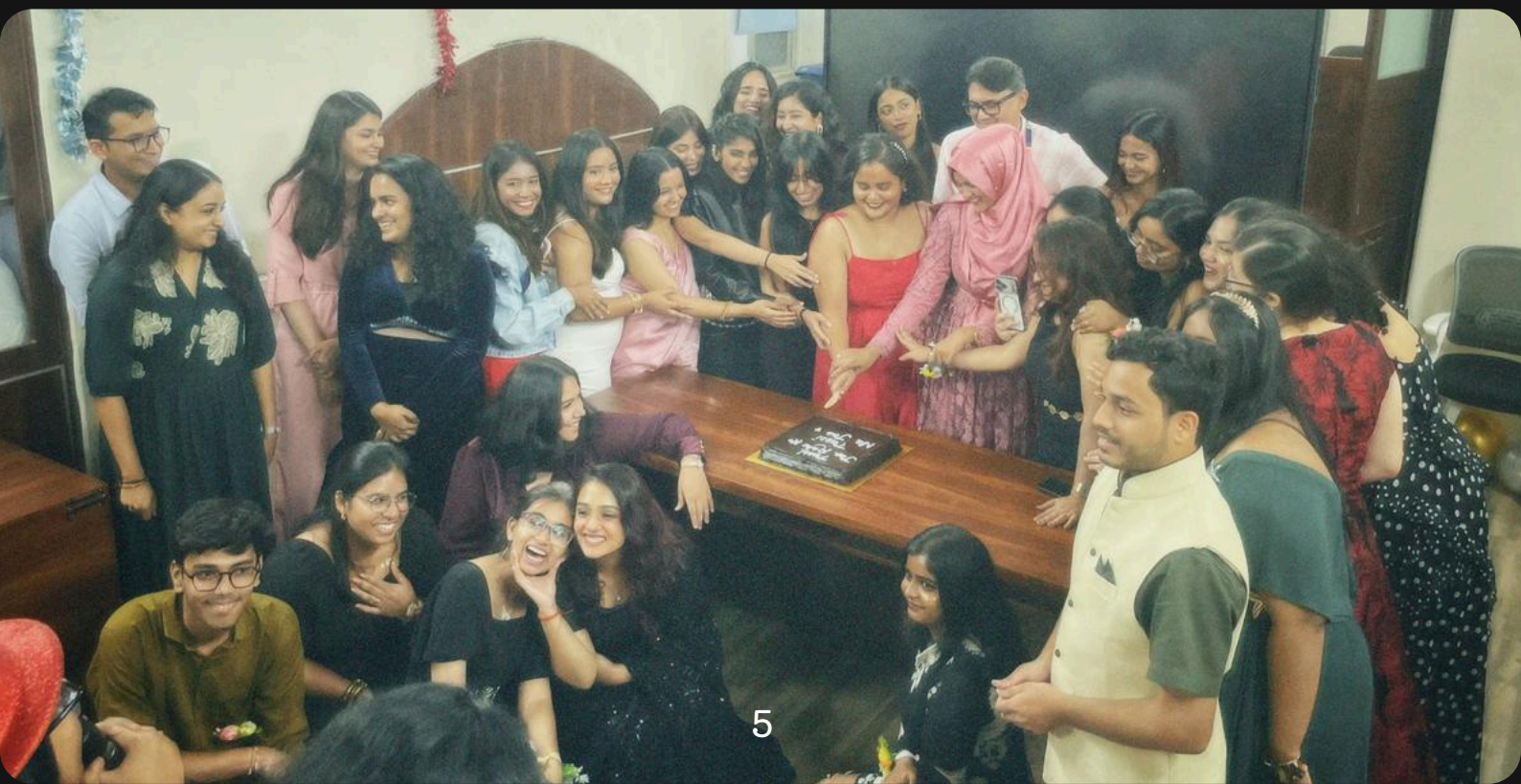
GOOD BYE TO OUR AMAZING STUDENTS OF THIRD YEAR BACHLEORS

The farewell event of Third Year bachelor's students was hosted by their junior students, that is the FY and SY. The farewell event ended up with absolutely pleasant eternal joyous memories, or the feelings that one feels to always be in touch with. The farewell also opened new possibilities for the future, with beautiful wishes imparted by the teachers and professors to the students. The event included snacks and various activities, covered with decorations of childhood photos, most of which were a strong appreciation for the passing outs, with a lot of love, gratitude and sweetness. It makes the department a cherishing place, the contribution of our fellow students has been at core. You're signing off, for it's not the last time. The department is always open.



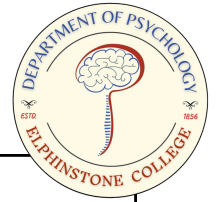
FAREWELL TO OUR MASTERS STUDENTS

Hosted by the Master FY students, the farewell was an evening to remember for the graduating batch. It was an evening filled with laughs, tears, nostalgia and lots of surprises. The end of the two years of the batch was made memorable and something that will always be cherished by MA SY. The event included wishes and goodbye from the professors and the head of the department. MA SY students have been the first child of the Master's program and its been a memorable two years with a lot of initiatives taken by the Master SY students, one of which is the inaugurating the very own Psynapse. Every second that evening carried something no one wanted to let go off, a special evening with special people in the most special place.



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AN INTERVIEW ON YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN POLITICS

Image Source:- Pinterest



Dr. Babasaheb Mundhe is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science (formerly Politics and Public Administration) at Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune, where he also earned his PhD in Public Policy. With over two decades of teaching and research experience, he has previously served at the Government College of Arts and Science, Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, and as a resource person at the university's Centre for Distance and Online Education (CDOE).

Dr. Mundhe's academic interests focus on public policy, public administration, accountability in Indian governance, local governance, and development administration, with particular emphasis on agricultural policy in Maharashtra.

He has led and contributed to several important research projects, including studies on agricultural advisory services, crop insurance, agricultural policies in Maharashtra, and the socio-political implications of policy interventions for farmers.

A prolific scholar, Dr. Mundhe has authored numerous research articles and book chapters in English and Marathi on themes related to governance, agricultural policy, public administration, and social development. He has also presented papers at several national and international conferences, contributing significantly to scholarship in public policy and governance.

Can you tell us about your academic and professional journey?

I have been teaching in the Department of Political Science at Savitribai Phule Pune University since 2008. Before that, I worked for some time at the Government College of Arts and Science as an Assistant Professor. Vilas Padhye and I were colleagues there, and continue to be good friends.

The journey began as a student way back in the mid or late 1990s at the Government College of Arts and Science in Aurangabad, and later culminated in full-time teaching at the same college.

Later on, I moved to this university and joined the Department of Political Science and Public Administration in 2008.

I have been teaching courses mostly on Public Administration and Public Policy. I completed my PhD in Public Policy, with a focus on Agricultural Policy and the evaluation of agricultural policies.

What inspired you to pick this field?

You can say it was a default choice; default in the sense that I was not primarily planning to get into academics. I was very keen on getting into Civil Services. So, during graduation, I was preparing for various competitive exams like those of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and Maharashtra Public Service Commission (MPSC).

When I took the MA final year examination, I also appeared for the MPSC examination. In the same year, I graduated and cleared MPSC. It was a successful attempt, I qualified, but I was not recommended because of some technical rules and reservation policies.

By the time the result of the MPSC was out, I was already working as a teacher. For two to three years, I used a dual strategy: teaching in college and, at the same time, pursuing government services, especially Civil Services. After which, I started focusing on academics.

How would you describe the current state of political awareness among youth today?

As far as the youth and young students are concerned, their political awareness and the way they express their views have changed a lot over time. Whether it is issues of personal interest, public concern, policy matters, or politics in general, young people today are much more expressive and open about their opinions.

Compared to our times as students, I think we were far less open about our political feelings or inclinations. We usually kept such views to ourselves. But nowadays, with greater awareness and the rise of affordable communication and new media platforms, youth are much more forthcoming about their political identities, views, and affiliations.

I think that is largely a positive development, as long as young people with different ideologies engage in meaningful and constructive dialogue on issues related to ideologies, values, and beliefs that matter to society and to the youth themselves. Of course, these differences can sometimes lead to confrontations and conflicts, but that is also a natural part of such processes. Overall, I believe there has been a significant improvement in political awareness among the younger generation.

With the polarization that is happening in the political sphere, how do you think it is affecting the youth?

I think one has to look at this polarization in terms of how political and social identities are becoming more entrenched. There is an increasing gap between people with different identities and ideologies, and many are not really willing to engage with one another. In many ways, this is also connected to the uneven spread of political awareness.

Political awareness among youth has certainly increased, but it is not uniform across regions, classes, castes, or social groups. There are rural-urban divides, elite-mass divides, and differences shaped by caste, religion, and other identities. And because of these uneven experiences and understandings, polarization has also grown.

So while it is a positive sign that young people are becoming more politically aware and expressive, at the same time, this awareness is sometimes taking negative forms. We are seeing divisions along caste, religion, ideology, and nationalism becoming sharper.

I think this is where we need to reflect on the direction we are moving in. Political awareness should ideally encourage dialogue, engagement, and understanding among people with different viewpoints. But in many cases, it is also leading to deeper social and political divisions rather than bridging them.

Has social media made youth more politically aware and/or emotionally reactive?

Yes, I think that is definitely happening, especially because of the growing role of social media and other digital platforms where youth engage in political discussions and activities online. These platforms have made young people more politically aware, but at the same time they have also made many of them more emotionally reactive to debates and discussions.

This is particularly visible among urban youth, where online political engagement has become quite widespread. At the same time, there is also a huge amount of misinformation and information overload on these platforms. And that often leads to what we may call information fatigue.

This is where the real challenge emerges. Young people are not always able to clearly distinguish between facts and misinformation or understand how to process the constant flow of information they are exposed to.



Image Source:- Pinterest

Source:- FaithFi

Given the prevalence of online activism, why does robust online activism often not translate into meaningful political engagement, such as high voter turnout?

