

Anger and Hope

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Young India is furious. With corruption, politicians, and the body blow to national pride. They have faith in their country, but not in the people who run it.

India's youth is angry with the country's political class. The Anna Hazare movement gave a glimpse of that anger. Now, *India Today's* exclusive opinion poll of 2,500 Indians between the ages of 18 and 25, conducted by global market research agency Synovate, confirms an anti-politician mood among the youth. When presented with three hypothetical electoral match-ups between prominent members of Team Anna and leading politicians, the verdict is clear. Anna Hazare defeats [Rahul Gandhi](#) by a huge 76-24 margin and Kiran Bedi trounces Kapil Sibal by 84-16 (in Delhi, it is 96-4 in her favour). It isn't just the Congress at the receiving end. Given a choice between the former BJP chief minister of Karnataka, B.S. Yeddyurappa, and former Karnataka Lokayukta N. Santosh Hegde, the latter wins hands down at 78-22. The Congress is rated as the most corrupt political party but the leading Opposition party, the BJP, is not far behind in second place, viewed as more corrupt than even the BSP or DMK. That said India's young still have faith in the country's democracy and electoral system. Eighty-six per cent of all respondents said they would vote in the next general election. Far from undermining India's democracy, the Anna movement has actually strengthened it by engaging a traditionally apathetic demographic group into the political mainstream.

India's youth matter, politically and economically. India is one of the youngest nations in the world, where 65 per cent of the population is under the age of 35. The political majority lies with them as does the advantage of contributing most productively to the workforce. The views of the youth provide a glimpse into India's future. Often these views are in apparent contradiction. Like in the *India Today-Synovate* Opinion Poll, there is a unique combination of a deep pessimism about Government and politics as well as a sunny optimism about their own lives and prosperity. Rather than a drawback, that is the greatest asset of youth: an uncluttered mind open to divergent views.

Eighty-four per cent of all respondents believe that they will enjoy a better life, in terms of education, freedom, income and lifestyle, than their parents did. Despite the Government, 81 per cent believe that they will be happier in the future than now. A remarkable 80 per cent of respondents say that if offered a similar job in the United States and India, they would opt for the job in India. It is not difficult to reconcile the apparent contradiction. Much of the youth surveyed in the metros and big towns no longer depend on the Government for their prosperity. If anything, the Government is seen as an obstacle to prosperity arriving faster. The youth are impatient. But there is a reluctance to join politics. Barring Delhi, the political epicentre of India, a significant majority of respondents expressed no desire to enter politics.

There remains, however, a desire to get a Government job, particularly outside the metros. In Patna, for example, 74 per cent of respondents said a government job was their first-choice career. In Visakhapatnam, the number is 75 per cent. That may be because of the job security on offer. Most likely, it is because there are fewer alternatives in smaller towns. In cities such as Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai, where opportunities are greater, the preference for jobs outside the Government is much stronger. What is remarkably clear is the focus that young Indians have on their careers. There is none of the drift associated with youngsters in this age group. When asked about the leading causes of stress in their lives, the top two responses were 'career' and 'financial matters'.

The social attitudes of Indian youth throw up even more interesting contradictions than their political-economic outlook. There is a clear mix between a new liberalism and old-fashioned conservatism. There are real differences between responses from the five metros and the five Tier-2 cities. Attitudes towards sex are liberal in places. Sixty-eight per cent respondents said they are sexually active. However, only 15 per cent of respondents said they have had intercourse. For most, kissing and touching qualify as sex. In an apparent contradiction, 54 per cent believe in pre-marital virginity. In Delhi and Mumbai, however, only 22 per cent and 35 per cent respectively believe in pre-marital virginity. There is a similar divide in the response to whether an arranged marriage, love marriage or live-in relationship is preferable. Overall, a 57 per cent majority favours arranged marriage. In Delhi and Mumbai, arranged marriage is the choice of a minority. Twenty-four per cent of the youth in liberal Delhi favour live-in relationships.

Young India is deeply religious. Eighty-six per cent of respondents believe in God. Seventy-six per cent pray every day. The only exception is Kolkata whose youth are divided almost 50-50 into believers and non-believers. The long reign of the atheist CPI (M) may explain this trend. The youth seem to be staunchly secular and non-discriminatory towards religions other than their own-90 per cent say that they have friends born to other religions.

Young India also happens to be vain. When asked what they worried about most, the top response was their looks. Seventy-seven per cent respondents carry a comb, 38 per cent admit to using whitening cream. The attachment to family values is strong. When asked about role models, mother and father came out on top well ahead of Anna Hazare and [Sachin Tendulkar](#). Spending time with the family is a greater priority for young Indians than sex.

The youth claim to be on the right side of the law. Ninety-two per cent claim they don't drink and drive. A similar number claims never to have used illegal drugs, 87 per cent say they have never had a brush with the law and 65 per cent have never paid a bribe. If true, then India's future is in safe hands.