

EDITORIALS – 4th SEP 2026

1. **YOUTH POWER, AN ELECTORAL FORCE STILL IN THE MAKING**

(GS Paper II Polity)

This editorial ‘**Youth power, an electoral force still in the making**’ was published in **The Hindu** on 4th Sep 2026, highlights India’s growing **political attention to youth** despite their failure to consolidate into a distinct **electoral bloc**.

Political Attention and Policy Gaps

- Parties, Ministries and media increasingly court **Generation Z** through digital and campus outreach, reflecting urgency to capture youth attention.
- Youth schemes cover employment, entrepreneurship and skills, while **National Education Policy 2020** promotes innovative learning and **National Youth Policy 2026** targets digital preparedness.
- Limited understanding of **Gen Z and Gen Alpha** persists, although these generations increasingly demand institutional accountability.
- **NITI Aayog** estimates 8.7 crore people aged 15–29 are outside education, employment or training, while the **degree-job gap** remains severe.
- Recent protests have triggered opposition criticism and government responsiveness, but neither side has demonstrated a clear **youth blueprint** beyond **electoral mobilisation**.

Demographic Strength but Electoral Fragmentation

- India has the world’s largest **youth population**, with 65% below 35 and nearly 23% of the **electorate** aged 18–29.
- Recent State elections showed no consistent youth preference; limited consolidation in Tamil Nadu and Bihar lacked a distinct **youth agenda** or durable **political direction**.
- India’s electoral history contains stable caste, community, class and occupational blocs, but no comparable **youth vote** has developed over **75 years**.
- **Caste and community**, reinforced by gender identity, continue to subsume youth identity, while employment and education remain weak unifying concerns.
- Youth electoral participation remains subdued despite improvement through **Election Commission of India** literacy campaigns promoting **informed participation** in educational institutions.

Emerging Electoral Test

- Elections in Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Manipur and Goa will test whether street mobilisation becomes **electoral preference**, particularly where **Gen Z voters** can influence closely contested seats.
- Nearly one-fourth of Assembly seats in these States were won by around 5% margins, creating potential **swing constituencies** for organised **youth participation**.
- Diverse regional concerns prevent a uniform youth constituency; present political outreach may therefore represent **loss minimisation** rather than investment in a nationwide **generational bloc**.
- Traditional social coalitions and booth management may still outweigh online mobilisation, while parties cautiously monitor the emergence of a distinct **Gen Z vote**.

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Pathways to Substantive Youth Representation

- **Representation deficit:** Only 11% of the 18th Lok Sabha MPs are aged 40 or below, showing that India's demographic youthfulness has not produced proportional legislative representation.
- **Winnable candidature:** Priya Saroj and Pushpendra Saroj entered the Lok Sabha at 25 in 2024, demonstrating that young candidates can successfully contest competitive constituencies.
- **Local leadership:** Arya Rajendran became Thiruvananthapuram Mayor at 21 in 2020, showing how urban local bodies can incubate young political leaders.
- **Electoral literacy:** The Election Commission's Electoral Literacy Clubs 2.0 promote continuous democratic learning through structured activities in schools, colleges and universities.
- **Political training:** The National Youth Parliament Festival, launched in 2019, enables people aged 18–25 to participate in democratic debates from district to national levels.
- **Civic engagement:** MY Bharat, established in 2023 for people aged 15–29, connects youth with volunteering, mentorship, experiential learning and nation-building opportunities.

- **Inclusive entry:** Shambhavi Choudhary's election at 25 from the Scheduled Caste-reserved Samastipur constituency illustrates the intersection of youth, gender and caste representation.

2. FOR NEWBORNS, THE ANSWER IS HOSPITAL PLUS HOME

(GS Paper I Society)

This editorial '**For newborns, the answer is hospital plus home**' was published in **The Hindu** on 4th Sep 2026, highlights the need to combine **safe neonatal units** with strengthened **home-based** newborn care.

Rising Institutional Burden

- Recurrent neonatal deaths, including three in the **Amravati hospital fire** in 2026, indicate a systemic rather than isolated **public-health failure**.
- **Institutional deliveries** rose from 39% in 2005–06 to 90% in 2023–24, increasing annual hospital births from 109 lakh to 194 lakh.
- Admissions to **Special Newborn Care Units** increased 28%, from 11.3 lakh in 2021–22 to 14.45 lakh in 2023–24, worsening overcrowding.
- Government hospitals increasingly manage premature, low-birth-weight and referred newborns, producing a more complex **case mix** requiring specialised **neonatal care**.
- The Gorakhpur oxygen disruption and fires in Bhandara, Bhopal, Jhansi and Amravati reveal persistent **infrastructure failures** and weak **safety systems**.
- Overcrowding, inadequate nurse-to-baby ratios, equipment shortages and poor **infection prevention** increase the risk of **hospital-acquired infections**.

Home-Based Care Model

- The **Gadchiroli field trial** found that trained community health workers providing home-based care reduced rural neonatal mortality by **62.2%**.
- Workers managed infections, supported breastfeeding and warmth, and cared for stable **low-birth-weight** and **preterm babies** at home.
- During 1996–2003, 97% of eligible babies weighing above 1,800 grams and born after 34 weeks received **home-based care** with low fatality.

- Incorporated into the public-health system in 2011, **Home-Based Newborn Care** is now delivered by nearly eight lakh trained **Accredited Social Health Activists**.
- Severe prematurity, respiratory distress, shock, sepsis, birth asphyxia and other danger signs still require immediate **facility-based treatment**, as home care cannot replace **intensive care**.