I think being active on online platforms and actually engaging in civic or political issues are two very different things. They require different kinds and different levels of commitment.

Much of the activism we see on social media is often driven by the need to remain visible online, react to political debates, and respond to rival ideological groups. There is also a sense of peer pressure and a desire to be seen as an active member of a particular community. In many ways, online activism is shaped by this need for visibility and belonging.

But when it comes to actual civic engagement, such as participating in public issues, community work, or even voting, people do not always come forward in the same way. This shows that online activism is not necessarily rooted in genuine civic participation. It is often more about expression and visibility on social media than sustained engagement with social or political causes.

I think this phenomenon is also psychological to some extent. Many young people feel that they should not be left behind, that they should belong to a group, or that they must constantly express themselves online.

As a result, there is a clear gap between online activism and real political participation. Youth today are highly active and expressive on social media, but that level of engagement does not always translate into meaningful participation in actual politics or civic life.

How do you think Western Politics, especially American politics, affects the views of the youth in India?

Yes, definitely. Developments in Western politics, especially American politics, do influence the views and political culture of youth in India. This is part of a larger global phenomenon where trends and movements in the West often shape discussions in developing societies as well.

One major impact has been through social media, where young people learn new ways of communicating, mobilizing, and spreading awareness about social and political issues. In some ways, this has produced positive outcomes. Issues that were rarely discussed publicly earlier have now become part of mainstream political and social discourse. For example, concerns related to the LGBTQ+ community, identity, and representation have become much more visible and openly debated.

Many such issues were not seriously discussed in public spaces even 10 or 15 years ago, but today they have become subjects of political awareness and debate, largely because global developments reach people instantly through digital media.

At the same time, I think this influence has both positive and negative sides. While social media creates awareness and connects people with global conversations, many of these movements often remain limited to online spaces. In many cases, there is visibility and discussion online, but not enough meaningful engagement or action beyond that.

How do you think the education system and environment (student unions) plays a role in shaping students' or youths' political views?

Yes, I think the education system and the larger student environment play a very important role in shaping the political views and ideological identities of young people. Political activism among students is not something entirely new; student organizations and youth wings of political parties have always been part of the political process in India.

What has changed today is the level of awareness among youth and the kind of media available to them. Young people are now much more vocal about their political identities and ideological inclinations. Social media, in particular, has amplified voices in ways that were not possible earlier. Even in the past, students had opinions, but today those opinions can spread rapidly and gain visibility within a very short time.



Source:- Getty Images

At the same time, this amplification also has its risks. Social media can intensify biases and spread misinformation, and many young people are not always able to verify every claim they encounter online. When emotional reactions combine with misinformation, it can sometimes lead to confrontation and conflict. So while political awareness is a positive development, there is also a need to encourage young people to approach information critically and responsibly.

I think education policy also plays a crucial role here. Since independence, educational policies in India have generally aimed to promote scientific temper, rational thinking, logical reasoning, and critical thinking among students. Governments may differ in emphasis, but the broader objective has remained the same: to equip youth with a rational and scientific outlook.

In that sense, one of the most important things higher education provides is the ability to think critically. These are not just academic skills; they are lifelong values that shape how young people engage with society, politics, and public life.

Young people's political interest extends beyond elections to specific policies (e.g. LGBT rights or Maharashtra's 'Laadki Bahin' welfare scheme). How do such issues engage the youth politically?

I think youth engagement today is increasingly issue-based. Young people tend to connect more strongly with issues that resonate with their values, beliefs, and lived experiences, while other issues may not generate the same level of interest.

At the same time, there is also a broader sense among many young people that they do not fully trust traditional political institutions or governments. Because of this, they often engage more with specific causes, policies, or movements rather than with political parties or long-term ideological commitments.

So, when issues that directly relate to their concerns come up, youth are more likely to express their views, participate in discussions, and even support movements or protests around those causes.

In that sense, political engagement among youth today is less about party-based politics and more about issue-based participation. They are responding more to policies and social concerns that they personally relate to, rather than simply aligning themselves with a particular political ideology or party.

Where do you think the mistrust among youth, about the government, is coming from?

I think this mistrust among youth towards the government and public institutions largely comes from the expectations people have from the state. Generally, young people expect the government to provide services efficiently, responsibly, and in a timely manner.

However, many of their experiences, whether with administration, public services, or government agencies, are often shaped by delays, inefficiency, mismanagement, and sometimes corruption. These experiences gradually contribute to distrust, not only among youth but among citizens more broadly.

At the same time, I would say this feeling is quite mixed and complex. Many young people are dissatisfied with the functioning of the government and administration, and they hold contradictory views about how effectively institutions are working.

But despite this dissatisfaction, there is still a sense of hope and optimism among youth. Many believe that these problems can be addressed through reforms, better governance, and more effective administration.

In the coming years, the proportion of young voters will be more than the rest. How do you think this will affect the political landscape? And what is your message to those who are now becoming more aware about Indian politics?

As far as youth participation in politics is concerned, one important issue is that while young people today are highly active and expressive online, their actual participation in political processes, especially voter turnout, still remains relatively low. This is not unique to India; it is a broader global phenomenon.

Many young people seem to feel that their vote or political participation may not really make a significant difference to political outcomes. Because of this, they often appear politically aware and politically active online, but not always politically engaged in practice. And unless youth participation reaches a certain critical mass, it becomes difficult for that section of society to significantly influence political outcomes. In political science, especially in the area of political processes and political participation, that critical mass is considered to be one-third of the total voter turnout.

As for my message to politically aware youth, I would say that they should look at politics as a vocation rather than as a business or enterprise. Politics should be guided by principles, constitutional values, democratic ethics, and a rational understanding of political issues, rather than opportunistic interests..

Young people should certainly consider politics as a meaningful career and public responsibility, but not as something purely transactional. There is still space in society for principled and progressive politics, and many people continue to look for leaders who genuinely believe in democratic and progressive values. I would advise them to take lessons or cues from what the New York Mayor, Zohran Mamdani, did when he started his campaign.

And by progressive politics, I do not mean politics which is actually regressive but merely presented as progressive. Young people should enter politics with a very clear understanding that they would practise it as a vocation and as principle-based politics.

That, I think, is the way forward, and that is the advice I would offer to them.

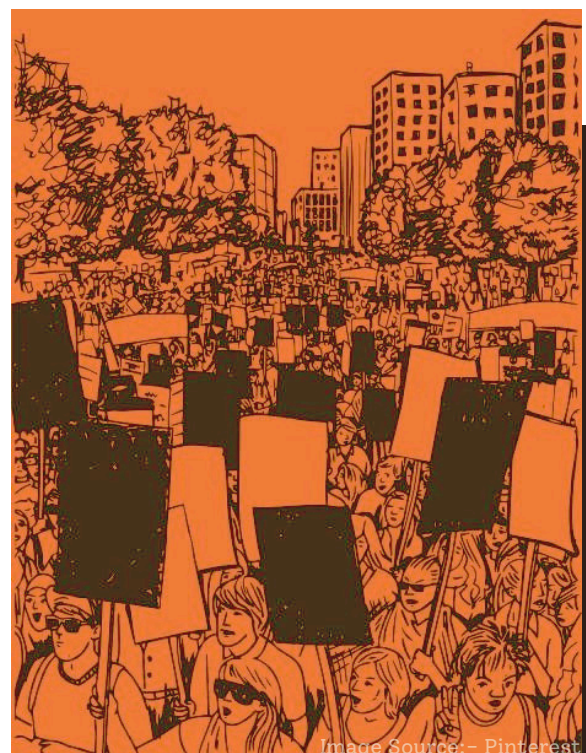


Image Source:- Pinterest
Source:- iStock

BLIND FOLLOWERS, WEAK DEMOCRACY!

MITISHA TAMBE, MA-1

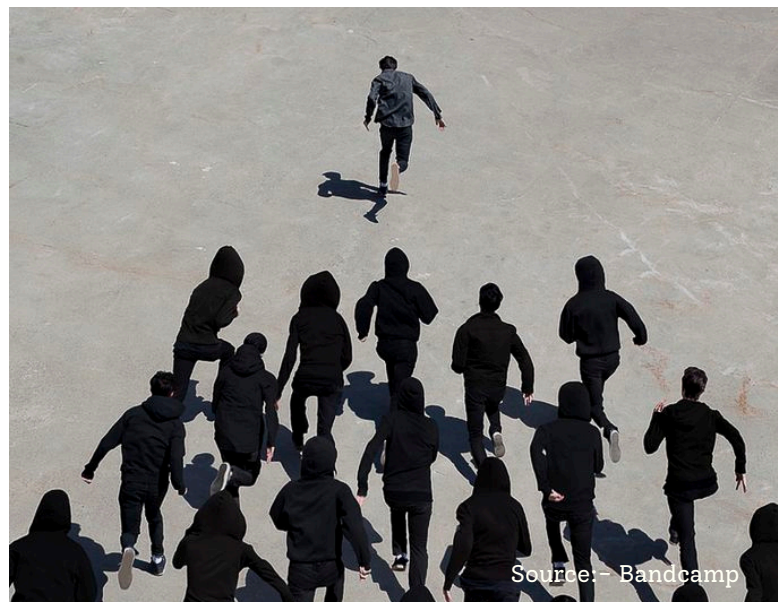
The perspectives presented in this article are personal to the author and do not represent the official stance of the editor, department, or institution.

The last few decades have seen the world's political discourse mimic the rise of charismatic leaders and increased polarization in politics. Democracy is based upon accountability to the public, the ability of the citizens to dissent and the participation of citizens in the democracy. However, when political loyalty becomes an unconditional act of devotion, the structures supporting democracy become weak. The unquestioned devotion to political leaders allows leaders to exercise emotional power over their constituents through the reduction of critical thinking skills and promoting conformity. Therefore, any criticism of political leaders can be viewed as a betrayal of one's country.

