

WOMEN LOSE RESERVATION BATTLE

Today, women of India lost another round of battle to secure reservations in the Parliament and Legislatures. This happened as the combined Opposition voted against the Constitutional Amendment Bill that sought to implement 33 per cent women's quota in legislative bodies including Parliament before the 2029 Parliamentary polls. As such major amendments in the Constitution demand two-thirds majority, it failed. Who is to be blamed for this? Did the government rush through such crucial bill knowing well that the opposition would defeat it in the Loks Sabha? Is the Opposition to be blamed for not giving the Indian women a chance to get their share of political power? As Home Minister Amit Shah said after the bill was defeated that the mindset behind it was neither in the interest of women, nor the country. The likely scene to emerge will be -- the BJP and NDA using the issue in elections in the West Bengal Assembly against the opposition. However, the women of this country would remain unequal partners in politics.

WEST ASIA WAR?

Has the war in West Asia ended? With Iran announcing that the Strait of Hormuz will remain "completely open" for the duration of the current cessation of hostilities in Lebanon, it seems so. The Lebanon ceasefire is a reference to the ongoing talks between Israel and Lebanon over the latter's support to the anti-Israel Hezbollah. Israel had bombed the Hezbollah hideouts after targeting Iran. Lebanon, once a prosperous and modern country, has gone through a massive transformation for worst because of the radical Islamic groups taking control of the parts of the country. Tehran's announcement had a quick impact as the oil priced tumbled. We all do hope that this time the ceasefire continues and Iran also backs off from supporting the Hezbollah.

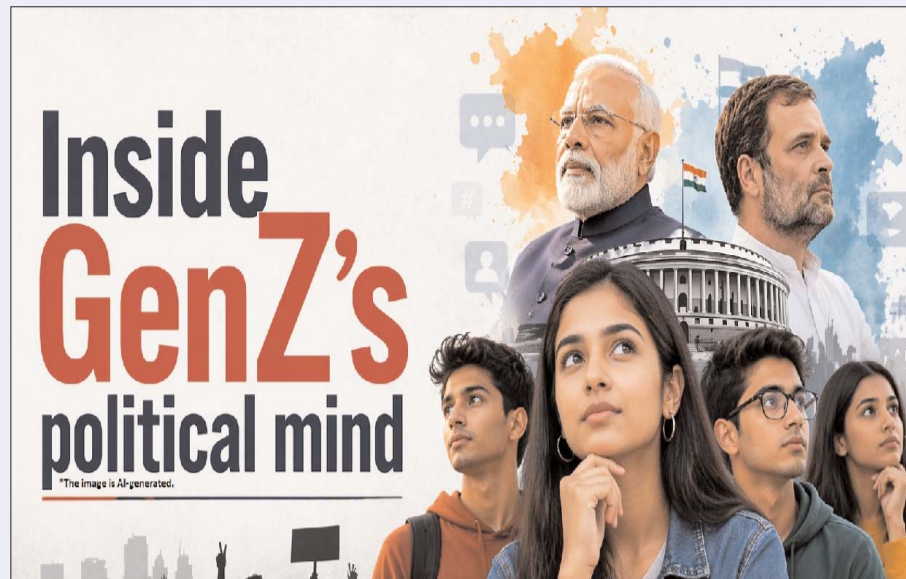
Inside GenZ's political mind

Rangam Trivedi

India's political conversation is quietly being reshaped by a generation that grew up with smartphones, digital payments, and real-time information. Urban Gen Z voters, those between 18 and 22 today, do not evaluate politics through the traditional lenses of ideology or party loyalty. Instead, they assess leadership much like they evaluate apps or start-ups: by performance, usability, and outcomes.

Forget the stereotype of the "distracted teen." After my informal interactions with over 1,000 urban Gen Z respondents in Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Ahmedabad recently, I found a demographic that is deeply analytical and surprisingly pragmatic. For this cohort, politics is about a 'market-fit product'. When looking at the two primary faces of Indian politics, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and LoP Rahul Gandhi, this urban demographic is leaning towards the former because his governance style hits the specific "likes" of a generation raised on efficiency.

Two of the highest "likes" in our interactions were "performance-driven leadership" and "measurable outcomes". PM Modi's mantra, "We inaugurate what we lay the foundation for," resonates with a generation that values speed over rhetoric. For an undergraduate Gen Z, witnessing India become the world's third-largest start-up ecosystem with over 2 lakh start-ups within a decade of the Startup India Mission is a lived reality. This is also visible in the rapid execution of the India AI Mission, with India ranking third in the Global AI Competitive Index by Stanford and hosting a global AI summit within just two years of its launch. Similarly, the India Semiconductor Mission saw the Sanand plant inaugurated in just 900 days from its foundation, with nine more coming up in less than five years of its launch. From the world's tallest rail bridge (Chenab) to the Atal Setu and Sela Tunnel, these mega projects were completed in record time, shattering the "decades of delay" seen under



previous Congress-led governments. These are not just headlines; they are lifestyle upgrades delivered by their leader, instilling a firm belief in these youngsters that their future in India is exceptionally bright.

