

Delhi State Legislative Assembly Elections 2013

Mood of the People Report

The general elections for 70 seats of Delhi State Legislative Assembly are due in December 2013 and Peoples Pulse, a Hyderabad-based research organization has undertaken a testing waters mood of the electorate survey during the last week of August 2012. The survey was undertaken in the residential and business areas of remote and key localities of Delhi, deliberately avoiding upper middle class colonies. The focus of the survey was to gauge the mood of the ordinary people – aam admi – on the street. Finding out the opinions of the man on the street was the major concern of the survey. The survey team visited eastern, western, southern and central parts of Delhi going deep into by-lanes and meeting people from all walks of life. The respondents were selected randomly keeping in view the demographic, professional and migration dimensions. On the whole, the sample respondents came from all walks of life as cobblers, tailors, barbers, daily wage laborers, petty shop keepers, migrant laborers, mechanics, registered medical practitioners, auto rickshaw drivers, taxi drivers, real estate dealers, etc. The conclusions of the survey are as follows:

All pervasive frustration

People across all the social and economic divisions expressed frustration and helplessness about their life and future. Almost all the respondents showed their anger against politicians and “sab chor hai” was the common refrain. All the politicians are looting the country, said many respondents. In the same vein, there was more anger against the ruling party (in this case Congress) and almost all the respondents ruled out the return of Shiela Dikshit or the Congress Party to power in 2013 elections. Corruption of Common Wealth Games was on everybody’s mind. The disconnect between the people at large and the political class is so huge that in none of the areas, people never saw a politician (an MLA or an MP or a minister) coming into their mohalla, except during election time. Some people said even if they don’t vote, the same persons win. Yet others said they vote for an arrack bottle and one person said “at least we get drink for four five days for voting. Who is bothered about life?” most of the people are disengaged with political issues and a major reason for this was their complete engagement with and search for two square meal a day. “Where do we get time to think about politics” said a battery shop owner as well as migrant labor from Bihar who work in textile market in Mangolpuri.

Some of the respondents said even the media was playing a dirty role with not showing the reality fully. “Only 40 percent that comes in the media is true, the other 60 percent is for their own benefit,” said a Brahmin mechanic in Mangolpuri. “Credibility is the main issue.

Nobody has credibility today. Everybody is purchasable,” said a Bihar migrant who runs an electronics repair shop.

An elderly Sardarji, owner of a car garage, giving his own prescription to eradicate corruption, says, “no officer should be posted in home state. All the officers should be transferred every two years from one corner of the country to the other, so that nobody develops vested interest. If officers are controlled, even the politicians cannot do anything.”

“Everybody is a thief, dacoit. There is no future for the country,” says a Muslim hairdresser in Mayur Vihar. “Saare ke saare chor hain. It is only difference of degree,” he adds. Virendar Singh, a villager of Munirka says, “all the politicians should be arrested and kept in jail as ordinary prisoners before the election. Release them just two days before and hold the elections.”

The immensity of helplessness can be seen in a respondent’s comment that “nobody can do anything about corruption and misgovernance. Only Yuganth will solve the problems of the country.”

Opposition doesn’t fare better

Though the people overwhelmingly expressed opposition to the Congress, that did not automatically turn into favoring the principal opposition, the BJP. The respondents expressed distrust and suspicions against the BJP citing various reasons. Most of the respondents said the BJP was also equally corrupt. Some respondents attributed price rise to the BJP. Though some respondents remembered Madan Lal Khurana and A B Vajpayee as better politicians and rulers, that was only a personal preference but not a party support. A Jat retired army man from Sultanpuri says both Modi and Advani are “terrorists”. Some respondents vehemently opposed the idea of Modi becoming PM saying that he is communal, partial and cruel. Neeraj Mittal, a real estate dealer in Mayur Vihar said Modi is a killer and he has to be hanged. “How dare they propose his name as prime minister,” he asked.

No confidence in alternative

Even while rejecting both the ruling and the opposition parties, the respondents were not enthusiastic about searching for or sowing confidence in an alternative. A resigned mood is set in and most people could not think of any alternative. The alternatives, in the form of other political parties or new forces like Anna Hazare and Baba Ramdev do not have any recall value. At least a quarter of the respondents don’t even recollect the names of Anna team. People do not propose these names as alternatives on their own. Even when the investigators pose these alternatives and probe, people dismiss them as viable alternatives. Some respondents gave a number of reasons to dismiss the alternatives also.

Some respondents, supporting Anna's initiatives asked whether this five-six member army could survive the onslaught of the corruption juggernaut. Surprisingly, some apparently illiterate respondents made a clear division between "social" goals like eradicating corruption and "political" initiatives and criticized Anna for mixing both.