Psychologists explain why people get drawn into political beliefs through conformity bias, herd mentality and identity-based politics. Humans naturally want to be socially accepted and feel a need to belong, which encourages them to adopt what others believe already. One of the best examples of this phenomenon is the well-known conformity experiment conducted by psychologist Solomon Asch (Asch, 1956). The results of his experiment showed that many participants agreed with incorrect answers because everyone else in the group had said the same thing.

This demonstrated how strongly the influence of social pressure can be on an individual's behaviour.

In politics the same psychological mechanism applies; therefore the support for a political ideology is based on policy and/or people's identity as being political; to therefore create an emotional connection with their political beliefs that will carry over to how one is viewed if one is critical of a political leader. Citizens that believe their political leader is part of their identity see criticism of the leader as a personal attack on them; thus producing an "us/them" mindset resulting in members of opposing political ideologies finding it hard to communicate rationally with each other.



The media serves as another major factor for driving blind allegiance to government political parties or behavior (Smith, 2026). Digital algorithms used by social media platforms often create repeated exposures of users to select political views. This kind of exposure leads to the strengthening of confirmation bias, meaning that people tend to accept information that confirms their prior beliefs and reject facts that do not support their previously established beliefs. The presence of propaganda helps to enhance the effects of confirmation bias by creating emotional appeals that utilise fear, pride and national pride as a way of influencing public opinion.

Hitler's use of propaganda and emotional nationalism made him look like the savior of Germany at a time of unrest. Many Germans not only regarded him as their political leader, but also as the embodiment of their nation's pride. The emotional allegiance created by this type of leadership contributed to the weakening of democracy in Germany as well as to the establishment of a totalitarian regime.

The effects of having a blind allegiance to a political leader can have repercussions that go beyond just politics. When dissent is frowned upon, journalists, whistleblowers and anyone who voices an opinion that opposes the political establishment often are met with hostility or threats. For instance, investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, who exposed corruption in the Maltese government, was killed in a car bombing in 2017 and her death has become a symbol of the dangers associated with individuals questioning a powerful political system (Schwaiger, 2025).

The essential component of a functional democracy is not blind loyalty but an informed, sceptical citizens (Nayak, 2024). While leaders will come and go, democratic institutions should last forever. To question authority is not to be anti-national; questioning authority is a necessity in maintaining a healthy democracy. The age of propaganda, political polarisation, and emotional politics requires Critical Thinking as one of the strongest safeguards of democratic ideals.



**“BLIND BELIEF IN AUTHORITY IS THE
GREATEST ENEMY OF TRUTH.”
— ALBERT EINSTEIN**

PARTY LOYALTY

What type are you?

Based on political psychology typologies, which resonates most when you vote?

1. The party's ideology aligns with my values
2. My family has always voted this way
3. I dislike the alternative more than I like this party
4. This leader personally inspires me
5. I vote tactically - whoever can win

A = Ideological voter, B = Habitual voter, C = Protest voter,
D = Charismatic follower E = Strategic voter

Political scientists find that B and C are the most common types globally – and the hardest for new parties to break.



PSYCHOLOGY OF NATIONALISM

EESHA PRABHU, MA-1

The perspectives presented in this article are personal to the author and do not represent the official stance of the editor, department, or institution.

A world cup victory, the national anthem before a film, or the sight of the tricolour during Independence Day celebrations; moments like these often create emotions that feel deeply personal and familiar, even among millions of strangers. For many people, their country is not only a place on the map, but something connected with their memories, culture, language, history, pride, and sense of belonging. Nationalism is generally understood as love, loyalty, and attachment towards one's country. But when we look at it from a psychological point of view, it is not just a political idea. It becomes a feeling, an identity, and sometimes even a part of how people see themselves.

Especially in India, nationalism has a very strong meaning because our country has gone through colonial rule, freedom struggle, partition, wars, and many social changes. Even though India is full of different religions, languages, traditions, and communities, people still come together under one national identity. This shows that nationalism can create unity and emotional connection among people. Psychologically, it gives an individual a feeling that they are part of something bigger than themselves. At the same time, nationalism is not always simple. Loving one's own country does not mean that we must hate another country or its people. A person can be proud of being Indian and still respect people from other nations. But during situations like terrorist attacks, wars, border conflicts, or political tensions, emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, and protectiveness naturally become strong. These emotions can shape how people think about their own nation and about others.



Nationalism also has an important historical background. It did not develop only as an emotion, but also as a political force in the shaping of modern nation-states. The French Revolution is often seen as an important moment in this process because it shifted political identity from loyalty towards monarchy to loyalty towards the nation and its citizens. This means that people slowly began to imagine themselves not only as subjects of a king, but as members of a common nation. Later, in colonised countries, nationalism became a form of resistance. In India, the growth of modern nationalism was closely connected with the anti-colonial movement, where people discovered unity through their struggle against British rule. So, nationalism can be understood both historically and psychologically: historically, it helped shape nation-states, and psychologically, it helped people feel that they belonged to one larger collective community (Bell, 2016; National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2024).



SOURCE: MEDIUM

Nationalism as Identity, Memory and Emotion:

One of the strongest psychological parts of nationalism is identity. Every person carries different identities in life. We may identify ourselves through our family, religion, language, gender, state, culture, college, or profession. In the same way, national identity also becomes an important part of how people understand themselves. When someone says, “I am Indian,” it is not only a statement of citizenship, but also a feeling of belonging to a larger collective history and culture.

In cognitive psychology, people often understand themselves through different groups they belong to. Social Identity Theory explains that a part of our self-concept comes from the groups we identify with (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). So, when a person says, “I am Indian,” it is not only about citizenship, but also about belonging to a larger group. This is why people may feel proud when India achieves something, or feel hurt when the country faces danger. This idea is also supported by Druckman, who explains nationalism and patriotism through group loyalty (Druckman, 1994). In this way, nationalism is not only political, but also psychological, because it becomes connected with the person’s self-image and group identity.

Another important factor behind nationalism is collective memory. People learn about their nation not only through personal experience, but also through shared stories, history, school textbooks, monuments, films, national holidays, and family discussions. Wertsch and Roediger explain collective memory as a way in which groups remember the past together (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008). In India, memories of colonial rule, the freedom struggle, Partition, wars, and national achievements shape how people emotionally understand the nation. In Maharashtra too, figures like Lokmanya Tilak and public cultural movements such as Ganesh Utsav are remembered not only as regional history, but also as part of India's larger national consciousness.

The emotional side of nationalism becomes visible during national events. For example, when India wins in cricket, when the national anthem is played, when soldiers are honoured, or when people celebrate Independence Day and Republic Day, many individuals feel connected even if they do not personally know each other. Similarly, when India achieved the Chandrayaan-3 Moon landing on 23 August 2023, many people experienced it as a personal moment of pride because it symbolised scientific achievement and national progress (Indian Space Research Organisation, 2023).



At the same time, nationalism also becomes emotionally intense during painful events. For example, the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks created fear, grief, anger, and a strong feeling of national hurt (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). Since Mumbai is in Maharashtra and is also seen as one of India's most important cities, the attack affected not only Mumbaiers but the whole country emotionally. This shows how the nation can become emotionally connected with people's sense of safety, pride, and belonging.

In the present world, nationalism also has to be understood along with globalization. Globalization has connected people through migration, education, trade, technology, and social media. Because of this, people today may carry more than one identity at the same time. For example, a person can be Marathi, Indian, Asian, and global in their outlook. However, globalization does not remove nationalism completely. In fact, when people feel that their culture, economy, language, or national identity is becoming weaker, nationalist feelings may become stronger.

Osterhammel explains that the histories of nationalism and globalization are difficult to separate because both operate together at global, national, regional, and local levels. Psychologically, this is important because people may want global opportunities, but still need cultural roots, belonging, and national identity (Osterhammel, 2013).

Healthy versus Extreme Nationalism:

Nationalism can be healthy when it creates responsibility, unity, and respect for one's country. Healthy nationalism means loving one's nation, respecting its Constitution, contributing to society, and feeling proud of its culture and achievements. It allows a person to say, "I love my country," without needing to say, "I hate another country." This kind of nationalism is mature because it gives space for empathy, criticism, and democratic values. But nationalism can become dangerous when it turns extreme. Extreme nationalism may make people believe that their nation, religion, language, or culture is superior to others. It can also create an "us versus them" mindset, where anyone who questions the government or has a different opinion is seen as anti-national. From a psychological point of view, this happens when group identity becomes too rigid. People may stop thinking as individuals and start reacting only as members of a group.

A healthy national identity should bring people together, but an extreme one can create exclusion, hatred, and blind loyalty. Nationalism needs balance. Loving one's country should not mean blindly agreeing with everything or hating people from another nation. A healthy form of nationalism allows pride along with empathy, loyalty along with responsibility, and criticism along with respect. In the end, true nationalism should encourage citizens to care for their country, protect its values, respect its diversity, and contribute to its better future.



FROM 'DISCORD' TO 'DEMOCRACY': THE NEPAL YOUTH REVOLUTION

MITALI AGLE, MA-1

The perspectives presented in this article are personal to the author and do not represent the official stance of the editor, department, or institution.

In recent decades, the world has been altered by two major currents of change : Climate change altering nature's ecosystems and the other is the regime change that has reshaped political systems, national identities, and the functional relationships existing between citizens and the state. Over the last decade, at least 35 to 40 successful coups d'état and unconstitutional overthrows of government have occurred globally. These forced, extra-legal transfers of power have been heavily concentrated in specific regions. In the twenty-first century, regime change is no longer only confined to the coup d'état organised by armies or political elites; with the rise of the digital world, it is increasingly influenced and amplified by digitally connected youth movements capable of mobilizing dissent at unprecedented speed (Mulmi, 2025).

The protests and subsequent leadership change that followed in September 2025 in Nepal, represents one of the most compelling examples of this transformation. The rise of youth-led political activism in Nepal reflects a generation, frustrated by political instability, corruption, inequality, economic stagnation and the widening disconnect between national leadership and the public aspirations.

