

Straight Talk : 09 February 2013

Assembly elections are round the corner in Karnataka. The citizens have two questions on their minds. (a) Which candidate or party should they vote for? (b) Has the sitting MLA or the ruling party performed well in the last five years? With hardly any difference between political parties in terms of their approach, or lack of it, to problems faced by the people, the decision making process becomes difficult.

Daksh, an independent civil society group, in collaboration with the Namma Bengaluru Foundation, has conducted a survey in the state's legislative constituencies, to gather information on what people want from the political class, what are the issues that are bothering them, how has the MLA of their constituency performed on them, etc. The survey's main focus is to improve accountability in politics and governance. It helps citizens to monitor the performance of their elected representatives.

In Bangalore, they conducted a 'perception survey' across 27 assembly constituencies. The idea was to gather people's perceptions about the functioning of their MLAs. A questionnaire containing a host of issues, including accessibility of MLAs, law and order / policing, maintenance of roads, traffic management, public transport, parking facility, basic amenities, power and drinking water supply, garbage clearance, corruption, encroachment of public infrastructure, health facilities, security of women, etc, was given to the respondents.

The survey findings threw up interesting facts about Bangalore:

- That there is a sharp gap between people's expectations and their perception of elected representatives' performances. The average performance index of all legislators across the city is a mere 5.4 out of 10 – a little over 50 per cent. The highest score was 6.6 and the lowest 4.8.

- That citizens generally believe caste and party are more important than the candidate. Across the city, 41 per cent believe that caste is more important; 18.7 per cent believe that the party is most important; only 14.5 per cent believe that the candidate is most important.

- Out of the 27 MLAs in Bangalore, four MLAs have never asked a question in the Assembly during their entire term; seven have asked 10 or less number of questions; eight have

asked more than 10 but less than 100 questions; three have asked more than 100 questions.

- That the six most important issues for the people across Bangalore are (1) encroachment of public land, lakes and roads; (2) zoning regulations; (3) better employment opportunities; (4) reservation for jobs and education; (5) better public facilities and basic amenities like parks, public toilets, quality footpaths, etc; (6) more hospitals/primary health care centres.

- That 10.1 percent of Bangaloreans rated 'eradication of corruption' as an issue of high importance --- the highest across the state. In most other districts, less than 5 per cent listed it as an issue of high importance.

Another interesting finding is that younger people's needs, in terms of issues of importance, are different from that of older people.

- 18 – 30 age group: Encroachment of public land, lakes and roads, more hospitals/primary health care centres, better employment opportunities, better public transport, zoning regulations, reservation for jobs and education – in that order.

- 31 – 45 age group: Encroachment of public land, lakes and roads, better employment opportunities, zoning regulations, public facilities & basic amenities, parking facility, restoration of lakes – in that order.

- 46 – 60 age group: Better garbage clearance, public facilities & basic amenities, reservation for jobs & education, water supply & quality, restoration of lakes, encroachment of public land, lakes and roads.

- Above 60 age group: Zoning regulations, reservation for jobs & education, encroachment of public land, lakes and roads, public facilities & basic amenities, restoration of lakes, water supply & quality.

The younger lot seems to be more concerned about encroachment of land, lakes and roads. It tops their list of issues of importance. It shows that they are worried about Bangalore becoming an unmanageable city, what with land grabbers having a field day. The older group appears to me more concerned about basic needs like better garbage clearance, public facilities like toilets and parks and basic amenities. Hopefully, candidates contesting the coming elections will keep these issues in mind.

In terms of constituencies where MLAs were rated as being focused best on the most important issues are (on a scale of 10) Dasarahalli 6.6, Shantinagar 6.5, Malleswaram 5.9, Sarvagnanagar 5.7, Yelahanka 5.5 & Rajajinagar 5.5. The constituencies with lowest scores are: Pulikeshinagar 5.1, Byatarayanapura 5, K R Puram 5, Bangalore South 4.9, Chikpet 4.8, Hebbal 4.8.

The survey's objectives are mainly to track performance of elected governments and representatives on a regular basis, present detailed, query-friendly background information about people in politics, present the perceptions of citizens at a local level, present human development indicators at the most important unit of political activity – the constituency, and finally promote citizen participation to ensure accountability in politics and governance.

Those citizens who are interested in obtaining detailed scores on different issues and for different constituencies may write to harish@dakshindia.org , kishore@dakshindia.org and nbf@namma-bengaluru.org

PARTING SHOT

An interesting tweet: Strange is the system which rejects an Army Chief's school certificate, but accepts a rapist cum murderer's school certificate!

- H S Balram

hsbalram@suvarnanews.in