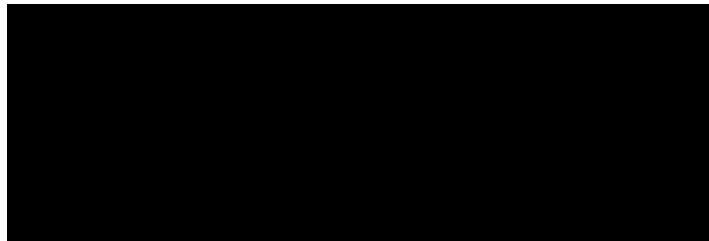


INDIA'S PERCEPTIONS ON POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, EDUCATION AND SOCIETY

PREPARED FOR



PREPARED BY



OUTLINE India
Social impact through Data

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The success of a participatory democracy rests on the engagement of citizens in the electoral process. Participation, by and large, can be evaluated by statistics of voter turnouts in an election event.

Lok Sabha elections 2014 boasted of an unprecedented, estimated 150 million first time voters. Their needs, aspirations, expectations and involvement then become critical to the functioning of the electoral machinery. The British Council, in conjunction with Outline India, undertook to explore the political perceptions of the youth and how this in turn affects their voting behavior, evaluation of current policies, expected reforms and a realization of what the youth perceive their role in society to be. This study also evaluates international agendas that are most crucial to this subset of voters, especially in the context of education and employment.

Media exposure and social networks play a dominant role in influencing opinions, formulation of debates, and hence voting decisions. Access to such networks determines an individual's or group's scope of exposure to information. Individuals in the age group of 18-30 are the primary users, enablers, and transmitters, of such information and hence this facet has been paid special attention to.

Youth as a group cannot simply refer to an age category. The productive capacity, resource needs and the perceptions they hold qualify them as a distinguishable category. Premised on this logic, it has become a concern for the state and the policy-makers to identify the capacity in which the youth can be integrated, represented and engaged in the broader political spectrum. The study also throws light on agendas and debates pertaining to internationalism in the context of the youth. This is to create a conducive ambience and enable policy structures that would help in furthering and appropriating symbiotic relations between the countries concerned and exploring avenues of synergy.

The analysis largely depends on qualitative data generated from discussion sessions conducted among professionals from the private and government sectors, civil society bodies, social workers, entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs, researchers, volunteers and students across disciplines, a subset of which has had exposure to education abroad or is aspiring to do so. The needs and critical concerns expressed have been plotted against the secondary data elicited from policy reports, budget, governmental data, international policy reviews, political



mandates, manifestos and debates floating within the academic and media circuits. Finally, a statistical mapping has been done to project the overall perceptual trends, which have at instances contradicted the aggregate picture painted through the discussions. For example, while opinion statistics reflect that a large number of students and working professionals would generally want to migrate to the US or the UK, the discussions reflect a different picture. In terms of migration, the UK is not preferred given work permit issues and lack of availability of scholarships for students. In the case of Germany, even though a relatively small number of people voted it as a preferred destination vis-à-vis the UK and US, respondents seem to believe that it is forthcoming in terms of policy measures and conducive to the youth's aspirations abroad, language being one of the more significant barriers.

In summarizing the key points of enquiry, the trends can be concluded in the following manner:

- While the change in political power generated by the recently held Lok Sabha elections is seen to be desirable, the respondents expressed apprehensions with respect to the current party's potential to bring about change in terms of actual implementation.
- There was an overall sense of deep resentment with respect to the country's education and employment scenario and very few were hopeful about propositions of revamping the structure.
- Overall, the youth seemed to qualify themselves as political entities and defined their level of engagement in variable terms. The act of casting a vote was to identify oneself as a political agent. Political agency as understood also lies in one's ability to actively engage in political debates.
- Some see political engagement as synonymous to activism, hence their participation was dependent upon whether they found the exiting political operations relatable or not. In most cases, the macro level politics in India was a metonymy for corruption, scandals and farcical which would disillusion the youth. The results of the online campaign validate this, as a majority of respondents said that corruption was a pressing reason for a change in political structure.
- In certain cities the lack of a political platform acted as an impediment for the youth's ability to engage in dialogues with the state processes.
- The existing platforms in certain cases were also seen as limiting and have restricted entry owing to the ideological stringency. The prevalent corruption and scandals within this gamut is seen as a microcosm of the political parties that are operating at the macro political level.
- To expect a certain change, one needs to operate within the available set of resources and be an active change agent, as opined by respondents across several cities. The need to be a part of voluntary services, or other forms of engagement in the socio-economic development space is a necessity during the formative years.



- The respondents expressed a necessity to have alternate youth forums which would allow them to do internships with the government agencies and be a part of the political structure.
- Overall, the youth was hopeful in terms of their expectations from the leadership. At all points, they expressed the need to have a relatable mass leader who is rooted to the grassroots and ‘qualified’ individual with degrees, who may operate under a divorced reality.
- Students and working professionals expressed their concerns about the disparity that exists between the knowledge that is imparted at the academic and institutional level and what is required in the job market. The lack of skill oriented courses renders them ‘unemployable’.
- The problem of reservation and the need to dissolve it is seen as a pressing need. By welcoming international institutes to set up operations, some expressed that this move could possibly result in weaning away from the reservation policy.
- Social sciences being heavily underfunded in India and the mismatch between theoretical old school education versus application were considered an impediment in securing a job.
- With respect to entrepreneurship, most welcome the idea and yet see a need to bridge the gap between the political and the social realm.
- Creating a more conducive and viable atmosphere for entrepreneurship, specifically companies within the social impact sphere. This would in turn create a demand for social entrepreneurship courses and programs.
- Most students saw India-UK collaborations in positive light, but for the fact, that this information and certain resources were accessible to a certain sub-section of students
- Students suggested that India-UK institutional collaborations were not communicated too well. They were generally aware of programmes but were unable to name any. This is in contrast to their cognizance of programmes in the United States and Germany, where the recall rate was relatively higher.
- A small subset of respondents was enthusiastic about being a part of exchange programmes. However, they were unable to give reasons as to why they hadn’t participated in such programs at their respective institutes.

The details of such debates have been extensively elaborated and critically explained in the subsequent chapters.

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