



A Study on Political Ideology, Justice Sensitivity and Collective Action Intentions among Gen Z and Millennials

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Abstract: The recent youth-driven protests at Jantar Mantar (India), which saw the emergence of the satirical Cockroach Janata Party, illustrated how political beliefs, perceptions of justice, and collective action can overlap among Indians. The current study examined the relationships among political ideology, justice sensitivity, and collective action intention in Gen Z and millennials. Political ideology involves people's beliefs about political and social matters, while justice sensitivity is the extent to which they notice and react to injustice. Collective action intention means the extent to which someone is willing to take part in actions aimed at addressing social or political issues. For this purpose, a sample of 68 individuals in the Gen Z and millennial age range was selected. Standardized measures of political ideology, justice sensitivity, and collective action intentions were administered to the participants. The study found that there is a significant positive relationship between collective action intentions and justice sensitivity. Results showed significant positive relationships between normative actions and justice sensitivity ($r = .247, p < .05$), observer sensitivity ($r = .448, p < .001$), beneficiary sensitivity ($r = .478, p < .001$), and perpetrator sensitivity ($r = .424, p < .001$). Non-normative actions were positively associated with cultural norms ($r = .309, p < .05$), justice sensitivity ($r = .252, p < .05$). There were no significant differences between Gen Z and Millennials. Overall, the findings show that justice sensitivity and cultural norms dimension of political ideology are linked with collective action intentions among Gen Z and Millennials.

Keywords: *Political Ideology, Justice Sensitivity, Collective Action Intentions, GenZ and Millennials.*

1. Introduction

“It is certain, in any case, that ignorance allied with power is the most ferocious enemy justice can have”

- James Baldwin.

Political ideology is a set of beliefs, values, and opinions that shape one's views on various issues such as governance, economy, society, culture, and morality. Justice sensitivity is the attempt to capture individual differences in the frequency with which injustice is perceived and the intensity of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions to it. Collective action intention refers to an individual's conscious willingness, motivation, and readiness to participate in collective efforts aimed at addressing a perceived social, political, or group-related issue. Normative actions refer to socially accepted and conventional forms of collective participation, whereas non-normative actions involve unconventional or disruptive forms of collective action that deviate from established social or political norms.

The recent student-led protest at Jantar Mantar in India illustrates how perceived grievances can mobilize individuals towards collective actions led by the Cockroach Janta Party. Thousands of students occupied the protest sites over irregularities in national examinations and demanded the resignation of the Union Education Minister, posing one of the most significant youth-led challenges. (Sharma, 2026). Rishika (2025) in *“The Silent Erosion, Power Suppression, and The Courage to Question”* discusses how suppression of dissent and silencing of questioning can generate frustration and resistance, drawing examples from Nepal protests to the French Revolution, to the civil rights movement and Black Lives Matter. It shows how questioning authority can fuel collective resistance. Political ideology offers one lens for this mobilization. And justice sensitivity offers a second lens.

George (2026) examined how Gen Z is rewriting the grammar of power in the world's largest democracy. When power is disrespectful, the older instinct is to protest, to demand an apology, to express hurt. Increasingly, the Gen Z urge is to meme. The insult was being turned into a label, one that the individual had chosen for himself: *“the cockroach.”* There is an expectation mismatch between Gen Z and older generations, with Gen Z placing greater emphasis on responsiveness, meaningful participation, personal freedom, and value alignment. In contrast, older generations are characterized as being more accustomed to hierarchy, patience, authority, and gradual institutional change.

The term “cockroach” was initially used as a derogatory label but was later reclaimed as a symbol of pride among young people. The term gained prominence after Chief Justice Surya Kant used “cockroaches” and “parasites” while referring to certain unemployed youth

during a Supreme Court hearing in May 2026. He later clarified that his remarks were directed specifically at individuals using fake or bogus degrees (Ananthakrishnan, 2026). By then, however, the label had already spread, with protesters reclaiming the term through “*Main Bhi Cockroach*” signs and cockroach masks, transforming an insult into a symbol of protest and solidarity (Ghosh, 2026). The movement gained further momentum when educator and climate activist Sonam Wangchuk joined the protest site and began an indefinite hunger strike on June 28, 2026, lending significant public weight to the demand for the education minister’s resignation.