Digital spaces became more than just locus of creative expression; they became arenas of organization, resistance, and democratic participation (CIVICUS, 2025).



Source:- Wikipedia

Incidentally, it was seen first as an agitation of the Gen Zs against the statewide ban of social media across the country in the early days of September. But the story wasn't just this, it followed a deep rooted, confined history of grievances and discontent against those who had democratically sworn in power to serve the very people they had disappointed (Thapa, 2025).

As a result, 'we the people' are left with no other option than to take to the streets to strive for our and the nation's future.



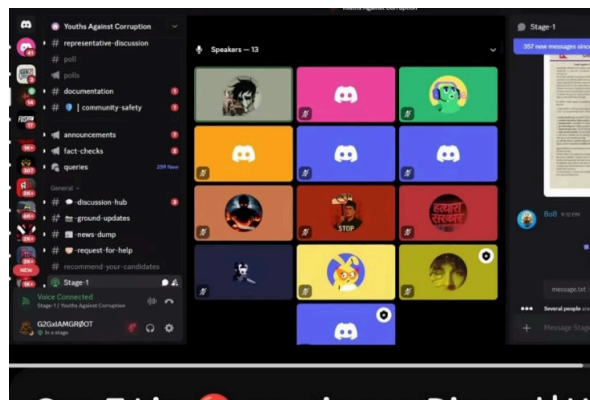
Source:- WIRED

The Government of Nepal suspended social media apps on September 4, 2025, it acted as the catalyst for the events that followed. The reasons that were cited by officials behind the ban were 'regulatory non-compliance policies' of the apps; although it was widely seen as an apparent move of the state, aimed at silencing political dissent by the citizens (Mulmi, 2025). The erupted political crisis was not merely just a reaction to this one event, but must be better understood taking into consideration the contextual backdrop of growing economic stagnation and youth disenchantment in the country. Nepal's 56 percent of the population is below the age of thirty, while its leadership, mostly geriatric, averaged around the age of 70, was evidently and seriously out of step with the times (Teekah, 2026).

Within the past decade, the internet has found its way to more than half of the population. The young Nepalese are online on apps like Instagram, TikTok, Reddit, Discord, active but watchful of the widening inequality and corruption. Their social media feeds served them the elites of the state, including political figures and their children, flaunting their privilege while the nation faced adversity. The signs of discontent were omnipresent, looking for channels to escape.



Source:- The Guardian



Source:- The Kathmandu Post

Since 2020, Nepal's GDP growth has averaged under 5 percent, not exactly or even nearly ample for an economy that has a per capita income below \$1,500 with the overall unemployment rate at a mere 12.6% and youth employment at 20.8%. Each year approximately 1,700 Nepalese leave their nation to find better lives (Mulmi, 2025; Thapa, 2025). The eruption of massive protests across Kathmandu and other cities, led mostly by young, Gen Z protestors holding signs, like "Stop corruption, not social media." marked the limit of tolerance and expressed the exasperation held for a long, long time (Thapa, 2025).

The most distinctive feature of this youth led movement was not just the collectivist organisation of dissent but even the election of a new interim Prime Minister amidst the raging crisis via an encrypted, online platform known as Discord. A youth, non-governmental organisation, Hami Nepal used online servers as organisation tools, advocating for serious actions against the government. Protestors also very smartly used QR codes to post flyers, posters and used VPNs to evade state imposed social media bans to propagate ideas of dissent. After the subsidence of the previous administration and the resignation of PM Oli, the chiefs of the army met with Hami Nepal to discuss the details of the interim government including potential nominees for administration.

On an online server of the app titled “Youths Against Corruption” with over 100,000 members and more than 10,000 users, the youth discussed and debated over other potential candidates and created polls to cast their votes to elect a new ‘interim’ leader that represented them. This virtual poll was won by the former Supreme Court Chief Justice, Sushila Karki by gaining over 50% votes (Teekah, 2026). She officially swore herself as the Interim Prime minister later replaced by Balendra Shah on March 27, 2026.

With the growing crowds outside the parliament, demanding answers and expressing their anger, a moment similar to the historic ‘Storming of the Bastille’. The police, in their attempts to disperse the mobs, first fired tear gas and then live rounds, injuring several. Hospitals were flooded with students in school uniforms. This fueled the enraged mobs further and not much later, clashes broke out between the security forces and the demonstrators following the deaths of nineteen protesters, of which most were under the age of 30. By September 8, within just a day, the spark of anger and frustration multiplied itself into over a thousand thresholds and state structures including the parliament building, government residences and other major government offices were burning in its flames. Offices of the three major parties of the country namely, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist, or UML), the Nepali Congress, and the Maoists were targeted and burnt (Mulmi, 2025). Then Prime minister, K.P. Sharma Oli resigned soon after and nationwide curfews were imposed by the army as the last stable institution to curb the utter and total collapse of the state machinery on September 10 (Teekah, 2026).



Source:- The Wire

The Nepalese Youth Revolution redefined activism in a rapidly changing democratic landscape. The youth, or the Gen Zs, are often understood with their digital literacy and social media presence; ended up using their biggest strength to establish secure communication and organisation during times of crisis and action. Usage of digital spaces has become increasingly central not just to amplify and act as a virtual microphone for those who have been rendered voiceless, but to sustain political dissent campaigns, from time to time, against regimes that no longer serve or represent the ideals they once swore to.

The unrest and the movement of the Youth-led unrest in Nepal not just examines the role of digital culture, youth mobilization and emerging political consciousness in shaping what many view as a new chapter in Nepal’s democratic evolution but also offers important lessons for neighbouring South Asian nations.

The Indian Subcontinent- India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Maldives- in recent years have seen various forms of political instabilities, mass protests and economic crises. Especially Afghanistan, with its regime change as the Taliban took back the reins of as the US made a hasty retreat. The episode of revolt in Nepal demonstrated how digitally connected youth populations can rapidly mobilize political dissent when democratic institutions are perceived to be unresponsive, corrupt, or disconnected from public aspirations. For India in particular, where a significant percentage of the population is young and digitally active, technology and digital spaces are constantly evolving and so is the manner of dissent. Nepal serves both as a warning and a lesson on the importance of accountable governance, transparency and meaningful political engagement with the future of the nation : the youth, who are watchful and far more aware than one gives them credit for. As history repeatedly shows, when institutions fail to evolve with their people, it is often the youth who become the authors of political transformation.



Timeline Scramble!

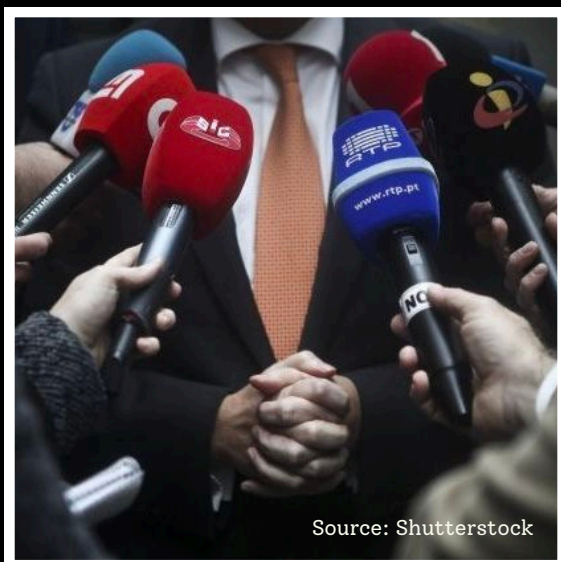
The Nepal Youth Revolution

Put these in the correct order:

1. Social media blackout protests begin.
2. Youth coalitions form across Kathmandu.
3. Government responds with internet restrictions.
4. International media picks up the movement.
5. Demands shift from local grievances to systemic democratic reform.



Persuasion is one of the oldest and most powerful mechanisms of influence in human society. Every day, people are influenced by words, emotions, stories and the behaviour of others, often without realising it. Persuasion shapes the decisions we make in everyday life and the beliefs we hold. In politics, persuasion becomes even more powerful because it influences not only individuals but entire nations. Political leaders use emotion, trust, confidence, and shared identity to guide public opinion, given that people are often more likely to be moved by a psychological connection than by facts alone. As Niccolò Machiavelli suggested, **"People are often driven by love or fear"**, and political leaders frequently use these emotions to build influence and public trust, highlighting how emotional responses shape political loyalty.



POWER. PERSUASION & POLITICAL INFLUENCE

DIPTI PATRE, MA-1

The perspectives presented in this article are personal to the author and do not represent the official stance of the editor, department, or institution.

Politics, as much as it shapes government, also shapes emotions, identities, and the way people see the world. Throughout history, powerful political leaders have understood that human beings are heavily influenced by feelings of hope, trust, fear, and belongingness, implying that people are never persuaded by facts alone. Political leaders understand that providing emotional reassurance and certainty, especially during times of fear or confusion, sways public opinion. Hence, a leader who can shape public sentiment can also shape how people feel, think and respond to political situations.

Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, explained persuasion via three powerful components: ethos, pathos, and logos. Ethos, meaning credibility and trust, and pathos appeal to emotions, while logos relies on logic and evidence only. As per theory, individuals should make decisions only through logos by analysing facts and policies. However, most political persuasion works through ethos and pathos. People tend to trust leaders who sound confident, appear certain, and make them feel emotionally understood.

When societies experience any issues, ranging from economic problems, wars, unemployment, to social conflicts, people search for emotional stability.

Human beings are wired to dislike uncertainty because it creates anxiety and activates threat vigilance, an evolutionary bias that makes people highly sensitive to potential danger or instability. As a result, many people tend to follow leaders who project strength and decisiveness, even when their arguments lack strong evidence.

Charisma also plays a major role in this process. Charismatic leaders may not necessarily be the smartest in the room, but they understand the importance of making others feel seen, valued, and emotionally connected. Their words often sound personal rather than factual or technical. They focus on connecting with people emotionally, telling stories, and using memorable phrases. Charisma works because humans are emotional and social creatures who are likely to trust confidence in the same way children trust a calm adult during a crisis.