Urban Gen Z's political views have moved towards meritocracy and consistency, creating a clear disconnect with Rahul Gandhi. This hustling generation often sees Rahul Gandhi as a "part-time politician". His legislative record shows 51 per cent attendance in the 17th Lok Sabha, 52 per cent in the 16th, and 43 per cent in the 15th. His frequent absence from key debates in Parliament during important discussions, often due to trips abroad, falls below national averages and suggests a lack of commitment. For young voters, holding on to 'supreme leader' status solely due to dynastic succession after nearly 100 electoral losses goes against the merit-based culture that Gen Z values.

Moreover, Rahul Gandhi's approach to negative politics, which includes endorsing negative slogans like "Modi teri kabra khudegi" and supporting the "shirtless protest" at the India AI Impact Summit, conflicts with a generation that wants a constructive approach. By reportedly praising those who tried disrupting a

global tech summit in front of foreign delegates, Gen Z says he chose a political stunt over India's global reputation. This attitude against development, opposing every pro-people decision, and engaging in "propaganda politics" from abroad suggests a leadership based on conflict rather than policy. In the end, Rahul Gandhi's focus on caste-based discriminatory politics and attacks on democratic institutions makes his style harder to connect with for a development- and innovation-driven Gen Z.

For Gen Z professionals in commerce and tech, the opposition's dismissal of "Make in India" and UPI has been decisively debunked by a high-performance economic reality. In FY 2025, India's total exports hit a record \$825.3 billion, bolstered by a 73 per cent surge in FDI (\$47 billion). Among its highlights is India's ascent as the world's second-largest mobile manufacturing hub and smartphones becoming the top export category in FY 25. Simultaneously, UPI has democratised finance, handling 50 per cent of global real-time payments with a monthly average of \$20 billion transactions in FY 25-26, all fuelled by the world's cheapest data at Rs 8-9/GB even in the far corners of the country. Beyond domestic success, PM Modi's reception of top civilian honours from 29 na-

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tions, recent landmark trade deals with the UK and USA, and secured energy corridors through the Strait of Hormuz for India's energy vessels during the West Asia crisis signal a level of global stature. To a generation prioritising tangible results over political rhetoric, Rahul Gandhi's perceived anti-development stance feels like a direct threat to their career trajectory, cementing their alignment with the visionary leadership of PM Modi focused on a "Viksit Bharat".

Today, India's median age is around 29 years, rising to 38 by 2047 — making Viksit Bharat a vision for today's Gen Z. While Rahul Gandhi instigates youth to stand against democratic institutions, PM Modi inspires through his vision of bringing 1 lakh youth from non-political backgrounds into politics to end the rot of nepotism and build Viksit Bharat. Gen Z chooses PM Modi's inspiration over negative narratives because they see a leader spending every minute for the nation. Standing by his side, they are the architects of 2047, choosing a future built on development rather than an anti-growth agenda.

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THE LUXURY OF GOING SOMEWHERE

Rachna Lakhpati

There was a time when travel was an act of spontaneity. You had a week off, a cousin's wedding in another city, or simply a restlessness that needed geography to cure it — and you booked a ticket. Not a spreadsheet. Not a three-hour comparison exercise across six tabs. Just a ticket.

That time feels almost quaint now. Somewhere between a relentless climb in aviation fuel costs, dynamic pricing algorithms that seem personally offended by your desire to fly on a Friday, and toll rates that treat every highway like a private members' club, the simple act of getting from one place to another has quietly transformed into a financial negotiation. Travel — for work, for leisure, for a medical appointment in a city with a better hospital — has started to resemble a luxury. Not by aspiration. By arithmetic. This shift is something both practical and deeply human, unfolding in response. People have started hunting. Not for experiences — for deals. The same energy that once drove us to circle supermarket shelves on a Saturday morning, trolley tilted, eyes scanning



for the yellow discount sticker, has migrated entirely to travel. We are bargain-hunting our way across the world now, and the supermarket has simply gone digital.

The tools of this new hunt are, predictably, AI and the resurgent travel expert. It is a fascinating pairing — the algorithmic and the instinctive, working in parallel for the same harried traveller trying to fly to Mumbai without being quietly robbed. AI-powered platforms now scrape

thousands of fares in seconds, flagging the precise Tuesday morning window in which a ticket to Bangalore is somehow forty per cent cheaper than Thursday evening.

Meanwhile, the human travel consultant — long declared extinct by the rise of booking apps — has made a quiet, confident comeback. Because it turns out, when the pricing systems become complex enough, people stop trusting machines and reach, instinctively, for another person.

What this signals is not merely economic stress. It is a fundamental reclassification of movement itself.

For centuries, the ability to travel freely was a marker of freedom.