1.1 Political Ideology

Jost et al. (2009) defined political ideology as “a set of beliefs about the proper order of society and how it can be achieved. Ideological belief systems help individuals interpret political and social realities, form political attitudes and evaluations, and understand questions concerning equality, authority, social change, and the existing social order.”

Puthillam et al. (2021) conceptualised political ideology in India as “a multidimensional system of beliefs concerning social, cultural, hierarchical, and attitudes encompassing cultural norms, hierarchical authority and economic issues, rather than as a single left–right continuum.”

Feldman (2013) undertook a review of the literature concerning the structure and psychological foundations of political ideology. The study provided empirical evidence supporting the multifaceted structure of ideology and outlined the key correlates for each of its dimensions. The author further analyzed recent studies probing the nature and role of social and moral values, personality, biology, and genetics in the emergence of ideology. Feldman proposed future directions for scientific research to unify the disparate viewpoints on the origin and structure of political ideology and improve understanding of the mechanisms linking ideology to various facets of human life.

Haas and Majumdar (2023) found that political ideology matters in India. They identified three main issue areas around which contemporary Indian political ideology revolves: the role of the state in driving economic and social policy, the role of the state in addressing historical inequalities, and Hindu nationalism. Their findings showed that individuals’ ideological positions were predictive of their stated partisan affiliations and reported political behaviours. However, the conventional unidimensional left–right scale used in many Western contexts did not effectively capture ideological cleavages in India, suggesting that political ideology in India is structured differently from that in other regions.

1.2 Justice Sensitivity

Schmitt et al. (2010) defined justice sensitivity as “the stable individual differences in the tendency to perceive and react to injustice. There are various types of perspectives on justice and sensitivity, such as victim sensitivity, which is sensitivity to being treated unfairly; observer sensitivity, which is sensitivity to seeing others treated unfairly; perpetrator sensitivity, which is sensitivity regarding being the one who causes unfairness; and beneficiary sensitivity, which is about benefiting unfairly at someone else's expense.”

Baumert et al. (2022) describe justice sensitivity as “involving a tendency to frequently perceive and think about injustices, which makes injustice-related information more accessible and influences how individuals attend to, interpret, and remember such information.”

Wolf et al. (2025) examined how justice sensitivity, social identification, and political ideology influence solidarity-based action toward disadvantaged groups. The findings showed that other-oriented justice sensitivity (JS-other) was a strong predictor of solidarity-based attitudes and behaviors. The study also found that political ideology influenced how individuals attributed responsibility for norm violations by disadvantaged-group members, with liberals making fewer dispositional attributions. Overall, the findings highlight that justice sensitivity, and political ideology can shape how individuals respond to disadvantage, inequality, and injustice.

Stavrova and Schlösser (2015) examined the relationship between individual differences in justice sensitivity and solidarity behaviour across four studies. Their findings indicated that justice sensitivity was associated with greater willingness to act in solidarity with disadvantaged individuals, even after accounting for basic personality characteristics. This suggests that individuals who are more sensitive to injustice may be more inclined to engage in behaviours intended to support others experiencing disadvantage, providing a potential link between sensitivity to injustice and collective or solidarity-based action.

1.3 Collective Action Intentions

Besta et al. (2024) conceptualised collective action toward gender equality as “intentional and conscious civic behaviours focused on social transformation, questioning power relations, and promoting gender equality through collective efforts” Marshall (1998) defined collective action as “action undertaken by a group, either directly or through an organisation, in pursuit of its members’ perceived shared interests.”

Osborne et al. (2019) examined collective action from a system justification perspective. The authors argued that while previous research has identified social identity, shared grievances, and group efficacy as important predictors of collective action, it has paid

less attention to the distinction between actions that challenge the existing system and those that defend it. Using two large-scale studies conducted in New Zealand and the United States, they found that stronger system justification was associated with lower participation in system-challenging collective action and greater support for system-defending collective action among both low- and high-status groups. They also found that group identification, perceptions of group-based injustice, group-based anger, and dissatisfaction with the system mediated these relationships. The study integrates system justification theory into collective action research by explaining the conditions under which people either challenge or defend the status quo.