Similarly, **propaganda** takes advantage of human psychological mechanisms and emotional responses. It is not simply false information; more importantly, it is selective information designed to shape the perception and emotions of people. Effective propaganda repeats simple messages until they start to feel familiar and true. Human brains naturally prefer familiarity over unfamiliarity because it creates comfort. Repetition can become more powerful than evidence. Political propaganda often divides society into emotionally charged groups, which creates a sense of "us" versus "them".

Another psychological mechanism that fuels persuasion is **fear appeal**. Fear narrows human thinking and increases the desire for protection. Neuroscience suggests that anxious people are more likely to seek authority, structure, and security during uncertain situations.¹

In crises, such as wars or lockdowns, leaders use this fear appeal to gain influence, seeking to regulate the masses rather than merely provide factual information emotionally.



However, political influence and persuasion are not only based on fear; **hope-based** campaigns can be equally persuasive because they give people a sense of optimism, purpose and emotional reassurance about the future. Political slogans such as "Achhe Din Aayenge" and MAGA ("Make America Great Again") appealed to people's desire for progress and national renewal. While fear appeals activate **threat vigilance**, hope-based persuasion works by offering emotional motivation and collective aspiration. Political influence can also work through inducing feelings of nationalism. Humans heavily desire emotional belonging and community, and national symbols such as flags, anthems, and patriotic stories satisfy this need. This also explains why political gatherings begin to feel like an emotionally fulfilling experience and create affinity for those who participate in them.

Ultimately, successful political leaders understand that public opinion is not just shaped by logic and facts; cognitive tendencies and emotional needs of the people are important factors. They understand that, as part of persuasion, facts matter, but feelings give direction to how facts are interpreted. George Orwell criticised the manipulative nature of political communication, writing that:

CHRONICALLY ONLINE, POLITICALLY OFFLINE

AKHIL BADHEKA, MA-1

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“Politics is too serious to be left to politicians.” - Charles de Gaulle, Former President of France

For many young people today, politics feels just like that one WhatsApp family group you mute for your mental health. You know the type: uncles forwarding conspiracy theories at 6 a.m., while your cousins drop fake news with the “source: trust me bro.”

We're caught in the storm of doomscrolling, election memes, corruption scandals, influencer debates, and a 45-minute YouTube ‘exposés. A strange thing has happened now; people are more politically surrounded than ever, but emotionally checked out at the same time (Zhang, 2022).

This is the era of political disengagement. Loud opinions yet fewer participants.



Source:- Shutterstock

Political Burnout

As a society we have a weird situation with politics, we love talking about it but aren't really committed to the duties it comes with. Part of this comes from the overwhelm of being in the instant information era. All of us are surrounded by an omnipresent, inescapable web of information, that bombards us with every big and small event occurring around the globe. It makes us that much more attached to not just our own lives but the global identity that we now share with each other. Our politics are everyone's politics. Which is why today, many young people treat it like emotional cardio: exhausting, repetitive, but still necessary. Psychologically, this makes sense. The human brain is not built to process endless outrage 24/7. Every day, social media throws breaking news, ideological wars, corruption stories, climate anxiety, inflation concerns, and hashtags screaming “#THISCHANGESEVERYTHING.”

After a while, this cardio accumulates into fatigue and it starts feeling like nothing you do will really change anything.

When people repeatedly feel powerless, they stop trying altogether. This is the sort of nihilistic atmosphere surrounding our politics today. Many young adults feel their vote does not matter, politicians do not listen, and what's the point if the world is going to end anyway (CIRCLE, 2025). Instead of engagement, cynicism takes over and cynicism is tricky because it disguises itself as intelligence. Saying “all politicians are corrupt” sounds sharp and worldly. But if everyone disconnects, the system does not become cleaner, it just becomes quieter and the issues easier to ignore.



Social Media: The Place Where Nuance Goes to Die

Social media was initially seen as democracy's superhero sidekick. Anyone could speak. Anyone could organize. Anyone could participate. Then the algorithms became the new economy. Social media platforms are the no. 1 “ragebaits”. They monetize outrage because outrage keeps people scrolling.

Calm, balanced political discussions get buried faster than your New Year resolutions. Psychologists studying digital behavior have found that echo chambers i.e. spaces where people only see opinions similar to their own, intensify polarization and frustration. Eventually, political discourses stop feeling productive and start feeling like multiplayer combat games where the public have already logged off. Not because they do not care, but because caring feels emotionally expensive.

A person opens Instagram hoping to watch cat videos and suddenly ends up in a geopolitical argument with a stranger named “SigmaPatriot_007.” Nobody wins.

The “Nothing Will Change Anyway” Generation

There's another psychological factor behind disengagement: distrust. Trust in institutions has declined globally over the years. In a survey conducted across various countries by the OECD (2024), it was found that only 39% of the people trust their national government, only 37% are confident that the government is balancing current and future interests of the public, and only 41% believe that the government uses the best available evidence while making any decision for the public.

Young people constantly hear about corruption, misinformation, manipulation, data leaks, propaganda, and performative politics. Eventually, skepticism becomes the default setting. This creates a paradox: Young people care deeply about issues like mental health, climate change, gender rights, education, unemployment, and freedom of expression and yet many dislike formal politics itself.

In other words, they are issue-engaged but politically exhausted. You can see this everywhere. Students passionately discuss social justice online but avoid political discussions in real life because they fear conflict, trolling, or being labeled (Kumar, 2026). Take any issue, the LGBTQ+ and Trans-rights issue, the Covid misinformation issue, the Gaza genocides, the Nepal revolution, and so many more issues that erupted in recent years; have all been subject to a tug-of-war of political consumerism. Politics has become less about dialogue and more about identity warfare and humans naturally avoid spaces where they feel psychologically unsafe.



Source:- British Vogue



The Great Political Circus

Another strange shift is how politics increasingly resembles pop culture. Election campaigns now compete with reels, memes, podcasts, and viral edits. Politicians trend like celebrities. Debates are clipped into “roast compilations.” Serious issues become content. This creates what researchers sometimes call slacktivism or clicktivism, where engagement becomes symbolic rather than meaningful (Kumar M., 2025).

Changing a profile picture feels like activism. Posting an angry story feels like participation. Retweeting something becomes the modern equivalent of “I have contributed to society.” To be fair, online activism can create awareness and mobilization, but constant exposure without meaningful action can also create emotional fatigue. It’s like watching workout videos for six hours and expecting abs to manifest!

The Psychology of Avoidance

Disengagement is not always laziness. Sometimes, it is self-preservation. People avoid politics because it creates anxiety, conflict, hopelessness, and emotional overload. Political news often activates fear and anger, two emotions the brain remembers strongly. This is why people either become hyper-obsessed with politics or avoid it completely. There is rarely an in-between.

Some disengage because politics feels too complicated. Some because it feels too toxic. Some because they genuinely believe nobody is telling the truth. Ironically, the more chaotic politics becomes, the more attractive disengagement starts to feel.

So... Is Democracy Cooked?

Not necessarily.

Disengagement does not mean young people are apathetic (Parvez, 2026). However, in many ways, they are redefining participation itself. They engage through social movements, mental health advocacy, environmental campaigns, online communities, satire, art, and discussions around identity and equality. Political engagement today may not always look like waving flags and attending rallies. Sometimes it looks like fact-checking misinformation, supporting causes, or simply refusing to spread hate online. Small actions still matter (Baloch & Barrail, 2025).

Democracy survives not because everyone becomes a political expert, but because enough people remain willing to care. Perhaps that is the challenge of this generation: learning how to stay informed without drowning, how to remain critical without becoming cynical, and be engaged without losing sanity.

Because if good people completely disengage from politics, someone else will happily take the wheel and judging by internet comments sections, that is a terrifying thought.





Image Source:- The Economic Times

COGNITIVE BIASES IN VOTING BEHAVIOUR

RAKSHITA PALANDE, MA-1

The perspectives presented in this article are personal to the author and do not represent the official stance of the editor, department, or institution.

Voting decisions, which one might assume are well-thought-out, informed actions, where citizens evaluate policies, weigh evidence, and choose leaders who best represent their interests. Psychology would think otherwise. According to many studies in political psychology, voting is not a rational act as there are several psychological factors that contribute to people's decision to vote for a certain candidate or party. Identity, emotions, social influence, cognitive biases, media exposure, group membership, and psychological processes all influence people's voting decisions. The human brain approaches politics less like a math problem, and more like a personal project.

As discussed in the American War, the formation of political identity starts at an early age and is carried throughout people's adult lives, shaping how individuals view political events and figures as a means of maintaining their identity. In other words, rather than viewing the political system objectively, we tend to analyze these events through the lens already formed in our minds. This is referred to as confirmation bias, our brain's favourite shortcut, the natural tendency to notice, attend to, and give more importance to the data that supports one's preconceived notions. We, therefore, are more likely to focus on information that supports our political identity, while dismissing contradictory evidence.

This bias can be observed during election campaigns. Although it is believed that campaigns tend to “change minds” of individuals, in reality, Jenke et al., (2016) have found that political campaigns rarely switch voters from one party loyalty to another. Instead, their findings demonstrated that campaigns largely triggered predispositions that were in the minds of voters before the campaigns began, and that these predispositions affected the interpretation of incoming information to give choices that could have been predicted in advance of the campaign. Rather than promoting critical thinking, political speeches, advertisements, slogans, and social media posts frequently strengthen emotional allegiances. Regular exposure to like-minded content through algorithms of the digital age reinforces this process, creating echo chambers of intolerance.



Voting decisions are emotionally charged, which also contributes to cognitive biases. One of them is affective evaluation or affect heuristic, which is the tendency to make decisions based on feelings rather than rational logic.

Many individuals make decisions based on how they feel about the candidate instead of on objective competence. They rely on general impressions rather than policy knowledge. A strategic political campaign, therefore, focuses on emotional engagement. The emotional aspect of voting has become more pronounced online. Political content that goes viral is frequently engineered to elicit anger, fear, or moral indignation since emotional content tends to spread quickly and attracts greater attention.

