

CITIZENS AWARENESS ABOUT THE ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

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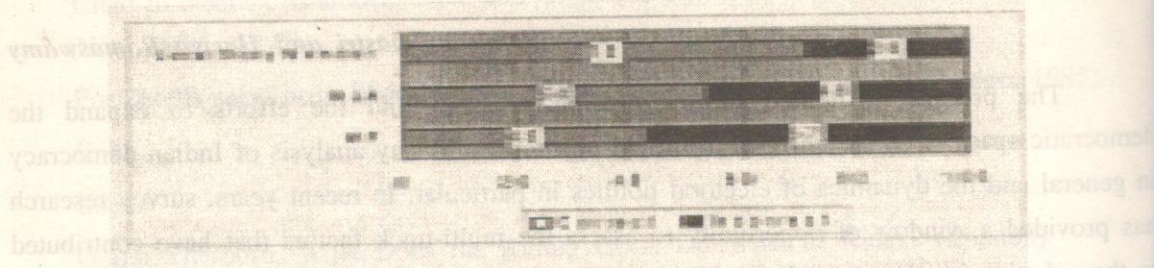
The process of democratic engineering in India and the efforts to expand the democratic space have occupied the spotlight of attention in any analysis of Indian democracy in general and the dynamics of electoral politics in particular. In recent years, survey research has provided a window of opportunity to assess the multi-track factors that have contributed to the ushering in of a new phase of competitive democratic politics across the country. One important trend in this new phase of competitive politics is the citizen attitude towards the 'dividends' of democracy and more particularly their response to the role and performance of elected representatives.

In this paper the findings of the State and Society Project Survey¹ on the public awareness of and confidence in elected representatives in Karnataka is analysed.. One of the questions in this study, sought to measure the level of awareness among the respondents about the representative elected to the local body, state legislature and the Lok Sabha. They were further asked whether the elected representative took care of the interests of all, some or none at all. Finally, if they mentioned that the elected representative looked after the interests of a few, their response was sought on who those few were. While the study was conducted in 20 states of India, the findings with in Karnataka with regard to the above mentioned issues are reported in this paper.

It is important to record the fact that when the respondents in Karnataka, were asked the name of their elected representative in the Lok Sabha, Legislative Assembly and local body, the response varied significantly. While sixty percent of the respondents were able to identify the name of their elected representative in the State legislature correctly, less than half of them knew the name of the Lok Sabha member from their constituency. More than eighty percent of the respondents knew the name of their elected representative in the local body. There appears to be a direct correlation between the respondents capacity to correctly identify their elected representative and the level at which these representatives were working. The closer the level they were operating at, the more likely that the respondents identified them correctly.

Graph I

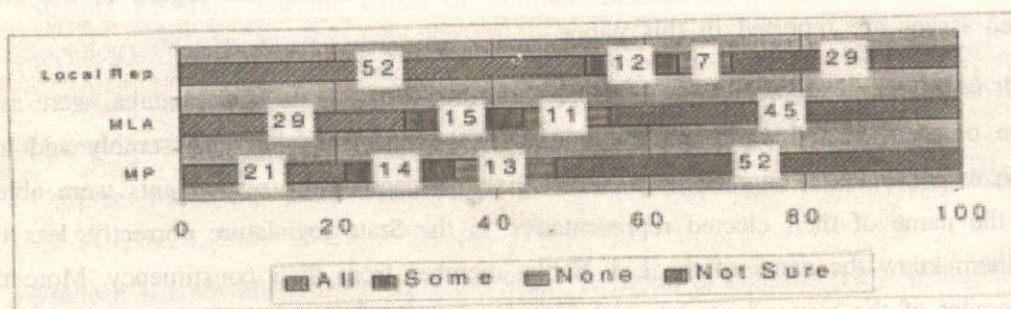
Who is your Lok Sabha MP, MLA and Representative in the Local Body?



When asked whether the elected representative took care of the interests of all, or some or none, the percentage of respondents who were unsure of the answer increased as they commented on an elected member who represented them at a more distant level. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents were unsure of the nature of interest that their Lok Sabha member served. While more than half the respondents were similarly ambiguous about the role of their MLA, there was much greater clarity when it came to their representative in the local body, with only one-third being unsure of what stand to take.

Graph 2

Whose interests does your Lok Sabha MP, MLA and Representative in the Local Body Serve?