Zomeren et al. (2008) developed the Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA) to integrate three major socio-psychological perspectives on collective action: a) perceived injustice, b) group efficacy, and c) social identity. Using three meta-analyses comprising 182 effect sizes, the study found that all three predictors had significant medium-sized effects on collective action. The findings highlighted social identity as the central predictor, demonstrating that affective injustice and politicized identity exerted stronger influences than non-affective injustice and non-politicized identity. Social identity predicted collective action against both incidental and structural disadvantages, whereas perceived injustice and efficacy were stronger predictors of action against incidental disadvantages. The study also showed that social identity linked the effects of perceived injustice and efficacy, providing stronger support for the SIMCA model than previous theoretical models. The authors concluded that collective action is best understood through the integration of social identity, perceived injustice, and group efficacy.

Gupta (2019) examined the significance of student protests in Indian higher education institutions within the broader context of global neoliberal restructuring. Focusing on student protests from 2014 onwards, the study traced their development from specific high-profile incidents to their roots in national and state-level political conditions and their wider implications in the global context. The paper argued that contemporary management practices in higher education are closely linked with efforts to institutionalize conservative and authoritarian norms. It concluded that student protests are not merely reactions to isolated campus issues but are responses to broader political, economic, and ideological transformations shaping higher education in India.

1.4 Purpose

The purpose of the study was to examine Political Ideology, Justice Sensitivity and Collective Action Intentions among Gen Z and millennials.

1.5 Hypothesis

H₁ : There will be a significant relationship between political ideology and collective action intentions among Gen Z and Millennials.

H₂: There will be a significant relationship between justice sensitivity and collective action intentions among Gen Z and Millennials.

H₃: There will be a significant relationship between political ideology and justice sensitivity among Gen Z and Millennials.

H₄: There will be a significant difference between Gen Z and Millennials in political ideology, justice sensitivity, and collective action intentions.

2. Methodology

2.1 Sample

The study used a sample of individuals among Gen Z and Millennials encompassing both males and females. The study has a sample size of 68 participants.

2.2 Measures

Belief Aligned Collective Action Intention Scale: The Belief Aligned Collective Action Intention scale was developed by Cervone et al. (2024), was used to measure the Belief Aligned Collective Action Intention among individuals. The scale consisted of 9 items across two dimensions: a) Normative Actions and b) non-normative actions. It included response options as Surely not (1) to Surely (7).

Justice Sensitivity Short Scales – 8 (JSS-8): The Justice Sensitivity Short Scales – 8 developed by Groskurth et al. (2023) was used to measure individuals' sensitivity to perceived injustice. The scale consisted of 8 items Justice sensitivity across four dimensions: (a) victim sensitivity, (b) observer sensitivity, (c) beneficiary sensitivity, and (d) perpetrator sensitivity. It included response options ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree).

Political Ideology Short Scale: The Political Ideology Short Scale for India (Short Version) developed by Puthillam et al. (2021) was used to measure the political ideology of the participants. The scale consisted of 10 items across two dimensions: (a) cultural norms and (b) obedience to hierarchies. It included response options ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7).

2.3 Procedure

The data were collected through the Google Form. The questionnaire link was created and shared with participants through an online platform. Before data collection, participants'

voluntary participation was ensured. The data were analyzed using the correlation analysis and t-test to understand the relationships among Political ideology, justice sensitivity and collective action intentions among Gen Z and Millennials.

3. Analysis of Data

3.1 Results

Table 1: *N, Mean and Standard deviation*

	Age	N	Mean	SD
Cultural Norms	Millennials / Generation Y (1981–1996)	34	13.32	5.44
	Generation Z (1997–2012)	34	16.21	8.69
Obedience to Hierarchies	Millennials / Generation Y (1981–1996)	34	20.65	8.09
	Generation Z (1997–2012)	34	18.88	8.41
Justice sensitivity	Millennials / Generation Y (1981–1996)	34	2.68	1.70
	Generation Z (1997–2012)	34	3.00	1.46
Observer sensitivity	Millennials / Generation Y (1981–1996)	34	3.46	1.55
	Generation Z (1997–2012)	34	3.72	1.40
Beneficiary sensitivity	Millennials / Generation Y (1981–1996)	34	2.65	1.61
	Generation Z (1997–2012)	34	3.37	1.56
Perpatrator sensitivity	Millennials / Generation Y (1981–1996)	34	3.37	1.84
	Generation Z (1997–2012)	34	3.66	1.64
Normative actions	Millennials / Generation Y (1981–1996)	34	23.88	10.59
	Generation Z (1997–2012)	34	23.59	8.54
Non normative actions	Millennials / Generation Y (1981–1996)	34	6.41	4.76
	Generation Z (1997–2012)	34	7.41	5.16