One of the most important cognitive processes observed in voting behavior is cognitive dissonance, a concept proposed by Leon Festinger. Cognitive dissonance is a state of psychological tension caused by experiencing conflicting beliefs or behaviors. In the realm of politics, the case of cognitive dissonance may be observed when a voter is in favor of a leader who performs in a way that goes against some of his/her beliefs. However, instead of switching to another political party, people tend to adjust their perceptions.

Recently, a study was conducted by Vibhor Mathur (2023) to examine how some secular voters were able to remain faithful to the political leaders they supported despite being uncomfortable with the communal and divisive nature of the leaders. Instead of withdrawing support from politics, participants seemed to reinterpret concepts like secularism or reevaluate the events that made them uncomfortable. This example shows that perception is also influenced by political identity. People sometimes change their perception in order to fit their political choices. It is funny how we would rather change our story, than admit we picked the wrong player to support.

Psychological predispositions can also account for voting behavior that does not follow self-interest. The basic assumption behind traditional political theories was that people would vote in favor of those policies that benefit them most. Nevertheless, contemporary studies show that identity-related factors may take precedence over rationality in policy evaluation. Individuals may prioritize social acceptance, ideological allegiance, or group reputation over material interests. Under highly polarized conditions, staying loyal to one's political community becomes more psychologically rewarding than objective political evaluations.

Importantly, the recognition of the presence of cognitive biases in voter decision-making processes does not necessarily mean that voters are irrational. Rather than being capable of objectively perceiving the high level of complexity of modern political systems, the human brain was designed to navigate and function within a social environment. Individuals rely on their social identity, emotions, and cognitive biases in order to perceive politics within the context of an information-rich society.

Thus, understanding the psychology behind voting behavior is vital to grasping modern democracy in its entirety. Politics is influenced by issues such as identity, emotion, belonging, and perception in addition to information and policy. As long as digital media continues to influence political behavior, especially amongst younger generations, cognitive biases will likely remain relevant to democratic processes. While awareness of them may not be sufficient to get rid of them, it could lead to more thoughtful political participation and a better understanding of the influence of our minds.



BIAS SPOTTER

CAN YOU NAME THE BIAS?

Scenarios

1. You vote for the candidate with better hair
2. You only read news that matches your views
3. You believe a rumour because you've heard it 5 times
4. You think the current leader must be good because things aren't worse
5. You blame the other party for the economy but credit yours

1-Halo Effect 2-Confirmation Bias
3-Illusory Truth Effect 4-Status Quo Bias 5-Attribution Bias

DREAMS UNDER PRESSURE

APOORVA SANODIYA, MA-1

The perspectives presented in this article are personal to the author and do not represent the official stance of the editor, department, or institution.

Imagine being seventeen and believing that a 3 hour long exam is going to determine your worth, future and your family's pride. Sounds pretty illogical, right? But sadly it is what millions of Indian students believe to be the truth.

Every year thousands of students leave their hometowns to move to cities like Kota to prepare for competitive exams like JEE and NEET. Fueled by either ambition or parental pressure these young souls put their all in trying to ace the system sacrificing their sleep, appetite, hobbies, interests and overall their own souls. Believing that in doing these sacrifices they finally might get it all right and make it all worth it in the end. But for the majority, it does all go to vain in the end. While over 17 lakh students register for JEE and over 22.7 lakh register for NEET, the ultimate selection percentage for a premium institute like an IIT or a government medical college sits at a razor thin 1% to 5%.



Being around a system that constantly revolves around mocks, tests, ranks and schedules. Given the atmosphere the people around start to treat others based on their performance on tests. In turn the students also start to view themselves as ranks. Luckily I myself never had to go down this rabbit hole but almost all of my cousins have or are preparing for some or the other exam. My 15 year old sister left her hometown for the first time to join a coaching institute for JEE, she would give her 12 hours to it daily, leaving at 9 am and coming home at 9pm, having never lived away from home, it deeply affected her mental health, from bad roommates to unhygienic and tasteless food, from homesickness to constant pressure to perform, her health gave up on her when she was in 12th. She had to be bedridden for almost 3 months, needing constant care and complete rest. Even then, her only concern was the work she was missing in the institute and how much time and effort it would take to cover it all back.



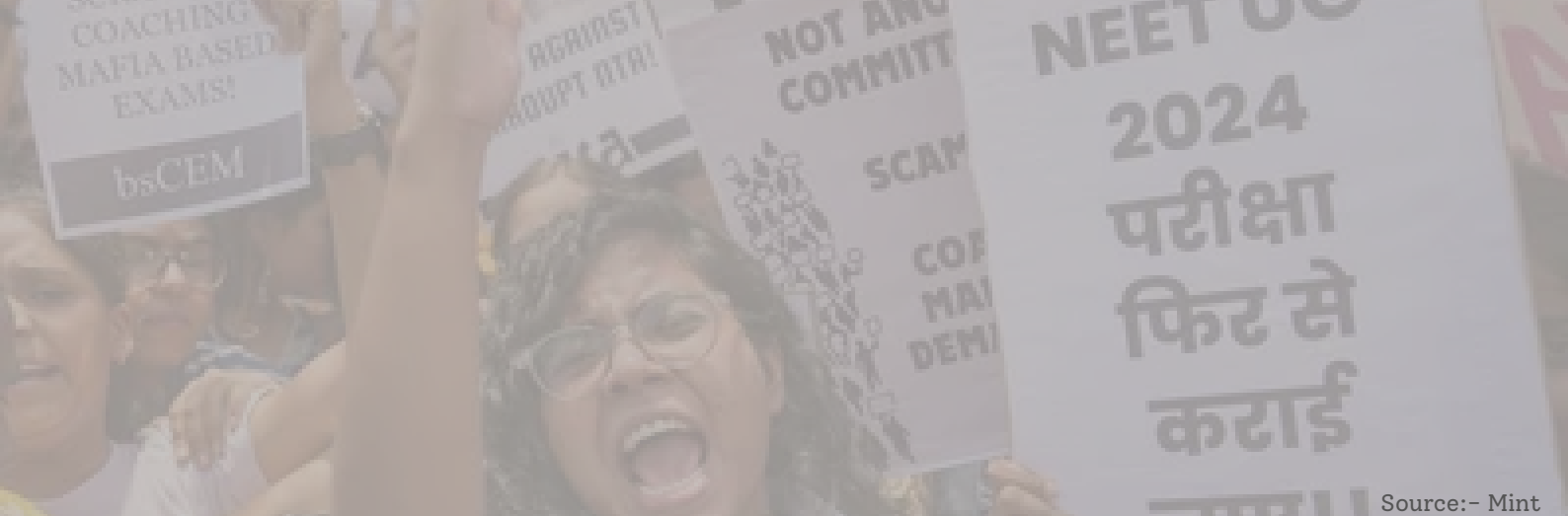
To her, even the mandated necessary rest was a guilt. To her, it might've felt like she has let everyone around her down by not being strong enough physically, but I could see my sister struggle mentally.

Kota is one of the main cities that caters to the students studying for these exams, with a network of coaching institutes, hostels, test culture and rigid routines, thousands move here to live their IIT dreams. Constantly being surrounded by toppers, rankings, mock tests and comparisons, even the highly capable students suddenly end up feeling average. Most people around praise students for having a routine constantly structured around the entire day of studying with minimal time spent on doing necessities like eating and sleeping, paying little to no attention on the wellbeing of the students. Believing things like mental health to be a hindrance towards achieving goals and leading to students becoming weak and sensitive.

“This is the most stressed city in all of India,” said Shree Kumar Verma, 19, who is preparing for his NEET exam at the largest coaching school in Kota.

“Everywhere you look, you can see the desperation of young people in this country. So many have this dream to be a doctor or an engineer and they will go to very intense hardship to get there. Being at Kota is either going to bring you success or totally break you down; it's all or nothing here.” Nowhere is the desire for success more visible than in the city's Radha Krishna temple, where thousands of prayers are scribbled frantically on the walls. “Dear god give me success”, “Krishna ji, please stay with me, please keep my parents happy ... Please help me crack Neet 2024” and “God teach me how to work very hard” are among the messages written by students. The temple priest Pandit Radhe Shyam said he had to whitewash the walls every two weeks to make room for more.

Kota's reputation has also been stained by the tragedy of students ending their lives because of curricular pressure or parental expectations. Many of the aspirants who come to the city hail from middle-class or even low-income backgrounds, with their families often taking loans or mortgaging property to fund the coaching of their wards.



Source:- Mint

And whereas coaching institutes initially screened applicants and admitted only the capable ones, as competition grew, they became lax about the eligibility criteria. Many students found it difficult to cope with the extensive curriculum, and languished as coaching institutes increasingly concentrated on students who were more likely to crack the JEE and bring them credit.

Recent statistics reveal that the suicide rate among coaching students is on a rise with 32 suicides officially recorded in 2023 and 17 suicides officially recorded in Kota till May 2024, As of mid-May 2026, at least three student suicides have been officially reported in Kota this year. Known incidents include: May 2, 2026: A 20-year-old NEET aspirant from Almora, Uttarakhand, died by suicide after falling from the roof of his hostel in the Landmark City area, just a day before the national medical entrance exam. April 24, 2026: A 21-year-old NEET aspirant from Jharkhand was found hanging in his room at Goyal Residency Hostel in the Coral Park area. January 2026: A student from Assam was found dead in a suspected suicide in the Mahaveer Nagar area.

The coaching institutes are now finally developing effective counseling module/intervention strategy for students to overcome stress and stop resorting to suicide. Institutes such as Allen Career Institute, Resonance, and Motion have collaborated with platforms like YourDOST to provide counseling to students. “After the Rajasthan government issued guidelines a year and a half ago, most centres appointed therapists, something that was earlier handled by teachers. There is one therapist for every 500–600 students in our institute. We also offer regular motivational sessions to support students, and every teacher acts as a mentor for a batch of about forty students, who can reach out to her to share any of their problems,” said a faculty member from a reputed coaching centre, seeking anonymity.

