



Youth Political Engagement in Transitional Societies: Trends, Drivers, and Challenges

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ABSTRACT: Youth political engagement plays a critical role in shaping democratic development, particularly in transitional societies undergoing shifts from authoritarian rule, conflict, or major political reform. This mini review synthesizes recent literature to examine the trends, drivers, and challenges influencing youth participation in these contexts. Key trends include the increasing use of digital platforms for political mobilization, the rise of youth-led movements and grassroots activism, and a shift from traditional, party-based engagement toward issue-driven, noninstitutional forms of participation. Drivers of engagement encompass education and civic awareness, which equip youth with the knowledge and skills necessary for informed participation; digital media and information access, which enable rapid communication and advocacy; socioeconomic conditions, including unemployment and social inequality, which motivate activism; and political opportunities and institutional reforms, which create formal avenues for meaningful involvement. Despite these enabling factors, youth face persistent challenges such as political distrust, weak institutions, limited representation, legal restrictions, and risks associated with digital misinformation. Addressing these barriers is essential for enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of youth participation. Policy implications include strengthening civic education and leadership programs, promoting inclusive political institutions, supporting safe and constructive digital engagement, and increasing youth representation in governance. The review underscores the importance of empowering youth as active agents of change to consolidate democratic processes in transitional societies. Future research is needed to evaluate the long-term impacts of youth political engagement on governance, policy reform, and social cohesion, providing evidence-based guidance for policymakers, educators, and civil society actors.

KEYWORDS: Youth political engagement; transitional societies; digital activism; civic education; political participation; youth-led movements; democratic consolidation

1. Introduction

Youth political engagement refers to the involvement of young people in activities that influence political decision-making, governance processes, and public policies. This engagement may occur through conventional forms of participation such as voting, joining political parties, and participating in electoral campaigns, as well as through non-conventional

activities including protests, advocacy movements, community organizing, and digital activism. In democratic systems, youth engagement is widely recognized as a crucial element for sustaining democratic governance, as it fosters civic responsibility, strengthens political accountability, and encourages inclusive participation in public affairs. Active involvement of young people also contributes to the renewal of political leadership and the introduction of innovative ideas and perspectives in policy-making processes [1, 2].

Transitional societies refer to countries undergoing significant political, economic, or institutional transformation, often characterized by shifts from authoritarian governance toward democratic systems, post-conflict reconstruction, or major political reforms. Such societies typically experience evolving political institutions, emerging democratic norms, and ongoing efforts to strengthen governance structures. While these transitions present opportunities for political participation and institutional reform, they also create uncertainties and challenges related to political stability, trust in institutions, and representation of diverse social groups, including youth populations [3, 4].

In recent decades, youth have increasingly emerged as influential actors in political processes across transitional societies. Young people have played visible roles in social movements, electoral mobilization, and reform campaigns aimed at addressing issues such as corruption, social inequality, unemployment, and political transparency. The expansion of digital technologies and social media platforms has further transformed the nature of political participation among youth. Online spaces enable rapid dissemination of information, facilitate mobilization for protests and campaigns, and allow young citizens to express political opinions and organize collective actions beyond traditional institutional channels [5, 6].

Understanding the patterns of youth political engagement in transitional contexts is therefore essential for assessing the prospects of democratic consolidation and inclusive governance. Youth participation can both support democratic reforms and challenge existing power structures, depending on the opportunities and constraints present within specific political environments. Examining the factors that motivate or hinder youth engagement can provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and civil society organizations seeking to strengthen democratic participation [7, 8].

This review aims to examine recent trends, key drivers, and major challenges influencing youth political engagement in transitional societies. By synthesizing existing literature, the review highlights the evolving forms of youth participation, identifies the social, economic, and technological factors shaping political involvement, and discusses barriers that may limit meaningful youth representation in political processes.

2. Conceptual Framework of Youth Political Engagement

Understanding youth political engagement requires a clear conceptual framework that captures the diversity of participation forms and the contextual characteristics of transitional societies. Political engagement among youth is multifaceted, encompassing both traditional and emerging forms of involvement that influence governance, policy decisions, and societal change [9, 10].