A majority of the respondents believed that the local representative served the interests of all. One of every three respondents believed that their MLA served the interests of all and there was a seven percentage point decline when it came to the evaluation of their

Lok Sabha member. A little over 10 percent of the respondents categorically stated that their local body representative served the interests of a few or none. This percentage remains more or less the same in the case of the MLA and the Lok Sabha member.

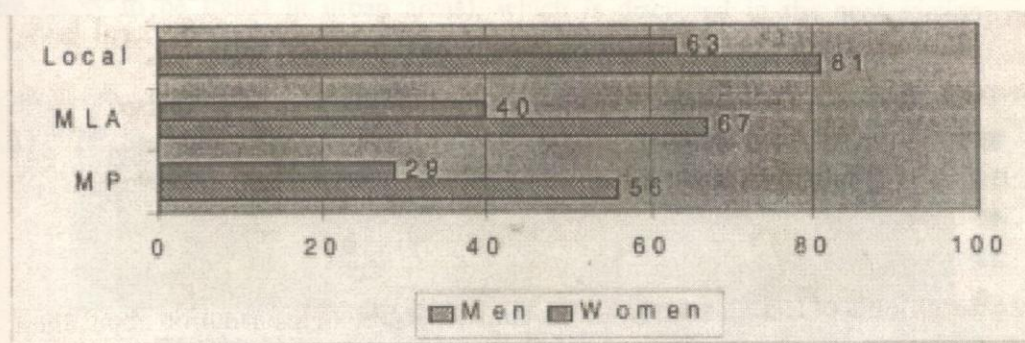
Among those who felt that the elected representative served the interests of only a few, the trend did not vary significantly in the case of all the three elected representatives - the Lok Sabha MP, State Legislature MLA or local body member. A majority of those who felt that the elected representatives served the interests of a few, pointed out to the special treatment meted out to the those belonging to the party of the representative. The second group rated as being the most favoured by the elected representatives were those who were affluent. Those belonging to the caste of the elected representative were the third most privileged group.

Do all segments of people in the state have a similar degree of information about their elected representatives and are there are variations in their assessment of their role? To account for the variance in the distribution of sentiment on the above factors, the role of education, gender, age, caste and place of residence were analysed². Critical differences emerged with regard to the above demographic variables.

Graph 3

Who is your Lok Sabha MP, MLA and Representative in the Local Body :

Correct Response Across Gender



Who is your Lok Sabha MP, MLA and Representative in the Local Body : Correct Response Across Gender

The level of difference between men and women in their awareness about the elected representative was striking. While less than 30 percent of the women respondents were able to correctly mention the name of the Lok Sabha member from their constituency, the percentage rose – though marginally (to a little over 40 percent) in the case of the member of the legislative assembly. More than three-fourths of the women respondents were able to correctly recall, the name of elected member of the local body.

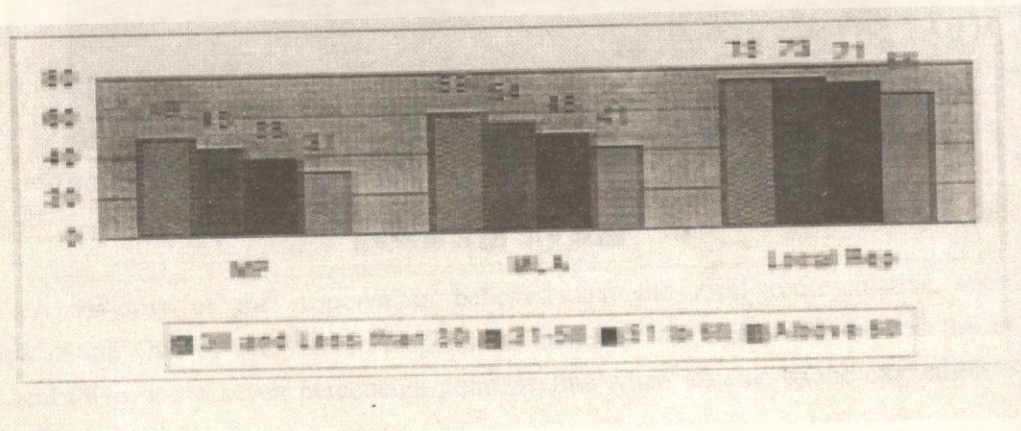
The difference between men and women in their level of awareness about their elected representative is more than double in the case of the Lok Sabha MP. The difference reduces marginally in the case of the member of the legislative assembly and reduces significantly in the case of the local body representative (12 % percentage points).