Then, why are students still dying by suicide? In May 2025, the Supreme Court sharply reprimanded the Rajasthan government and Kota police, asking, “Why are these children dying by suicide, and only in Kota?” describing the situation as “serious” and demanding accountability for the rising student deaths.

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Coaching centres attribute the suicides to constant pressure from families, peers, and society. “Most of the pressure comes from parents, and it’s very negative. Many of them come from humble backgrounds. In the advanced batch, which is segregated with the cream of intelligent students, 90 percent make it to IIT. However, in the bottom-tier batches, none of them do. Yet they come here and spend two years only to succumb to parental pressure,” the faculty member added.

However, such measures in Kota are too little, too late. In most of the centres, teachers are hired and trained for their academic knowledge, not for their ability to offer emotional support or career advice. “Students are not encouraged to talk about failure or alternatives beyond engineering and medicine. These conversations are either avoided or treated as distractions. There’s a pressing need to train educators to engage with students more holistically,” says Dr Ghasi Ram Choudhry.



As the lights stay on in hostel rooms across Kota long after midnight, thousands of students continue solving equations, memorizing formulas, and chasing futures they hope will change their lives. But somewhere between the mock tests and the rankings, an important reminder often gets lost: they are still teenagers, not machines designed only to perform. Maybe the problem was never ambition itself. The problem begins when young people start believing they must earn rest, love, or self-worth through performance alone. Dreams are meant to inspire people, not exhaust them. And perhaps no rank, percentile, or entrance exam should ever matter more than the mental wellbeing of the students chasing them.



Is Your Identity Fused With Your Political Affiliation?

OVEE GOKHALE MA-1

The perspectives presented in this article are personal to the author and do not represent the official stance of the editor, department, or institution.

Have you ever seen a casual conversation suddenly turn tense, the moment politics enters the room? A family dinner turns silent, friendships feel strained, or a social media comment section turns into a battlefield. What makes political opinions feel so personal that disagreement can sometimes feel like betrayal?

Political affiliation is not just limited to voting preference but also includes values, morality, religion, identity and emotions. Problems arise when a person cannot separate themselves from their political identity, that is, the way they associate themselves with political groups, beliefs, or ideologies.

Social Psychologists William B. Swann and Ángel Gómez coined the term “Political Identity Fusion” in early 2000’s to describe this phenomenon. Identity fusion is a deep-rooted sense of “oneness” with a group and its individual members that motivates personally costly, pro-group behaviors. (Swann & Gómez, 2009)

If we look at history, we may notice specific instances that fueled identity fusion. When President Eisenhower was elected as the President of the United States, in the mid-50s, he received significant cross party support. This indicates that until this point identity fusion and polarization wasn’t as strong. However, with the introduction of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, a strong distinction between the Democrats and Republicans began to emerge. In recent years, the Trump administration’s anti-immigrant agenda, amongst other things, has further intensified this distinction.

Similar trends have also been seen in India. For a few decades after independence, goals and agendas across party lines focused on development and nation building. With events like the Emergency, Mandal Report, and Ayodhya conflict seeds of strong political affiliation and identity fusion were sowed. The emergence of strong regional political identities and the spread of television and mass-media, led to political narratives becoming emotionally immersed.



Source:- Poynter

The last decade saw a significant rise in identity fusion. For some people political affiliation now resembles cultural, social, and even moral identity. At the crux of it, when identity fusion becomes widespread, politics stops being about development, administration, and governance; it becomes about belonging, fear, and identity.

Identity fusion is not just a social or cultural phenomenon, brain imaging studies have found that it changes how we process information. When individuals with a fused identity think about their political group, the same brain regions are activated as when they think about themselves (Valenti, 2025). Their brain is unable to distinguish between criticisms of the group and criticisms of the person. This is one of the primary reasons why any sort of critical political discussion or confrontation of the party's ideologies with them feels impossible.

Identity fusion exists on a spectrum and develops gradually. **Below are some early warning signs to look out for:**

1. Difficulty /inability to acknowledge any validity in opposing viewpoints.
2. Social relationships are highly based on political agreement.
3. Having a disproportionate reaction to any trigger stemming from a political discussion.
4. Political themes being the main theme of almost all conversations.
5. Using dehumanising/ inappropriate language to describe people of the opposing ideologies/ political parties, etc.
6. Feeling personally attacked when one's political ideologies are questioned.
7. Spending an increasing amount of time listening to/ watching news consistent with their political ideology.

Beware : Fusion doesn't always require extreme political standings!

If you identified with the above mentioned warning signs, don't worry, they're reversible.

Here are some ways in which you can cultivate psychological flexibility when it comes to politics.

1. Recognize the early warning signs

Insight or acceptance is the first step towards change.

2. Develop interest/hobbies beyond politics

Nurture different hobbies, find activities that interest you, look back at the hobbies you pursued earlier but that somehow got lost along the way. .

3. Preserve relationships across differences

Maintain genuine relationships with people who hold different political views but share other values with you. Shared experiences, hobbies, or mutual care can act as reminders that disagreement does not erase humanity.

4. Accept that no one is fully informed

... and that your understanding will always have limits. Try to incorporate the "I may be wrong about some things" mindset. Rigid certainty often deepens Identity Fusion.

5. Seek Understanding, Not Just Confirmation

Don't look out for facts that confirm your biases, but instead delve into conversations with curiosity to know more about the situation, history, different viewpoints, etc.

6. Diversify your information sources

Engage with people who challenge your assumptions rather than only validating them. Read/watch news from different sources, expose yourself to different perspectives even if they do not match your own.

It is important to remember that political beliefs are a natural and important part of identity, but problems arise when they become inseparable from a person's sense of self. When political beliefs become too closely tied to our identity, even simple disagreements can start feeling deeply personal and damaging to relationships. In today's world of social media, echo chambers and polarization, it becomes even more important to stay curious, open-minded, and connected to people beyond ideological lines. Let us all strive to make space for empathy, dialogue, and human connection.



WORD SCRAMBLE

Unscramble the key concepts from this issue:

hoce breahcm _____

mocnofrtiian saib _____

zaitpolriona _____

tidentity isnouf _____

ragolhtim _____

1-Echo Chamber 2-Confirmation Bias
3-Polarization 4-Identity Fusion 5-Algorithm

FROM SHOCK TO SILENCE

SAISHA KAMBLE MA-1

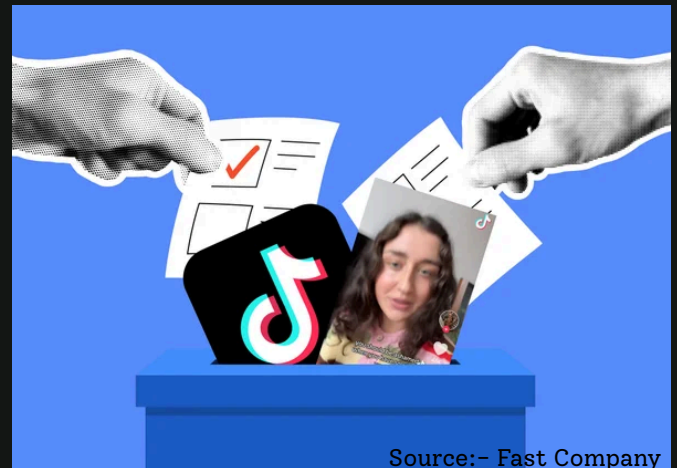
The perspectives presented in this article are personal to the author and do not represent the official stance of the editor, department, or institution.

You wake up. You grab your phone. You scroll through your feed. A cat playing piano, a Tiramisu recipe, a trendy dance reel, and somewhere in the middle of this doomscrolling is yet another video of civilians trapped under buildings, children crying for food, and other unimaginable flagged videos. You click, wait, let out a "whoa," and scroll.

This isn't necessarily a moral failing. It may simply be our brain adapting.

We are experiencing an unprecedented human historical moment, where we see real-time atrocities from across the world while waiting for our coffee to brew. And, more often than not, we digest these horrors not through protests but via memes and dark jokes, a numbness that seems almost normal at this stage. Social media platforms focus on speed rather than reflection. Tragedy appears alongside entertainment posts. This flattens emotional hierarchy, making war footage and memes share the same psychological space.

So what exactly is happening to us? It's desensitization.



Desensitization, in simple words, can be called your brain's spam filter for trauma. From a psychological viewpoint, it is a diminished emotional reaction toward a stimulus following repeated exposure. The first time you see graphic violence, it's sickening. Your stomach churns, you might cry or react with shock, pause and think, Oh no! But the hundredth time? You might not even finish the video. That is emotional numbing and the normalization of violence that happens.

Here's where it gets interesting. The youth isn't just slipping into quiet numbness; we're consuming meme culture and reducing our sensitivity to violence through it. I clearly remember the drone attacks on a neighboring country and also remember how the internet made it comical. It's not about who your enemy is but about how easily people normalize war and destruction by making them funny. If we laugh about one conflict, we can easily do it for many more.