2.1. Definition and forms of political engagement.

Conventional political participation includes activities that operate within formal institutional frameworks. Voting is the most basic form, enabling youth to express preferences and influence

electoral outcomes. Party membership and participation in political campaigns allow young citizens to contribute actively to party platforms, policy advocacy, and leadership selection. These forms of engagement are often seen as indicators of a functioning democratic process, reflecting both civic responsibility and trust in institutional mechanisms [11, 12].

Unconventional political participation, by contrast, occurs outside formal political structures and often seeks to challenge or reform existing systems. Youth frequently engage in protests, demonstrations, grassroots organizing, and activism to raise awareness of social injustices, demand accountability, and push for policy change. These forms of engagement are particularly significant in transitional societies, where formal political institutions may be weak, inaccessible, or unresponsive to youth concerns. Unconventional participation can therefore act as a catalyst for democratic reforms and social innovation, even as it sometimes generates tension with authorities [13, 14].

Digital and social media engagement represents a rapidly growing dimension of youth political participation. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok enable young citizens to access information, debate policies, and mobilize peers quickly and efficiently. Online activism allows youth to organize campaigns, advocate for causes, and amplify voices that might otherwise be marginalized in traditional political spaces. In transitional societies, where access to conventional political channels may be limited, digital engagement provides a powerful alternative pathway for participation and influence [15, 16].

2.2. Characteristics of transitional societies.

Transitional societies are marked by political liberalization and institutional reform, reflecting shifts from authoritarian rule or conflict toward more open, democratic governance. Such reforms often include changes in electoral systems, decentralization of authority, and the creation of new legal and political institutions designed to enhance citizen participation. However, these societies frequently exhibit weak democratic institutions, which may lack legitimacy, capacity, or stability. Electoral processes can be inconsistent, rule of law unevenly enforced, and mechanisms for accountability limited. Youth engagement in such contexts is therefore both critical and challenging, as the effectiveness of participation often depends on the reliability and responsiveness of these institutions [17, 18].

Furthermore, transitional societies often experience political instability and governance challenges, including social unrest, contested leadership, and limited state capacity. These conditions can simultaneously motivate youth to participate—seeking reform and representation—and constrain their engagement due to risks of repression, marginalization, or co-optation. By situating youth political engagement within this conceptual framework, researchers can better understand the interplay between participation forms and the broader socio-political context, providing a foundation for analyzing trends, drivers, and barriers in transitional societies [2, 19].

3. Methodology

This mini review adopts a systematic approach guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework, ensuring transparency, rigor, and reproducibility in the selection and synthesis of relevant literature on youth political engagement in transitional societies [20]. The PRISMA approach provides a structured method

to identify, screen, and include studies, minimizing bias and enhancing the validity of the review findings.

3.1. Literature search strategy.

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across multiple academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, and Google Scholar, covering publications from 2015 to 2025. The search employed a combination of keywords and Boolean operators, including: "youth political engagement" OR "youth participation" AND "transitional societies" OR "democratic transition" OR "political reform". Additional terms related to forms of participation, such as "digital activism", "protests", "voting behavior", and "social movements", were also included to capture a broad range of conventional and unconventional engagement studies.

3.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Studies were considered for inclusion in this review if they focused specifically on youth political engagement within transitional or post-authoritarian societies, and if they reported empirical findings, theoretical analyses, or case studies addressing trends, drivers, or challenges of youth participation. Only studies published in peer-reviewed journals or recognized academic sources between 2017 and 2025 were included, and all were required to be written in English to ensure accessibility and consistency in analysis (Figure 1).