Table 2: *Correlations among Political Ideology, Justice Sensitivity, and Collective Action Intentions*

	Cultural Norms	Obedience to Hierarchies	Justice sensitivity	Observer sensitivity	Beneficiary sensitivity	Perpatrator sensitivity	Normative actions	Non normative actions
Cultural Norms	—							

Obedience to Hierarchies	0.594***	—						
Justice sensitivity	0.151	0.114	—					
Observer sensitivity	0.059	0.098	0.626***	—				
Beneficiary sensitivity	-0.058	-0.146	0.401***	0.592***	—			
Perpatrator sensitivity	-0.184	-0.078	0.208	0.589***	0.738***	—		
Normative actions	0.048	0.121	0.247*	0.448***	0.478***	0.424***	—	
Non normative actions	0.309*	-0.004	0.252*	0.045	0.191	0.148	0.362**	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3: Independent Samples T-Test

		Statistic	df	p
Cultural Norms	Student's t	-1.639 ^a	66.0	.106
Obedience to Hierarchies	Student's t	0.882	66.0	.381
Justice sensitivity	Student's t	-0.843	66.0	.403
Observer sensitivity	Student's t	-0.739	66.0	.462
Beneficiary sensitivity	Student's t	-1.874	66.0	.065
Perpatrator sensitivity	Student's t	-0.697	66.0	.488
Normative actions	Student's t	0.126	66.0	.900
Non normative actions	Student's t	-0.831	66.0	.409

Note. $H_a \mu_{\text{Millennials / Generation Y (1981–1996)}} \neq \mu_{\text{Generation Z (1997–2012)}}$

^a Levene's test is significant ($p < .05$), suggesting a violation of the assumption of equal variances

Table 4: Group Descriptives

	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Cultural Norms	Millennials / Generation Y (1981–1996)	34	13.32	12.00	5.44	0.933
	Generation Z (1997–2012)	34	16.21	13.50	8.69	1.490

Obedience to Hierarchies	Millennials / Generation Y (1981–1996)	34	20.65	21.00	8.09	1.387
	Generation Z (1997–2012)	34	18.88	19.00	8.41	1.442
Justice sensitivity	Millennials / Generation Y (1981–1996)	34	2.68	2.00	1.70	0.292
	Generation Z (1997–2012)	34	3.00	3.00	1.46	0.250
Observer sensitivity	Millennials / Generation Y (1981–1996)	34	3.46	3.50	1.55	0.266
	Generation Z (1997–2012)	34	3.72	4.00	1.40	0.240
Beneficiary sensitivity	Millennials / Generation Y (1981–1996)	34	2.65	2.25	1.61	0.276
	Generation Z (1997–2012)	34	3.37	3.00	1.56	0.267
Perpatrator sensitivity	Millennials / Generation Y (1981–1996)	34	3.37	3.00	1.84	0.315
	Generation Z (1997–2012)	34	3.66	3.75	1.64	0.281
Normative actions	Millennials / Generation Y (1981–1996)	34	23.88	24.50	10.59	1.817
	Generation Z (1997–2012)	34	23.59	24.00	8.54	1.464
Non normative actions	Millennials / Generation Y (1981–1996)	34	6.41	4.00	4.76	0.816
	Generation Z (1997–2012)	34	7.41	5.00	5.16	0.886

3.2 Discussion of results

The present study aimed to understand the relationships between political ideology, justice sensitivity, and collective action intentions. The variables examined in the present study can be understood through their respective dimensions. Political ideology was assessed through dimensions reflecting cultural norms and obedience to hierarchies, which capture individuals' orientations toward established social structures, authority, and traditional norms. Justice sensitivity was examined through its four perspectives: victim sensitivity, observer sensitivity, perpetrator sensitivity, and beneficiary sensitivity, reflecting different ways in which individuals perceive and respond to injustice. Similarly, normative and non-normative collective actions constituted the two dimensions of belief-based collective action intention,

capturing individuals' willingness to engage in socially accepted as well as more unconventional forms of collective action.

The results showed a significant positive relationship between obedience to hierarchies and cultural norms ($r = 0.594$, $p < .001$). Observer sensitivity and justice sensitivity was positively associated ($r = 0.626$, $p < .001$). There is also a positive significant relationship between beneficiary sensitivity and justice sensitivity ($r = 0.401$, $p < .001$) and observer sensitivity ($r = 0.592$, $p < .001$).