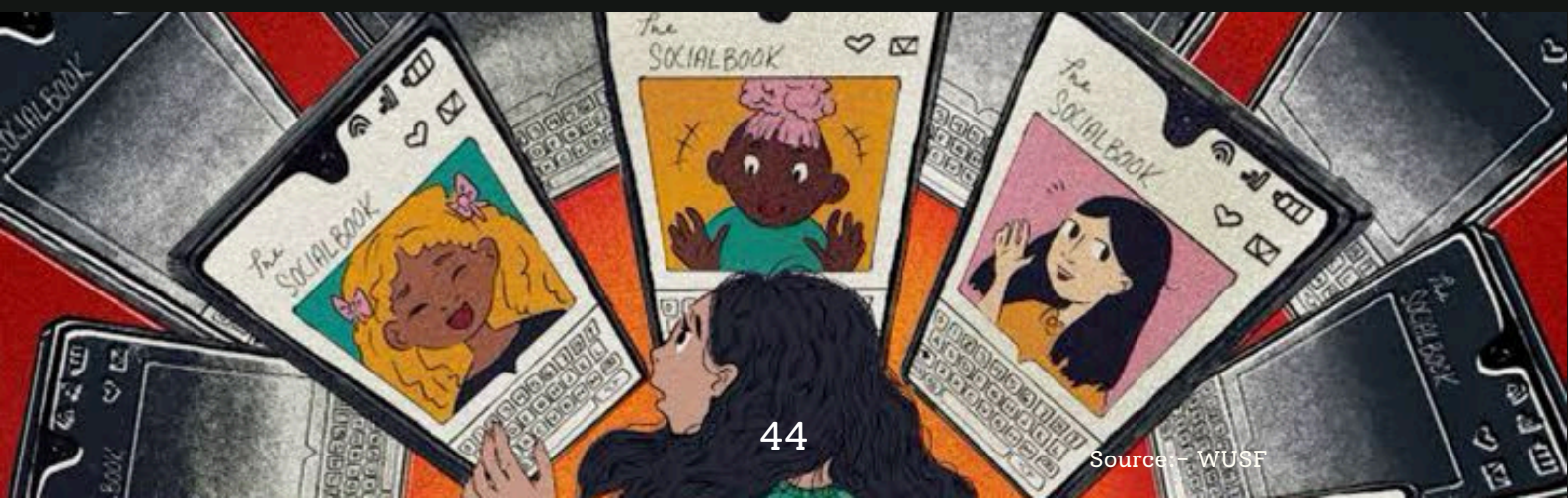
As news of civilian casualties begins to surface, you'll start seeing edits to trending audios, captions with words like "POV: you are a civilian in XYZ conflict area," along with comments such as "average Tuesday." This is not an act of indifference; it is a psychological defense mechanism played out publicly.

You'd ask why only humor is used to cope, though? Well, memes allow us to acknowledge horror while simultaneously mocking it, distancing us from the emotional weight. They're the digital equivalent of nervous laughter at a funeral.

There's also a social aspect. Sharing a meme about a tragedy shows awareness without requiring the emotional effort of a "proper" response. It communicates: I'm informed, I'm not oblivious, but I'm also not going to act, as this affects me when the last fifty tragedies didn't. As of recently, the death toll in Gaza has reached shocking levels, with entire neighborhoods destroyed and humanitarian crises unfolding in real time on Instagram Lives. The "all eyes on Rafah" campaign went viral, but viral moments have shelf lives. The algorithm moved on. Palestinians are still suffering, but the world has newer trends to follow.

The uncomfortable truth is that we don't react to all tragedies equally. A European refugee crisis receives different coverage than one in the Middle East. A war involving a nuclear power gets more attention than one that doesn't affect "us." Our emotional numbing isn't random; it's influenced by racism, geopolitics, and proximity. Now, you might ask what purpose desensitization serves, then? I would say it isn't entirely evil. It does serve real functions. Constant empathy is neurologically unsustainable. If we felt the same intensity for every death online as we would for a neighbor's death, we'd be overwhelmed and unable to function. Desensitization helps us carry on. Those who don't crumble at every headline can organize, donate, and vote. Sometimes, having distance enables action. Shared humor fosters in-group bonding. Emotional numbness online does not always mean people care less; sometimes it means they have exceeded their emotional capacity to care continuously.

But there are real costs: If nothing surprises you, what will motivate you to act? Desensitization can become a convenient excuse for inaction. As the number of victims rises, our emotional response and willingness to act often diminish, which is referred to as the "psychic numbing."





Psychologists also refer to this as compassion fatigue, which is a state where constant exposure to suffering reduces our ability to emotionally respond with the same intensity over time.

Psychology is political, and governments understand desensitization better than we do. We have just begun to grasp the term. "Collateral damage" replaces "dead children." These phrases exist to create cognitive distance, to help us, soldiers, and politicians sleep at night. Drone warfare may become a form of weaponized desensitization. When you kill via screen, from thousands of miles away, the psychological barriers to violence lower. Media management during war carefully controls what we see and when. Too much graphic footage can lead to backlash; too little can cause apathy.

We are a generation with pocket-sized windows into human suffering, scrolling through them as if they were weather updates. Maybe the goal isn't to reverse desensitization; that might be impossible and perhaps even undesirable. Maybe the aim is to remain selectively sensitive and decide what deserves our emotional investment.

We should allow ourselves to be affected by certain events to retain our humanity, while using numbness as a tool rather than a default state. The danger begins when tragedy stops feeling tragic.

But here's the thought I want to leave you with: If you can watch a child pulled from rubble and feel nothing, that's not strength. That's not "being realistic." That's a door shutting inside you. Every door that closes makes it easier for us to accept destruction because it no longer horrifies us.

“There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest.”

— Elie Wiesel



What Keeps Certain Political Parties in Power?

MILI DASS, MA-1

Some political parties become so powerful that removing them feels impossible. They may lose one election and face criticism, and may return stronger. Other parties rise very quickly, become famous, create excitement for some time and then slowly disappear. The reason behind this is not always good leadership and better policies. Politics works much deeper than that. Like how people think, how political systems are built and how some parties become a part of people's identity that it feels so hard to differentiate between them.

To understand why some parties keep winning, we need to understand how the systems work. Giovanni Sartori's 1976 work, *Parties and Party System*, he explained that some democracies have healthy competition between parties, but others slowly become dominated by one major party. This usually does not happen through force, but naturally a party becomes so strong institutionally that removing them becomes difficult (Sartori, 1976).

Economist Douglass North in his concept of "path dependency" explains that early advantages become stronger over time. A party that gains influence early may slowly build connections through media, funding, institutions and the local communities. And once these structures are in form, they are hard to change not because they are good but because everyone gets used to the system. The parties who set up early get better benefits (North, 1990).

The perspectives presented in this article are personal to the author and do not represent the official stance of the editor, department, or institution.



Source: — Stock Cake

Most people do not choose political parties the way they choose a product like by comparing the features and then selecting the best option. Henri Tajfel and John Turner's Social Identity Theory explained that people often see groups as a part of their identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This also applies to politics just as much as it does to a sports team. When a party becomes a part of your identity, you don't just support it, you feel like you are a part of it. And when something is part of your identity you feel it personal and when someone points criticism it feels like a personal attack and instead of seeing it rationally you start defending it.



Source: The Creativity Post

Ziva Kunda's 1990 paper on 'motivated reasoning' she explained that people usually reach a conclusion first which they emotionally want and then find for logic and evidence to support it, this means working backwards (Kunda, 1990). For parties this acts as an advantage because the people who are loyal to their parties will defend them even during failure or any scandal. They may get blamed on other groups, to the media or to any other major reasons they found.

Parties that are already in power usually have an advantage even before elections, people already know them because they appear on social media, TV, newspapers, rallies and advertisements. So familiarity makes voters more comfortable. So even if opposition parties have good ideas, they often struggle to display them because they do not have the same level of visibility in front of people.

Governments in power also have the ability to influence public opinion through policies and projects, right before elections, like they may announce new schemes, subsidies, jobs or financial benefits at the right time so people will feel positive.

Another important thing in politics is storytelling. George Lakoff has explained that politics is not just about facts but also about frames. Frames are mental shortcuts through which people understand the world (Lakoff, 2004). If a party knows how to control the narrative, then people begin to see the events through the party's lens. So the party decides who is the hero, who is the enemy, what counts as a danger and what success looks like. Also, the way the information is presented matters more than just simply how much the information exists.

Emotions also play a big role. Fear, anger, hope strongly influence the behaviour of the people towards the party. A message that makes people feel safe usually spreads more effectively than a message only with facts.

Given all of this, then what finally weakens a party? Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt's book *How Democracies Die* explains that the main thing is elite defection that when prominent people within the party withdraw or join the opposition, like once it breaks internally, the people become open to other options (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).



Source: Difference Between

Economic crises are another reason when unemployment arises or losing savings or daily life becomes difficult, loyalty towards the party weakens and the suffering becomes more important than the political identity.

Generational change is also one more factor. New generations do not always share the same emotional attachment with the party as the older generation did. Because their opinions and experiences are different.

Political power is not only maintained through elections, but through voter loyalty, advantages and narratives that shape how people see the world. Parties that connect with people's emotions, and identity often stay in power longer. However, nothing lasts forever, economic crises, generational changes and other factors eventually weaken even the strongest political parties.



Word Search

O V A G B D S J F O Y R P C E L E A U E
O N I Q C K A S A S B L U Z L F N W K O
B M M K Q E L A Z V W P T M A A B S I F
Y H C O N P U P I Y Q S R J Q X T D L Q
G R Y E R H I X E H E Y U Z T J P C A M
H P G Z N A J R M Z C C O U Q S E H W B
V R Y C R T L T S C O H C Q S L B C D J
R E T G H N R I P M N O C D E K I A D V
E S R B W K D E T U O L N L L E W R K K
T I A N L E R X H Y M O F N X A G U O Y
S D P Y G P L S I X I G G L M A R Q M Q
I E S C T S L L Q L C Y R I G H T S T M
N N J I S K N V B O S S R B F G Q N G R
I T P L R N D R Q E R K R E L I G I O N
M V F O Y A Z P P O I P O L I T I C S Q
A P B P R B J Q W W U N L E Z E V X I N
J F S A C F S N E M T A G B M I T F S C
F P Z K O M P P K L K Y A C T S T L H V
O D R K B V B K D R T S K W F C N B A Y
G P A X W F W K E C M B G S J M O R B W

- Acts
- Economics
- Politics
- Minister
- Party
- Court
- Psychology
- President
- Morality
- Law
- Wellbeing
- Banks
- Religion
- Rights
- Policy
- Centre



In politics, nothing happens by accident. If it happens, you can bet it was planned that way.

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

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