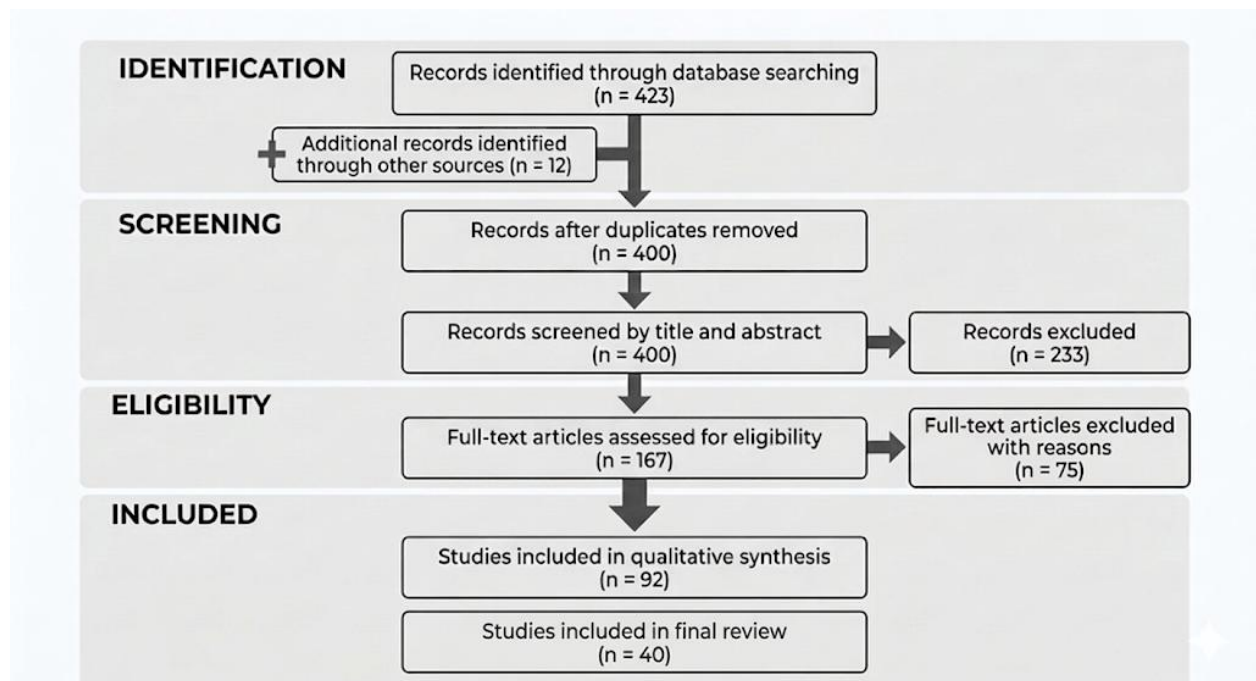


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram for study selection.

Conversely, studies were excluded if they focused exclusively on adult populations or stable democratic contexts, addressed political engagement without reference to youth, or were non-academic sources such as opinion pieces, news articles, or unpublished reports. Following the PRISMA guidelines, the study selection process involved four key stages. In the identification stage, a comprehensive search of multiple databases yielded 423 articles. During

screening, titles and abstracts were reviewed for relevance, and duplicates as well as clearly irrelevant studies were removed, resulting in 167 articles. The eligibility assessment involved a full-text review to ensure each study met the inclusion criteria; studies that did not focus on youth or transitional contexts were excluded, leaving 92 eligible articles. Finally, in the inclusion stage, a total of 40 studies were selected for detailed synthesis and analysis. This structured approach ensured a transparent, reproducible, and systematic process for identifying and evaluating literature on youth political engagement in transitional societies.

3.4 Data extraction and synthesis.

Key information was extracted from each study, including author(s), year, country/context, study design, forms of youth political engagement, identified drivers, and challenges. The data were synthesized using a thematic approach, organizing findings into categories such as conventional participation, unconventional participation, digital engagement, and contextual influences of transitional societies. This PRISMA-based methodology ensures a systematic and reproducible approach to understanding youth political engagement, providing a robust foundation for analyzing trends, identifying key drivers, and highlighting challenges within transitional societies.

Table 1. Summary of data extraction variables.