Here are some of the interesting comments:

- "To change the system we need 250 MPs. What can these five persons do even if we send them to Parliament?"
- "Change is a slow process. Even for day break it takes 12 hours of darkness. Can you expect a hunger strike and a party get change so fast?"
- "Anna is speaking good, but can he deliver what he speaks?"
- "A party that aims to emerge as an alternative has to have thousands and lakhs of people. But these are only a handful."
- "Anna should not have withdrawn the hunger strike. At least he should have shown that he was interested in Jan Lokpal, come what may. But he withdrew and turned to politics unnecessarily."
- "In the beginning Anna team has a lot of credibility, but with the withdrawal of the first hunger strike, division within the team and politicization, they lost credibility."
- "Why are they coming into politics? Do they want to fight corruption or form government? Can they bring in Lokpal by joining politics?"
- "What is the guarantee that they will implement Lokpal?"
- "Anna cannot do anything. His aims are distracted. Struggle against corruption should have been his sole agenda. Joining politics is very bad."
- "Anna had very good objectives in the beginning. Fight against corruption is okay and criticizing one party and the government is also okay. But if you denounce all the political parties, where do you go?"
- "Corruption is the real issue and that's why Anna had good response initially. But who knows if they also follow the same political path? See, Dr Ambedkar points his finger at Parliament. Everything has to be done there only."
- "Agitation is different and political parties are different. Don't mix them."
- "At best Anna and Ramdev will dent Congress votes and winning probability."
- "naam se nahin hota, kaam se hota."
- "Unless corruption is rooted out, India cannot prosper. But one person cannot do anything. Samandar me machli gande hain."
- "Anna team can come into politics. But it would be better if they join hands with BJP."
- "Baba Ramdev is a fool. He is raising the bogey of foreign accounts. Whose money is not there is foreign accounts? Is Ramdev clean?"
- "Politics is a bad game. Nobody wants to join politics and anybody who is joining politics will be suspected. Anna team should not enter politics."

- “There will be no difference with Anna Team. He proved ineffective. In fact, corruption increased after his initiative.”
- “Ramdev’s medicines are fake. He doesn’t have integrity. He wears religious clothes but involves in business. Now to protect his business interests he is joining politics.”
- “Without joining politics and coming to power corruption cannot be rooted out. But what is the right time?”
- “Anna gave some hope. But there is infighting in his team.”
- “Ramdev is becoming another Chandra Swami.”
- “Kiran Bedi was part of Indira/Rajiv administration and helped massacring people. Now she is preaching altruisms.”

Individual preferences

Though there was an all pervasive mood of frustration and helplessness, the respondents had individual preferences on some politicians belonging to the same parties that were being criticized. The preferences ranged from Rahul Gandhi to Dr Manmohan Singh to Nitish Kumar. However, in contrast to media projections, Narendra Modi’s name was not favored by most respondents. Some people said it doesn’t matter who becomes the prime minister. Many respondents referred to Dr Manmohan Singh as “katputli” (puppet) even without mentioning who is running the show. Mulayam is associated with goondagardi and Mayawati with personality cult.

Price rise

Price rise is a major problem faced by people across all sections and almost everybody expressed it. People think that the prices are rising because of corruption. “Since Rs 10 work was done for Rs 500 in Common Wealth Games, all that load has come on to the heads of ordinary people and prices are rising,” said a property dealer in Mayur Vihar.

Poverty, lack of civic amenities, underdevelopment issues

While the major roads and key governance areas in Delhi appear beautiful, the areas we visited showed a horrible spectacle of poverty, dirtiness, lack of civic amenities and underdevelopment. Our team visited while it was raining and just after the rain and most of the colonies are waterlogged, full of mosquitoes and flies, and without sanitation facilities. People everywhere showed these to the investigators and asked whether that was development. Their anger against the governance as well as corruption was more vocal in the background of this scenario.

Unemployment

Many respondents cited unemployment as a major problem and a lathe machine operator in Trilokpuri attributed the rise of crime rate in Delhi to the unemployment problem. “if

there are 100 vacancies, 50 will be filled by officers with their own people, 25 will be taken by politicians, 5 goes for recommendation or bribe leaving only 20 for open recruitment. Thus unemployment is rising leading to all kinds of crime,” he said. In Trilokpuri with a population of three lakh, there are only two government schools and a registered medical practitioner cites this as utter neglect suffered by people.

Conclusion

There is a palpable anger and opposition against the ruling party as well as the entire political class. It would be a great opportunity for any real alternative if it shows that it was interested in real change. However this alternative initiative has to tread the path carefully, in the context of overall suspicion against political moves. Delhi offers a clean and better ground for such an initiative, since the iron is very hot there to strike. The ruling party is on the verge of losing its power and the opposition doesn't have sufficient credibility to cash in and there is an immense scope for a third and better alternative. More over, Delhi will send international and national signals for hopeful future. The alternative should concentrate more on not appearing overtly political and at the same time building people's opinion in favor of better politics.