

EMPOWERING TOMORROW: HOW YOUTH SHAPE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION TODAY?

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Article history

Received date : 25-8-2025

Revised date : 27-8-2025

Accepted date : 22-9-2025

Published date : 15-10-2025

To cite this document:

Suhaimi, S., & Mohd Nor, H. (2025). Empowering tomorrow: How youth shape public participation today? *International Journal of Accounting, Finance and Business (IJAFB)*, 10 (62), 379 – 386.

Abstract: *Youth engagement in public participation plays a crucial role in building inclusive, dynamic, and democratic societies. This paper reviews recent literature highlighting the benefits of youth involvement in civic activities, organizational and sports participation, and urban planning, emphasizing positive impacts on psychological well-being, social capital, and community development. Despite significant barriers such as socioeconomic challenges, infrastructural limitations, and social exclusion, emerging opportunities through digital platforms and youth-friendly policies have expanded access and inclusivity. The paper underscores the importance of creating supportive frameworks that address structural inequalities, foster mentorship, and actively involve youth in decision-making processes. Future recommendations focus on equitable resource allocation, capacity-building programs, and inclusive policy design to empower youth as active citizens, thereby strengthening democratic governance and sustainable community development.*

Keywords: *Youth, Governance, Public Participation, Youth Empowerment, Youth Development*

Introduction

Youth engagement in public participation has become a key factor in building inclusive and dynamic societies. Recent research highlights the positive effects of youth involvement in various areas. For instance, a 2024 review found that youth participation in civic activities, such as volunteering, improves psychological, social, and mental well-being, demonstrating how active involvement benefits both individuals and communities (Brown & Smith, 2024; Suhaimi, et al., 2016). Other studies emphasize the importance of creating inclusive public participation opportunities to ensure diverse youth voices are heard in decision-making (Lee et al., 2024). Targeted efforts by local governments, like those seen in Indonesia's 2024 regional elections, have successfully increased youth voter turnout, illustrating the impact of strategic engagement (Putra & Santoso, 2024). Moreover, involving youth in urban planning fosters innovative and effective community development by incorporating their lived experiences (Garcia & Nguyen, 2024).

Youth involvement in public participation is a crucial element in fostering active citizenship and strengthening democratic governance. Engaging young people in decision-making processes and community activities not only enhances their quality of life but also empowers them to contribute meaningfully to society. Public participation serves as a foundation for good governance by promoting transparency, accountability, and inclusiveness (Cuppen et al., 2012). Various forms of participation enable youth to express their views directly or through representatives, influencing policies and programs that impact their lives. Understanding these different forms of involvement is essential for developing effective strategies that encourage and support youth engagement in public affairs (Anuar & Saruwuno, 2013). Together, these insights reveal that empowering young people to actively participate in public affairs not only supports their personal growth but also strengthens the communities in which they live.

Literature Review

Youth involvement in public participation has gained increasing attention in recent years due to its significant impact on community development and democratic processes. Studies consistently highlight that when young people actively engage in civic activities, such as volunteering, policymaking, or community organizing, it not only benefits society but also promotes their personal growth and well-being (Brown & Smith, 2024). For example, engaging in these activities can enhance young people's sense of belonging, improve social skills, and boost mental health (Brown & Smith, 2024; Lee et al., 2024).

Research also emphasizes the importance of creating inclusive environments where diverse youth voices are valued and heard (Lee et al., 2024). Without deliberate efforts to remove barriers—such as lack of access to platforms or resources—many young people remain marginalized in public decision-making. Governments and organizations play a critical role in providing opportunities and support that empower youth participation (Putra & Santoso, 2024). This is evident in cases where targeted campaigns and youth-friendly policies have successfully increased voter turnout and civic engagement among young populations (Putra & Santoso, 2024).

Youth Involvement in Organizational Activities Related to Community Engagement

Youth involvement in organizational activities that include community service plays a critical role in shaping active citizenship. According to Anuar and Saruwuno (2013), participation in youth organizations provides platforms for young people to engage in social causes, which not only benefits the community but also nurtures leadership and teamwork skills. These organizations often serve as a training ground where youth learn to navigate decision-making processes, develop a sense of responsibility, and contribute to societal development. Furthermore, Wilson and Musick (2021) emphasize that involvement in such structured groups helps youth build social capital by creating networks of support and collaboration, which are crucial for both personal and community growth.

Additionally, youth organizations often align their activities with local needs, which makes participation more relevant and appealing to young people (Kang & Lee, 2023). This relevance increases motivation and sustains long-term engagement. Moreover, involvement in community projects through organizations has been linked to enhanced psychological well-being, as youth feel valued and see the tangible impact of their contributions (Brown & Smith, 2024). Therefore, organizational participation acts as both a socializing experience and an empowering process, helping youth transition into active, responsible adults.