Variable	Description / Purpose
Author(s) & Year	Citation for the study
Country / Context	Transitional society or region studied
Study Design	Methodology used (survey, case study, qualitative analysis)
Form of Political Engagement	Conventional (voting, party membership), unconventional (protests, activism), digital/social media engagement
Drivers of Engagement	Factors motivating youth participation (education, digital access, socio-economic, political reforms)
Challenges / Barriers	Factors limiting youth engagement (institutional weakness, repression, digital risks)
Key Findings	Summary of major insights and trends

3. Trends in Youth Political Engagement

Youth political engagement in transitional societies has undergone significant transformation over the past decade, reflecting both technological innovations and shifts in sociopolitical contexts. Understanding these trends is critical for assessing how young citizens influence governance, policy reform, and democratic consolidation. Broadly, these trends can be categorized into three main areas: increasing digital political participation, youth-led political movements, and shifts from traditional to nontraditional forms of participation [21, 22].

3.1. Increasing digital political participation.

The proliferation of digital technologies and social media platforms has fundamentally reshaped youth political engagement. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp serve as mobilization tools, enabling rapid organization of campaigns, dissemination of political information, and coordination of collective actions. Social media allows young citizens to participate in discussions, share political content, and amplify voices that might otherwise be marginalized in traditional political structures. For instance, digital platforms were instrumental during recent youth-led protests in several transitional societies,

where offline mobilization would have been logistically challenging or restricted by state authorities [23, 24]. Online campaigns and digital advocacy also facilitate issue-based engagement, allowing youth to support specific policy changes, raise awareness on social justice issues, and lobby for institutional reforms without formal political affiliations (Table 2).

Table 2. Trends in youth political engagement: increasing digital political participation.

Trend	Key Platforms/Tools	Key Characteristics	Mechanism of Influence	Impact on Youth Participation	References
Increasing Digital Political Participation	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp	Rapid information dissemination and network-based mobilization	Enables youth to share political information, coordinate campaigns, and organize collective actions	Expands youth participation in political discussions and activism beyond traditional institutions	[23, 24]
Online Political Discussions and Debates	Social media comment sections, online forums, live streams	Interactive dialogue and exchange of political opinions	Facilitates deliberation, exposure to diverse viewpoints, and political awareness	Encourages critical thinking and increases youth involvement in political discourse	[23]
Digital Advocacy and Campaigns	Hashtag campaigns, online petitions, digital awareness campaigns	Issue-based mobilization and advocacy	Allows youth to raise awareness about social justice issues and advocate for policy changes	Strengthens civic engagement and mobilizes support for specific political causes	[24]
Digital Mobilization for Protests	Messaging apps and social networks	Rapid coordination and real-time communication	Supports organization of demonstrations, rallies, and youth-led protests	Increases the scale and speed of youth collective action	[23, 24]
Information Access and Political Awareness	Digital news outlets, online media platforms	Easy and continuous access to political information	Improves knowledge about governance, policies, and political events	Enhances informed participation and political literacy among youth	[23]

3.2 Youth-led political movements.

In addition to digital engagement, youth have increasingly taken the lead in political movements that aim to challenge existing power structures and promote reform. Participation in protests, demonstrations, and grassroots activism has become a hallmark of youth engagement in transitional societies. These movements often emerge in response to issues such as corruption, unemployment, inequality, or lack of political representation. Youth-led civic engagement initiatives, including community organizing, volunteer programs, and advocacy campaigns, allow young people to influence both local and national decision-making processes [16, 25]. Evidence suggests that these movements not only raise awareness but also pressure political elites to adopt reforms, contributing to incremental democratic consolidation (Figure 2).