Of citizenship. Of a life that had options. When a family starts reconsidering a holiday because fuel surcharges have inflated the cab fare to the airport, or when a daily-wage worker calculates whether the train to the next city for a job interview is worth the cost of the ticket — travel stops being a choice and starts being a privilege. And privilege, by definition, is unequally distributed. The middle class, once again, finds itself in the uncomfortable middle — too mobile to stay put, too financially squeezed to move freely. Scouring the internet at midnight for a flash sale fare. Downloading one more app. Asking AI what the best day to book is.

There is something quietly heartbreaking about that image. We were promised a connected world. Nobody mentioned it would cost this much to actually cross it.

The writer is a freelancer writes on development and social issues; Views presented are personal.

A New Chapter in India's Democratic Story: When Women Rise, the Nation Rises



Er Priyanka Mahajan

In the long arc of India's democratic journey, there are moments that feel less like policy decisions and more like turning points in history. The enactment of the Women's Reservation Bill—formally known as the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam—is one such moment. With its promise to reserve one-third of seats for women in legislatures, it signals not just political reform, but a quiet revolution.

At the heart of this transformation stands our Prime Minister Narendra

Modi, who pushed forward a bill that had lingered in debate and remained trapped between intent and indecision for nearly three decades. The government led by Narendra Modi did what governments before it could not—turn a 27-year-old promise into law. In doing so, it did not merely pass a bill; it altered the future of Indian women & the trajectory of India's democracy.

While the move itself speaks volumes, its deeper significance lies in what it acknowledges: that India's women are not merely participants in democracy & development—they are its equal architects.

The Stark Reality of Numbers. From Silence to Strength - India today has around 15 lakh elected women representatives in Panchayati Raj institutions, the highest in the world. This is not symbolic participation—it is proven governance. And yet, at the highest level, representation remains limited. India's Lok Sabha has 543 seats. After the 33% reservation is implemented on ground, 181 seats would be allocated to women. Currently, women hold about 82 seats—roughly 15% of the

Lok Sabha.

The Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly, for instance, has only 4 women representatives just 4.44% of total representation. This raises an uncomfortable but necessary question: Why, despite proven capability, are women still so underrepresented? The answer lies not in ability, but in access. Even today, many capable women never make it to the electoral stage—not because they cannot lead, but because they are not given the chance.

India's history is rich, but it is also layered with the realities of a deeply patriarchal society where women were often confined to domestic roles, their voices limited in public and political spaces & decision-making spaces remained largely male-dominated. Politics, seen as an extension of power and public life, remained largely inaccessible to women. Social expectations, financial barriers, and other biases further limited their entry. Even as the nation gained independence, representation remained uneven. The Constitution promised equality, but social structures were slower to

change.

And yet, Indian women have always found ways to rise. From freedom fighters like Rani Lakshmbai, Sarojini Naidu, and Aruna Asaf Ali—who stood shoulder to shoulder with men—to scientists like Kalpana Chawla and Tessy Thomas, who proved that the sky—quite literally—was not the limit.

Consider also the inspiring examples of women officers who have led from the front in critical national operations, including missions like Operation Sindoor. Their leadership under pressure, strategic clarity, and courage reflect a simple truth: capability is not defined by gender.

And yet, despite this legacy of excellence, women's political representation has remained strikingly low. Today, the Women's Reservation Bill stands as an institutional recognition of that journey—a bridge between constitutional ideals and lived reality.

The bill must be viewed not merely as a measure of numerical inclusion, but as a potential catalyst for qualitative change. Greater representation can reshape legislative priorities, di-

versify perspectives in policymaking, and deepen democratic legitimacy.

However, the true transformation hinges on one crucial milestone: its implementation before the 2029 general elections.

Beyond Representation: A Cultural Shift - The significance of this bill extends beyond numbers. It challenges a centuries-old mindset. It tells every young girl in a remote village in Kashmir or Kerala that leadership is not an exception—it is a possibility.

When more women enter legislative bodies, the nature of debate changes. Policies become more inclusive, governance becomes more empathetic, and democracy becomes more representative of its people. This is not about replacing one voice with another—it is about completing the conversation.

This transformation is already visible under PM Modi's government initiatives like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao or the financial inclusion through Jan Dhan accounts—through the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana—where women have

been primary beneficiaries. This has helped Indian women to move from the margins to the mainstream.

These interventions, while varied in scope, point toward a broader shift: from viewing women primarily as beneficiaries of welfare to recognising them as active participants in economic and social transformation. History will record this reform in legislative terms, but its impact will be deeply human. Generations of women who were told to wait their turn may finally see the doors of power open wider.

This reform is not the end of a journey—it is the beginning of a new chapter. And in that quiet shift, there is a moment of acknowledgment—of leadership that chose to act, of a government that recognized the urgency of inclusion, and of a Prime Minister who lent momentum to a long-awaited change.

India's democracy has always evolved through bold steps. With the Women's Reservation Bill, it makes one more move—towards balance, towards fairness, and towards a future where governance truly reflects the strength of all its people.