There appears to be a clear link between the social background of the respondent and their level of awareness about their elected representative. Awareness about the elected representative to the Lok Sabha was significantly higher among the Forward Castes, Dominant Castes as compared to the Other Backward Castes and the Dalits. On the other hand, the level of awareness about the representative at the local body was highest among the Dalits as compared to the Other Backward Castes, Dominant Castes and Forward Castes.

Graph 4

Who is your Lok Sabha MP, MLA and Representative in the Local Body :

Correct Response Across Age Groups



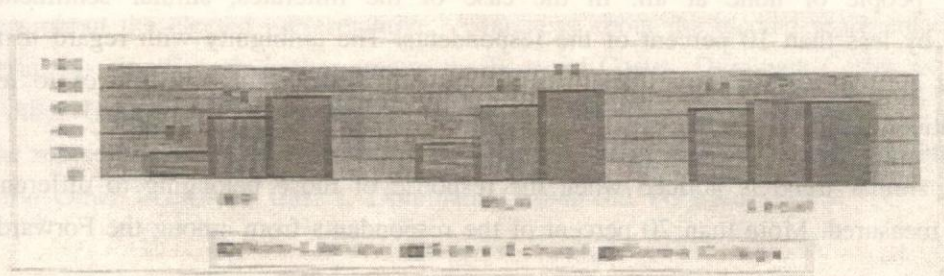
Among the Dalits, the difference in the level of awareness about the elected representative increases sharply as we move to a level closer to the people (from MP - 32% - to local body representative - 86%). Similarly, in the case of the Other Backward Communities the level of awareness about the elected representative doubles when one moves from the MP to the local body representative (42 % to 84 %). This difference is not as skewed in the case of the Dominant Castes and Forward Castes (60% in case of MP and 80% in case of local body representative).

There is a clear link between the level of education and the awareness about the elected representatives. The higher the level of education the greater is the chance of the respondent being able to name the elected representative. The only exception seems to be in the case of the local body representative. The difference between the level of awareness about elected representatives among the illiterates and the degree holders is pronounced in the case of Lok Sabha Members (67 percentage points) and legislators (40 percentage points). When it comes to the awareness about the local body representative the level of awareness is marginally lower among those who have had the benefit of college education. Among the illiterates there is a much greater likelihood that they are able to name their local representative rather than their state legislator or elected member of Parliament. On the other hand in the case of those who have acquired a college degree, the likelihood of their being able to rightly recall the name of their elected representative to Parliament and the Assembly is much higher as compared to the name of their representative in the local body. This factor is possibly linked to the place of residence (those with the benefit of college education are more likely to be found in urban areas), which is discussed in the next section.

Graph 5

Who is your Lok Sabha MP, MLA and Representative in the Local Body :

Correct Response Across Education Groups

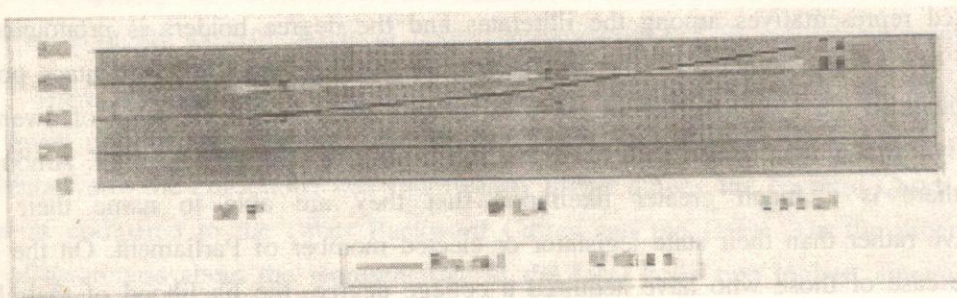


When the place of residence of the respondents is taken into account, a unique pattern is noticed. With regard to the elected representative in the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assembly, there appears to be greater awareness in the towns and cities as compared to the villages. The trend gets reversed in the case of the elected representative in the local body. Here, the level of awareness is higher by 6 percentage points in rural areas as compared to the cities and towns.