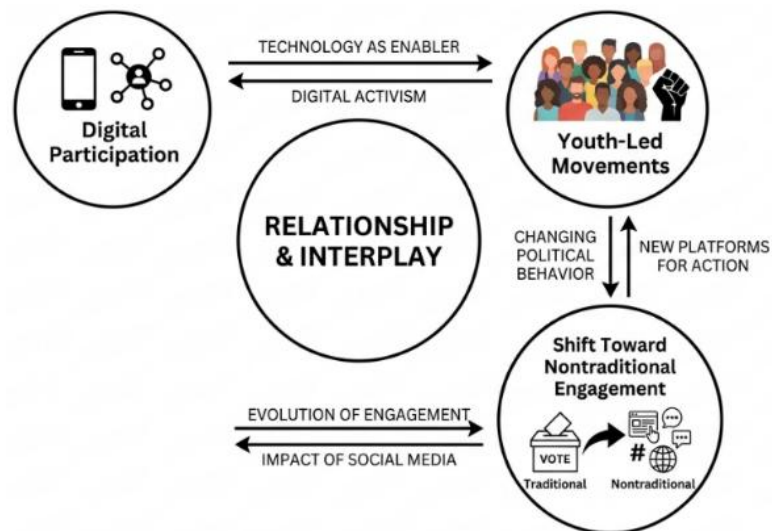


Figure 2. Conceptual representation of youth political engagement trends.

3.3 Shifts from traditional to nontraditional participation.

A notable trend in transitional societies is the decline in traditional forms of political participation such as party membership, attendance at political rallies, or formal involvement in government structures. Many young people perceive traditional institutions as unresponsive or corrupt, leading them to seek alternative forms of engagement. Concurrently, there has been a rise of issue-based and noninstitutional participation, including activism for climate change, human rights, digital campaigns, and volunteer-led reform initiatives. This shift indicates a move away from party-centric politics toward participatory, interest-driven engagement, reflecting both disillusionment with formal politics and the growing influence of digital technologies [12, 21, 26].

These trends collectively suggest that youth in transitional societies are increasingly proactive, technologically savvy, and issue-driven. While traditional forms of engagement remain relevant, digital platforms and grassroots movements are now the primary avenues through which youth influence politics and society. Recognizing these trends is essential for policymakers, civil society organizations, and educators seeking to enhance youth participation and support democratic development [27, 28].

4. Drivers of Youth Political Engagement

Youth political engagement in transitional societies is shaped by a complex interplay of social, economic, institutional, and technological factors. Understanding these drivers is essential for identifying the conditions that encourage active participation and for designing policies that foster meaningful youth involvement in governance and democratic processes [1, 2, 23].

4.1. Education and political awareness.

Education is widely recognized as a critical driver of political engagement among young people. Higher education institutions provide not only knowledge but also critical thinking skills that enable youth to evaluate political systems, understand policy issues, and engage in informed decision-making. Civic education programs, both formal and informal, raise awareness about democratic rights and responsibilities, helping youth recognize the value of participation in political processes. Studies have shown that individuals with higher levels of

education are more likely to vote, join political organizations, and participate in civic initiatives, indicating that education plays a dual role in fostering both conventional and unconventional forms of engagement [29, 30].

4.2. Digital media and information access.

The proliferation of digital media platforms has significantly expanded the avenues for youth participation. Social media, online forums, and digital news outlets facilitate political mobilization by providing easy access to information, enabling discussions, and connecting like-minded individuals. Online platforms also allow youth to participate in campaigns, share political content, and organize protests or advocacy initiatives without relying on traditional institutions. Digital engagement has been particularly impactful in transitional societies, where formal political channels may be limited, inaccessible, or perceived as corrupt. Consequently, access to online information and communication networks is a strong motivator for youth political activity [10, 24].

4.3. Socioeconomic conditions.

Socioeconomic factors such as unemployment, income inequality, and social justice concerns also play a pivotal role in motivating youth political engagement. High youth unemployment rates and perceptions of inequality often drive young people to seek systemic change through activism and civic participation. Similarly, exposure to social injustices, whether in education, healthcare, or governance, encourages youth to engage in protests, advocacy campaigns, and community-based initiatives. These socioeconomic pressures not only motivate engagement but also shape the forms and intensity of participation, particularly in contexts where conventional institutional channels are weak [31, 32].