Similarly, the results showed a significant positive relationship between perpetrator sensitivity and observer sensitivity ($r = 0.589$, $p < .001$) and beneficiary sensitivity ($r = 0.738$, $p < .001$). These associations are expected given that the variables were assessed using the same scale.

In contrast, there is also a positive significant relationship between normative actions and justice sensitivity ($r = 0.247$, $p < .05$), observer sensitivity ($r = 0.448$, $p < .001$), beneficiary sensitivity ($r = 0.478$, $p < .001$), and perpetrator sensitivity ($r = 0.424$, $p < .001$) which highlights that people would participate in conventional and lawful methods such as signing petitions or attending permitted rallies is driven by justice and other oriented sensitivity of people. The present findings are consistent with previous research showing that justice sensitivity is associated with behavioural responses to perceived injustice. Rothmund et al. (2014) reported that observer sensitivity was associated with greater political engagement and protest, but victim sensitivity was not related to political engagement.

There is a significant positive relationship between non-normative actions and cultural norms ($r = 0.309$, $p < .05$), justice sensitivity ($r = 0.252$, $p < .05$), and normative actions ($r = 0.362$, $p < .01$). This suggests that non-normative actions are positively related to cultural norms, justice sensitivity, and normative actions. The findings are consistent with previous research by Sabucedo et al. (2019), which found that ideology, moral obligation, and affective injustice directly predicted intentions to participate in non-conventional collective actions. (Study 2, $N = 607$)

The *first hypothesis* stated that there would be a significant relationship between political ideology and collective action intentions. Among Gen Z and millennials, the results show a significant positive relationship between non-normative actions and cultural norms.

The *second hypothesis* stated that there would be a significant relationship between justice sensitivity and collective action intentions. The results supported this hypothesis, as justice sensitivity was positively related to normative actions and non-normative actions.

Observer, beneficiary and perpetrator sensitivity were also positively related to normative actions.

The *third hypothesis* suggested a significant relationship between political ideology and justice sensitivity. The results, however, did not report a direct relationship between political ideology and justice sensitivity.

The *fourth hypothesis* proposed significant differences between Gen Z and millennials. However, there was no significant difference reported among the Gen Z and Millennial samples on political ideology, justice sensitivity, and collective action intentions.

The present findings are consistent with Mikołajczak and Becker (2019), who found that political ideology and perceptions of injustice were associated with collective action intentions. Their findings suggested that individuals across the political spectrum may engage in collective action when issues violate fairness principles that are important to them.

4. Conclusion

The nationwide youth-led education protests, sparked by exam irregularities and concerns over fairness in India's education system, grew from local demonstrations into a major collective movement, with Jantar Mantar becoming a prominent centre of mobilisation. The protests ultimately culminated in the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, highlighting how perceived injustice can translate into collective political action.

The findings suggest that sensitivity to injustice was associated with a greater willingness to engage in collective action, regardless of whether the action followed conventional or non-conventional forms. Therefore, the findings provide support for the idea that justice sensitivity can play an important role in motivating collective action even when individuals hold certain political or cultural orientations that may otherwise be associated with lower participation. However, the present correlations do not establish that justice sensitivity specifically caused individuals with a particular political ideology to participate; rather, they indicate that sensitivity to injustice is an important factor associated with collective action intention across the sample.

A key limitation was the complexity and length of the survey, as participants across age groups, including Gen Z and older adults, reported difficulty understanding some questions and requested Hindi translations. Even individuals who participated in the protests suggested that simpler wording could have made the survey more accessible to a wider audience.

Another limitation was the choice of comparison group. Although an older generation would have provided a more meaningful generational comparison with Gen Z, an adequate sample of older participants could not be obtained. This limited the scope for examining generational differences in political ideology, justice sensitivity, and collective action.

Ultimately, the recent protests reflect more than a movement of political dissent. They represent the growing power of young people to question the social and political realities around them. The intersection of political ideology, justice sensitivity, and collective action demonstrates how individual beliefs can evolve into a shared voice when a generation perceives a gap between the society that exists and the society it believes should exist. In this sense, the protest highlights the transformative potential of youth, not merely as observers of social change but as active participants capable of challenging existing narratives, expressing collective dissent, and shaping the political and social consciousness of their time.

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