Graph 6

Who is your Lok Sabha MP, MLA and Representative in the Local Body:

Correct Response and Place of Residence



Significant differences in perception among the respondents was noticed when the issue - whose interests did the elected representative take care of, was measured. The variation was clearly evident in the case of three important variables - level of education, caste and place of residence. The unhappiness with the performance of the elected representative was the highest among the more educated and gave room for greater optimism as the level of education of the respondent reduced. Among those who had the benefit of college education, more than 20 percent felt that their elected representative took care of the interests of a few people or none at all. In the case of the illiterates, similar sentiments were expressed by less than 10 percent of the respondents. The ambiguity with regard to the role played by elected representatives declines among the illiterates as one moves to levels of representation closer to the people.

A similar trend is noticed when the response of those belonging to different social groups is measured. More than 20 percent of the respondents from among the Forward Castes

and Dominant Castes felt that their elected representatives served the interests of a few or none. The degree of pessimism among the Dalits is significantly lower. Further, among the Dalits, the ambiguity in the response declines significantly as the respondents are asked to evaluate a representative who works at a level closer to them. It is also noticed that among the Dalits, the unhappiness with the functioning of the elected representative is highest at the level of the local representative – more than 10 percent felt that the local representative served the interests of some or none.

The survey results also provided proof of the fact that the degree of frustration with the elected representative was significantly higher in urban areas as compared to the villages. There was a fifteen percentage point difference in the response in urban and rural areas on whether the elected representative served the interests of a few or none, with respondents in urban areas being more critical. This pattern holds good for elected representatives at all the three levels. Additionally, with regard to the elected representative at the local level, the degree of ambiguity on the role in representing the interests of society was more pronounced in the urban areas.

A few tentative conclusions could be arrived at from the above findings. These conclusions have important implications for the quality of representation in the State and the perception of common citizens in this regard.

There is a direct co-relation between the respondents capacity to correctly identify the elected representative and the level at which the elected member represents the people. Respondents were more likely to be aware of who their representative in the local body and less likely to correctly recall their representative in the state legislature and parliament.

Men were more likely to know the name of the elected representative as compared to women. The difference between the level of awareness between men and women is more pronounced when representative at the state and national level are taken into account.

The social background of the respondent is linked in significant ways to the level of awareness about the elected representative. Awareness about the elected representative to the Lok Sabha was significantly higher among the Forward Castes, Dominant Castes as compared to the Other Backward Castes and the Dalits. On the other hand, the level of awareness about the representative at the local body was highest among the Dalits and marginally lower among the Other Backward Castes, Dominant Castes and Forward Castes.

There appears to be a direct relationship between the level of education of the respondent and their awareness about their elected representatives in the Parliament and State legislature. The lower the level of education, the lesser the likelihood of their being aware of who their elected representative was. The position gets reversed when it comes to the local government representative.

Urban voters were more likely to be aware of their Lok Sabha and Assembly representative than their rural counterparts. The converse is true in the case of awareness about elected representatives in the local bodies.

The respondents were more likely to be ambiguous when commenting on the performance of their elected representative in the Lok Sabha and State Legislature as compared to the one in the local body.

The unhappiness with the performance of the elected representative was the highest among the more educated and those belonging to the forward and dominant castes.

The lack of faith in the capacity of the elected representatives was much higher in urban areas as compared to the villages.

Among those who felt that the elected representatives served the interests of a few, the 'few' essentially included party workers, the rich, those belonging to the caste of the elected representatives and their relatives.

1 The survey was conducted as part of the 'State and Society Project', coordinated by the Bangalore University. Dr Sandeep Shastri was one of the Principal Coordinators of the Project and Dr Harish Ramaswamy was the Karnataka Coordinator. A rigorous scientific methodology was employed to generate the sample for the survey. A target sample of 8388 citizens was identified and detailed face-to-face interviews were conducted. The survey was conducted in 18 states of India, which covered nearly 97% of the nation's population. 73 districts were identified for the purpose of the survey. The 73 districts were spread across the 18 states in which the survey was conducted keeping in mind the population of the states, even while ensuring that a minimum of two districts were surveyed in each of the 18 states. In Karnataka, the survey was conducted in 4 districts chosen by random sampling (PPS: probability proportion to size). A target sample of 480 was generated for the state.

2 Respondents are divided into three categories on the basis of their education level a) Illiterate; b) Some School (primary pass, middle pass, matriculate, intermediate); c) some college (diploma holder, graduate, post graduate, professional degree). On the basis of place of residence, respondents are divided into a) Rural and b) Urban with a further sub-classification of urban into those living in towns and cities.