4.4. Political opportunities and institutional reforms.

Political opportunities, including electoral reforms, decentralization of authority, and democratic openings, provide structural incentives for youth participation. When political institutions become more inclusive or responsive, youth are more likely to engage in voting, party activities, and reform movements. Institutional reforms that create spaces for youth representation, such as youth councils or advisory boards, further encourage active participation by demonstrating that young voices can influence policy outcomes. In transitional societies, these opportunities often interact with education and digital access to amplify engagement levels [33, 34].

As summarized in Table 3, these drivers interact to shape both the nature and intensity of youth political engagement. Education and awareness equip youth with the knowledge and skills needed to participate effectively, while digital media amplifies their reach and organizational capacity. Socioeconomic pressures often act as motivators for engagement, particularly when young people perceive systemic inequities. Finally, political opportunities and institutional reforms create structural pathways that legitimize and facilitate meaningful participation. Collectively, these factors illustrate that youth political engagement is both a response to societal conditions and a proactive agent of change in transitional societies [1, 2, 35].

Table 3. Drivers of youth political engagement in transitional societies.

Driver	Key Factors	Mechanism of Influence	Impact on Youth Participation	Context in Transitional Societies	References
Education and Political Awareness	Higher education, civic education programs, political literacy	Provides knowledge of political systems, develops critical thinking, and increases awareness of democratic rights and responsibilities	Encourages voting, joining political organizations, participating in civic initiatives, and engaging in policy discussions	Education institutions often become spaces where democratic values and political awareness are introduced and debated	[29, 30]
Digital Media and Information Access	Social media, online forums, digital news platforms, internet accessibility	Facilitates rapid information sharing, online discussions, mobilization of supporters, and organization of campaigns or protests	Expands participation through digital activism, online campaigns, and grassroots mobilization	Particularly influential where traditional political channels are limited, restricted, or perceived as ineffective	[10, 24]
Socioeconomic Conditions	Youth unemployment, income inequality, social justice concerns	Economic hardship and perceived injustice motivate collective action and political advocacy	Encourages protests, activism, advocacy campaigns, and community engagement	Socioeconomic pressures often intensify youth demands for policy reforms and social change	[31, 32]
Political Opportunities and Institutional Reforms	Electoral reforms, decentralization, youth representation mechanisms	Creates institutional pathways for participation and increases political inclusiveness	Increases youth involvement in elections, policy discussions, and reform movements	Democratic openings and institutional reforms can significantly expand youth political influence	[33, 34]

5. Challenges and Barriers

While youth in transitional societies have become increasingly active in political engagement, their participation is often constrained by a combination of institutional, legal, and social barriers. These challenges not only limit the effectiveness of youth participation but also shape the forms of engagement that are considered feasible or safe within a particular context. Broadly, the main barriers can be categorized into political distrust and institutional weakness, political repression and restrictions, limited representation in formal politics, and digital risks and misinformation [14, 21, 23].

5.1. Political distrust and institutional weakness.

A pervasive challenge for youth engagement in transitional societies is low trust in government and political elites. Many young citizens perceive political institutions as corrupt, inefficient, or unresponsive to their needs. This distrust reduces confidence in conventional participation mechanisms such as voting or party membership and may discourage engagement in formal political processes. Weak democratic institutions, including inconsistent rule of law, limited accountability, and lack of transparency, further exacerbate political disengagement. As a result, youth often turn to informal or alternative modes of participation, such as protests or digital activism, which can be less predictable in outcomes but provide a sense of agency and visibility [2, 5].

5.2. Political repression and restrictions.

In many transitional societies, youth face legal and political barriers that limit participation, including censorship, restrictions on assembly, and repression of dissent. Activism, particularly when it challenges entrenched power structures, can carry significant personal and social risks. These restrictions may manifest as arrests, harassment, or surveillance of youth activists, deterring individuals from participating in political activities. Even in cases where legal frameworks nominally guarantee freedom of expression and assembly, practical enforcement may be weak or biased, reinforcing a climate of caution and self-censorship among politically active youth [1, 21].