Recent studies also highlight the role of digital platforms in expanding youth engagement within organizations. As noted by Garcia and Nguyen (2024), online communities and social media enable youth organizations to reach wider audiences, foster inclusive participation, and mobilize collective action quickly. This digital shift has created new opportunities for youth to participate in public affairs beyond traditional face-to-face interactions, increasing accessibility and diversity in engagement.

Moreover, youth participation in urban planning and community projects is becoming more recognized as a way to create innovative and responsive solutions to local challenges. Young people's unique perspectives, shaped by their lived experiences, can lead to more effective and sustainable outcomes in public policy and development (Garcia & Nguyen, 2024).

Overall, the literature suggests that meaningful youth participation requires not only opportunity but also education, mentorship, and structural support to maximize its benefits for both young people and the wider community (Brown & Smith, 2024; Lee et al., 2024; Putra & Santoso, 2024; Garcia & Nguyen, 2024).

Youth Involvement in Sports Activities

Youth participation in sports is a critical form of public engagement that offers physical, social, and psychological benefits. Research shows that socioeconomic status, family support, and access to facilities significantly influence youth involvement in organized sports (Anderson & Drennan, 2018). Barriers such as cost and location disproportionately affect lower-income and rural youth, limiting their participation (Smith et al., 2021; Suhaimi & Abidin, 2022).

Volunteering in sports is another important avenue for youth engagement, fostering social capital and community ties while developing personal skills (Jones & Taylor, 2020). Public policies and infrastructure investments are essential to promote safe, accessible sports environments; for example, upgrading sports facilities improves youth participation rates and inclusivity (City of Adelaide, 2022).

Moreover, sports involvement benefits youth health by reducing obesity and improving mental well-being, alongside enhancing self-esteem and reducing risky behaviors (Lee et al., 2019). Addressing barriers through collaborative efforts can expand equitable sports opportunities, ensuring broader youth participation in public life (Anderson & Drennan, 2018).

Challenges of Youth Involvement

Despite the recognized benefits of youth involvement in public participation, several challenges continue to hinder effective engagement. Socioeconomic barriers remain significant. For many young people living in poverty, these costs are prohibitive, effectively barring them from participating in programs that could benefit their development and social integration (Anderson & Drennan, 2018). For example, a teenager from a low-income household may want to join a local soccer league but cannot afford the registration fees or travel to the training grounds regularly. This economic exclusion restricts their access to beneficial activities and reduces their chances of developing skills, building networks, or gaining confidence through public participation (Yeon et al., 2016).

In addition, infrastructural shortcomings, particularly in rural or under-resourced areas, restrict safe and accessible spaces for youth activities, reducing opportunities for participation (City of Adelaide, 2022). Without adequate facilities, opportunities for engagement become scarce, leading to lower participation rates. For instance, rural youth might have to travel long distances to attend a community event or engage in sports activities, discouraging regular participation. Furthermore, poor infrastructure also affects the safety and quality of these activities, with inadequate lighting, poor maintenance, or lack of supervision creating further deterrents.

Time constraints also pose challenges; balancing academic responsibilities, family obligations, and part-time employment often leaves limited availability for civic engagement (Smith et al., 2021; Yeon et al., 2016). In many cases, young people prioritize studies or income-generating activities, especially if their families rely on their financial contributions. This time scarcity reduces their availability for volunteering, attending meetings, or participating in civic initiatives. For example, a student who works after school to support their family may not have the flexibility to join a youth council or attend local government forums.

Furthermore, lack of awareness about available opportunities and insufficient encouragement from family or community networks negatively affect youth motivation to participate (Jones & Taylor, 2020). Social and cultural factors, including gender norms and discrimination, continue to exclude marginalized groups, especially girls and minority youth, from full engagement (Lee, Kim, & Park, 2019). Psychological barriers such as low self-esteem and fear of failure further reduce youth confidence in public participation (Lee et al., 2019). Addressing these challenges requires multi-level interventions aimed at reducing structural inequalities and fostering inclusive environments.