Three-Part Strategy

- **Decongest neonatal units** by shifting appropriate and stable newborns to supervised home care, preserving scarce beds for critically ill babies.
- Strengthen **clinical capacity** through adequate doctors, nurses, nurse-to-baby ratios, functional equipment, infection control and reliable oxygen and electricity backups.
- Mandate **institutional safety** through fire suppression, electrical and oxygen-system safeguards, evacuation drills and independent audits.
- The **Janani Suraksha Yojana** successfully expanded institutional deliveries, but hospital admission should become the first step in a wider **continuum of care**.

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Addressing Social Determinants of Neonatal Mortality

- **Maternal anaemia:** NFHS-5 found nearly 57% of women aged 15–49 anaemic, while Anaemia Mukt Bharat's 7×7×7 strategy adopts a life-cycle approach covering pregnant women.
- **Nutrition support:** Mission Poshan 2.0 provides supplementary nutrition to pregnant women, lactating mothers and adolescent girls through Anganwadi centres across India.
- **High-risk detection:** Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan provides free specialist antenatal check-ups every month and tracks high-risk pregnancies until safe delivery.
- **Early marriage:** NFHS-5 found 23.3% of women aged 20–24 were married before 18, increasing risks associated with adolescent pregnancy and maternal malnutrition.
- **Birth spacing:** Mission Parivar Vikas expands contraceptive access in high-fertility districts, helping prevent short pregnancy intervals associated with prematurity and low birth weight.
- **Financial access:** Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram provides free delivery, diagnostics, medicines, blood and transport for pregnant women and sick infants in public institutions.

- **Geographical equity:** Birth Waiting Homes in remote and tribal regions accommodate pregnant women near health facilities, reducing delays caused by distance and poor connectivity.

3. ARE BRANDS OVERREACTING TO MANUFACTURED OUTRAGE?

(GS Paper I Society)

This editorial ‘Are brands overreacting to manufactured outrage?’ was published in **The Hindu** on 4th Sep 2026, highlights how **online outrage** is driving brands towards **advertisement withdrawals, cultural caution** and **fear-based self-censorship**.

Controversy and Competing Interpretations

- Jewellery brand Giva withdrew its **Raksha Bandhan advertisement** after criticism of Kriti Sanon’s outfit, continuing a pattern of retreats following **online backlash**.
- Santosh Desai viewed Giva as either commercially naive or deliberately generating publicity, while Mitushi Sharma considered **employee safety** and **commercial risk** inseparable.
- Unlike Tanishq’s 2020 interfaith advertisement and FabIndia’s 2021 Urdu campaign, Giva conveyed no social message; criticism instead targeted **women’s clothing** through **religious interpretation**.
- Current sensitivities make backlash foreseeable, but cultural awareness should recognise that language, clothing and imagery may receive different **regional interpretations** without abandoning **creative communication**.

Manufactured Outrage and Self-Censorship

- Desai termed the backlash **manufactured outrage**, where determined groups magnify minor content to sustain wider cultural and ideological conflicts.
- Treating women’s festival attire as religiously prescribed reflects a broader **cultural project** seeking control over women’s clothing, speech and **personal autonomy**.
- Sharma found the outfit unobjectionable but argued that every advertising element must serve the intended **brand message** and avoid becoming an unnecessary **distraction**.
- **Self-censorship** is widespread across agencies and brands; it may improve contextual awareness but can also suppress ideas because of anticipated **social-media reactions**.

- Brand caution becomes problematic when decisions arise primarily from **fear of outrage** rather than genuine cultural sensitivity or sound **ethical judgment**.

Commercial Logic and Wider Consequences

- Brands are commercial entities rather than social crusaders; for a small challenger like Giva, avoiding confrontation with powerful groups can be a rational **risk-management** decision.
- Withdrawing the advertisement enlarged the controversy and created an unintended impression that Giva accepted restrictions on **women's attire**, raising the later cost of **public resistance**.
- Giva is unlikely to suffer lasting damage; as seen after the Tanishq controversy, widespread attention may strengthen **brand visibility** and consumer recall.
- Festive-season publicity could ultimately support Giva's jewellery sales, making the controversy a potential **commercial advantage** despite the initial **reputational risk**.

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Institutional Safeguards against Coordinated Digital Outrage

- **Constitutional protection:** In *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India* (2015), the Supreme Court protected online discussion and advocacy while permitting restrictions on incitement.
- **Independent scrutiny:** The Advertising Standards Council of India processed 9,599 complaints and scrutinised 7,199 advertisements in 2024–25, offering structured review instead of mob-driven decisions.
- **Objective regulation:** The Central Consumer Protection Authority penalised coaching institutes for misleading topper claims, illustrating regulation based on demonstrable consumer harm rather than subjective offence.
- **Political pressure:** Dabur withdrew its same-sex Karwa Chauth advertisement in 2021 after threatened legal action, showing how official intervention can amplify online outrage.
- **Platform responsibility:** The Information Technology Rules, 2021 require social-media intermediaries to establish grievance mechanisms, providing formal channels for addressing unlawful and harmful content.

- **Threat management:** The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre and National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal provide institutional channels for reporting intimidation, impersonation, doxxing and online threats.
- **Inclusive review:** ASCI's guidelines on harmful gender stereotypes offer advertisers a professional benchmark for identifying discriminatory content without surrendering creative decisions to online campaigns.