5.3. Limited representation in formal politics.

Another structural barrier is the underrepresentation of youth in political institutions. Despite forming a large proportion of the population, young people often occupy few decision-making positions in government, political parties, or advisory councils. This lack of representation creates a perception that formal politics is inaccessible, reducing motivation for conventional forms of engagement. Youth engagement may thus remain concentrated in noninstitutional channels, which can limit long-term influence over policy and governance [1, 36].

5.4. Digital risks and misinformation.

While digital media provides opportunities for political participation, it also introduces risks of misinformation, manipulation, and exposure to harmful content. Social media platforms can facilitate the spread of fake news, propaganda, and polarizing narratives, which may misinform youth or incite conflict. Digital harassment, trolling, and cyberbullying further discourage online political engagement, particularly among young women and marginalized groups. These digital risks create a paradox where the very tools that empower youth participation can also undermine its reliability, safety, and effectiveness [10–12, 14]. As illustrated in Table 4, these challenges highlight the complex environment within which youth operate in transitional societies. Addressing these barriers requires multi-dimensional strategies, including institutional reforms, legal protections for activism, digital literacy programs, and initiatives to enhance youth representation in political decision-making. Recognizing both the opportunities and the risks associated with youth engagement is essential for fostering meaningful participation that strengthens democratic processes.

Table 4. Challenges and barriers to youth political engagement in transitional societies.

Challenges/Barriers	Key Issues	Mechanism Limiting Participation	Impact on Youth Engagement	Context in Transitional Societies	References
Political Distrust and Institutional Weakness	Corruption, lack of transparency, weak rule of law, low government accountability	Reduces trust in political institutions and discourages participation in formal political processes	Youth shift from conventional participation (voting, party membership) to informal actions such as protests or digital activism	Weak democratic institutions often fail to address youth concerns, reinforcing disengagement	[2, 5]
Political Repression and Restrictions	Censorship, restrictions on assembly, surveillance,	Legal and political constraints create risks for youth activism and public political expression	Fear of harassment, arrest, or punishment discourages participation in political activities	Even when legal freedoms exist, weak enforcement or political bias can	[1, 21]

Challenges/Barriers	Key Issues	Mechanism Limiting Participation	Impact on Youth Engagement	Context in Transitional Societies	References
Limited Representation in Formal Politics	repression of dissent Low youth representation in government, political parties, and decision-making bodies	Lack of institutional access reduces youth influence in policymaking processes	Youth rely more on noninstitutional channels such as advocacy movements or grassroots campaigns	limit youth engagement Structural barriers prevent youth from gaining meaningful positions in governance	[1, 36]
Digital Risks and Misinformation	Fake news, propaganda, online manipulation, cyberbullying	Spread of misleading information and online harassment undermines trust in digital participation	Discourages online political expression, particularly among young women and marginalized groups	Digital platforms simultaneously empower and expose youth to new forms of political risk	[10–12, [14]

6. Policy Implications and Future Directions

The trends, drivers, and challenges of youth political engagement in transitional societies carry important implications for policy, governance, and the design of programs that foster active and meaningful participation. Translating the insights from this review into practical strategies requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses structural, educational, and technological dimensions of youth involvement. A fundamental policy priority is strengthening civic education and youth leadership programs. Formal and informal educational initiatives can equip young citizens with the knowledge, skills, and confidence required to participate effectively in political and civic life. Civic education should extend beyond theoretical instruction to include experiential learning, such as simulations, debates, community projects, and engagement in local governance initiatives. Youth leadership programs, mentoring, and capacity-building workshops can further cultivate critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative skills, empowering young people to become active agents of change rather than passive observers of political processes [23, 33].