Opportunities of Youth Involvement

Despite these challenges, emerging opportunities provide pathways to enhance youth engagement in public participation. The rapid expansion of digital platforms and social media has revolutionized how young people connect, collaborate, and mobilize, creating more accessible and diverse avenues for involvement beyond traditional physical spaces (Garcia & Nguyen, 2024). For example, youth-led climate movements like Fridays for Future or political campaigns such as #Undi18 in Malaysia have used online tools to rally large numbers of young people, influence public discourse, and even shape national policies. Digital activism is not

limited to protests; it also includes online petitions, awareness campaigns, and participatory content creation, which empowers youth to participate in civic life in innovative, flexible ways. Youth organizations increasingly utilize these tools to broaden their reach and foster inclusive participation (Brown & Smith, 2024).

Additionally, youth organizations are increasingly adopting digital platforms to engage with a broader and more diverse membership. Online workshops, webinars, and virtual meetings have made it easier for youth from rural areas or those with limited mobility to participate actively without physical constraints.

Governments and institutions are beginning to recognize the importance of youth inclusion in policymaking. Public policies that prioritize youth-friendly initiatives, such as targeted voter engagement campaigns and improved sports infrastructure, have demonstrated success in boosting youth involvement (Putra & Santoso, 2024; City of Adelaide, 2022). Furthermore, recognizing youth as valuable contributors in urban planning and community development processes offers innovative approaches that leverage their unique perspectives for more responsive and sustainable outcomes (Garcia & Nguyen, 2024). These opportunities underscore the importance of supportive environments, mentorship, and educational programs that empower youth to realize their full potential as active citizens (Suhaimi et al., 2025).

Limitations and Strengths

While the existing literature provides valuable insights into youth involvement in public participation, several limitations must be acknowledged. Many studies focus predominantly on urban or higher-income populations, which may limit the generalizability of findings to rural or economically disadvantaged youth (Smith, Brown, & Wilson, 2021; Anderson & Drennan, 2018). Additionally, much of the research relies on cross-sectional designs, restricting the ability to infer causality or understand long-term effects of youth engagement (Brown & Smith, 2024). There is also a tendency to examine participation in isolation, without fully accounting for intersecting factors such as gender, ethnicity, and disability that can influence access and experiences (Lee et al., 2019).

Despite these limitations, the strengths of the literature lie in its multidimensional approach to youth engagement, encompassing psychological, social, and structural perspectives. Research consistently highlights the positive impacts of participation on mental health, social capital, and civic skills development (Brown & Smith, 2024; Jones & Taylor, 2020). Furthermore, the integration of case studies and policy analyses provides practical insights for designing effective youth engagement strategies (Putra & Santoso, 2024; City of Adelaide, 2022). The growing recognition of digital platforms as facilitators of inclusive participation represents an innovative strength that expands traditional paradigms of public involvement (Garcia & Nguyen, 2024). Together, these contributions advance understanding and offer a robust foundation for future research and policy development.

Future Applications and Recommendations

To maximize youth participation in public affairs, future efforts should focus on creating inclusive, accessible, and supportive frameworks. Policymakers and community leaders must address socioeconomic disparities by subsidizing costs and improving transportation to ensure equitable access (Anderson & Drennan, 2018; Suhaimi, 2021). Investments in upgrading and maintaining safe sports and community facilities are critical, particularly in underserved areas (City of Adelaide, 2022). Integrating digital engagement strategies with traditional participation

forms can widen access and foster sustained involvement (Garcia & Nguyen, 2024). Schools and organizations should develop programs that raise awareness of participation opportunities, provide mentorship, and build youth capacity through leadership training (Brown & Smith, 2024). Moreover, addressing social and cultural barriers through inclusive policies and campaigns will help ensure marginalized youth feel welcomed and valued (Lee et al., 2019). Lastly, involving youth directly in policy design and urban planning not only empowers them but also enhances the relevance and effectiveness of public initiatives (Garcia & Nguyen, 2024). These combined approaches will contribute to more vibrant, equitable, and democratic societies driven by active youth participation.

Conclusion

Youth engagement in public participation is vital for fostering inclusive, innovative, and democratic societies. Despite challenges such as socioeconomic barriers, infrastructural limitations, and social exclusion, emerging opportunities through digital platforms, supportive policies, and inclusive programs show great promise in enhancing youth involvement. Future efforts must prioritize equitable access, mentorship, and direct youth involvement in decision-making to harness their unique perspectives and energy. Finally, direct youth involvement in decision-making processes should be a cornerstone of democratic governance. Young people must be seen not merely as beneficiaries but as key stakeholders whose unique perspectives and innovative ideas can shape policies and initiatives. Their active engagement ensures that public affairs reflect the diverse needs of society and remain responsive to future generations. Strengthening these pathways will not only empower young people but also strengthen communities, promoting sustainable development and good governance.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are also extended to all participants involved for their willingness to contribute their time, insights, and expertise in making this study a success.

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