In tandem, there is a pressing need to promote inclusive political institutions that accommodate and value youth participation. Transitional societies often face challenges such as weak institutional structures, limited accountability, and underrepresentation of young voices. Policymakers should consider reforms that lower barriers to entry for youth in political parties, local councils, and advisory boards [35, 37]. Institutional mechanisms such as youth quotas, advisory councils, and participatory budgeting initiatives can provide formal channels for input and influence, ensuring that the perspectives and priorities of young citizens are incorporated into policy decisions. Inclusive institutions also help rebuild trust in governance, which is often eroded by historical authoritarian practices or ineffective democratic processes. The rise of digital political participation highlights the importance of supporting safe and constructive online engagement. Digital platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for youth mobilization, advocacy, and political expression, but they are also susceptible to misinformation, harassment, and polarization. Policies should focus on digital literacy, promoting critical evaluation of online content, and providing tools for secure and responsible digital participation. Collaboration between governments, educational institutions, and civil society organizations can establish guidelines and support structures that maximize the benefits of digital engagement while minimizing its risks [38, 39].

Finally, encouraging youth representation in governance is crucial for ensuring that young people have meaningful influence in decision-making processes. Representation is not only about increasing the number of youth in political offices but also about ensuring that their input shapes policies affecting education, employment, social justice, and technology. Long-term engagement strategies can include mentorship programs, leadership pipelines, and participatory mechanisms that integrate youth perspectives into national and local governance frameworks. This approach helps bridge the gap between youth activism and institutional politics, creating sustainable pathways for participation and fostering the next generation of democratic leaders. Enhancing youth political engagement in transitional societies requires an integrated approach that combines education, institutional reform, digital support, and representation initiatives. By addressing both the structural and socio-cultural barriers identified in this review, policymakers and civil society actors can cultivate a politically aware, motivated, and empowered youth population. Such efforts not only strengthen democratic consolidation but also foster social cohesion, innovation, and resilience, laying the foundation for more inclusive and participatory governance in transitional contexts [1, 33, 40].

7. Conclusion

Youth political engagement in transitional societies is a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon, shaped by evolving trends, diverse drivers, and persistent challenges. This review highlights three major trends: the increasing role of digital political participation through social media and online campaigns, the emergence of youth-led movements and grassroots activism, and a shift from traditional, party-based participation toward issue-driven, noninstitutional forms of engagement. These trends reflect a growing capacity among young citizens to influence political processes, advocate for social change, and mobilize collectively in both physical and digital spaces. The drivers of youth engagement are equally complex. Education and civic awareness provide the knowledge and skills necessary for informed participation, while digital media and access to information amplify youth voices and facilitate mobilization. Socioeconomic pressures, such as unemployment and inequality, often motivate young people to engage in activism, while political opportunities and institutional reforms create formal avenues for participation. Despite these enabling factors, youth face significant barriers, including political distrust, weak institutions, limited representation, legal restrictions, and risks associated with misinformation and online engagement. These challenges can constrain participation, shape the forms of engagement pursued, and affect the effectiveness of youth-led initiatives. Empowering youth to participate meaningfully is critical for democratic consolidation in transitional societies. Policies that strengthen civic education, promote inclusive institutions, support safe digital engagement, and encourage youth representation can help address existing barriers and sustain youth involvement in governance. Future research is needed to assess the long-term impacts of youth political engagement, including its influence on democratic outcomes, policy reforms, and social cohesion. Such insights will be essential for designing strategies that not only encourage participation but also ensure that young citizens play a central role in shaping the political futures of transitional societies.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests. There are no financial, personal, or professional relationships that could be perceived to influence the research or the interpretation of the results presented in this review.

Author Contributions

Kwame A. Mensah: Conceptualization, literature search, methodology, drafting of the manuscript, and supervision. Ama Serwaa Boateng: Data extraction, synthesis of literature, drafting sections of the manuscript, and reviewing and editing the final version. Both authors contributed equally to the interpretation of findings, approved the final manuscript, and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Data Availability

All data analyzed and summarized in this review are derived from publicly available, peer-reviewed literature. No original datasets were generated or analyzed for this study. References to all sources are provided within the manuscript, and data supporting the conclusions can be accessed through the cited publications.

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