

Youth participation in civil society and political life in Andhra Pradesh

Youth participation in civil society and political life is increasingly recognised as an important development objective. The opportunities for participation that young people experience in their communities may influence their development and the kind of transitions they make to adulthood. For example, evidence that comes largely from developed countries indicates that youth who participate in community activities or are connected to their communities are less likely than others to engage in risk-taking behaviours. Moreover, behaviours and attitudes relating to community participation that individuals adopt as young people predict their lifelong civic affiliations and perspectives.^a

In India, the National Youth Policy 2003 has underscored the role of India's youth in political decision-making, and has argued for greater representation of youth in appropriate bodies as well as more extensive youth participation in the design and implementation of programmes.^b Indeed, there is a recognition that today's youth, who have better access to skills and information than those of earlier generations, can play an important role in influencing political processes and the socio-economic development of the country. However, there is very little evidence of the extent to which Indian youth participate in civil society and political life.

This policy brief documents the participation of youth in Andhra Pradesh in civil society, the extent to which they uphold secular attitudes and their perceptions about and participation in political processes.

The study

Data are drawn from the *Youth in India: Situation and Needs* study, a sub-nationally representative study undertaken for the first time in India of key transitions experienced by young people in six states of India, including

Andhra Pradesh. The study included a representative survey of youth in both rural and urban settings. Respondents included unmarried women and men and married women aged 15–24 and, in view of the paucity of married men in these ages, married men aged 15–29.

In Andhra Pradesh, the survey was conducted in 2007–08. A total of 8,330 married and unmarried young men and women were interviewed in the survey. These included 1,405 married young men, 2,077 unmarried young men, 2,330 married young women and 2,518 unmarried young women. This brief is based on data obtained from 2,479 young men and 4,848 young women aged 15–24.

To what extent do young people participate in civil society?

Participation in civil society, as measured by participation in community-led activities and membership in an organised group, was somewhat limited among youth, particularly among young women. Specifically, 59% of young men compared to only 17% of young women reported that they had participated in any community-led programmes such as cleanliness drives, health promotion activities, and celebration of festivals and national days. Fewer young men (10%) and a somewhat larger proportion of young women (26%) reported membership in organised groups such as self-help groups, and sports and social clubs. In total, 62% of young men and 39% of young women reported participation in civil society.

Participation in civil society differed by educational attainment of young people; however, the direction of association varied between young men and women and differences were wider among young men than young women. Among young men, participation in civil society was more likely to be reported by the better than the less

^a National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. 2005. *Growing up Global: The Changing Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries*, Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press.

^b Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. 2003. *National Youth Policy 2003*, New Delhi: Government of India.

educated. For example, 51% of young men with less than 9 years of schooling participated in civil society, compared to 67% of those with at least 9 years of schooling. Among young women, it was the less educated who were somewhat more likely than their better educated counterparts to have participated in civil society: 41% of those with less than 9 years of schooling, compared to 36% of those with at least 9 years of schooling.

Participation in civil society also differed by marital status. Findings show that more unmarried (63%) than married (53%) young men reported participation in civil society. In contrast, more married young women than their unmarried counterparts reported participation in civil society (46% versus 30%).

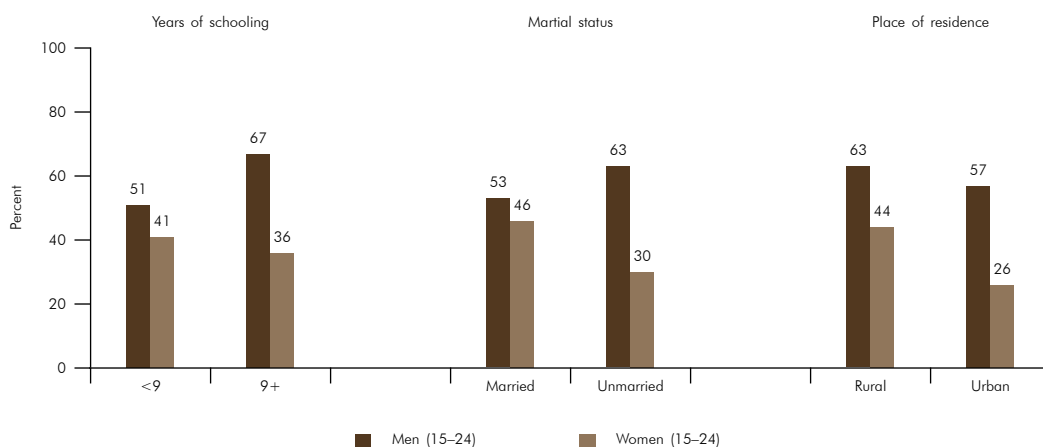
Rural-urban differences were also evident, with more rural than urban youth reporting participation in civil society. Among young

men, those in rural areas were mildly more likely than those in urban areas to have participated in civil society (63% versus 57%). Among young women, differences were more pronounced: 44% versus 26%.

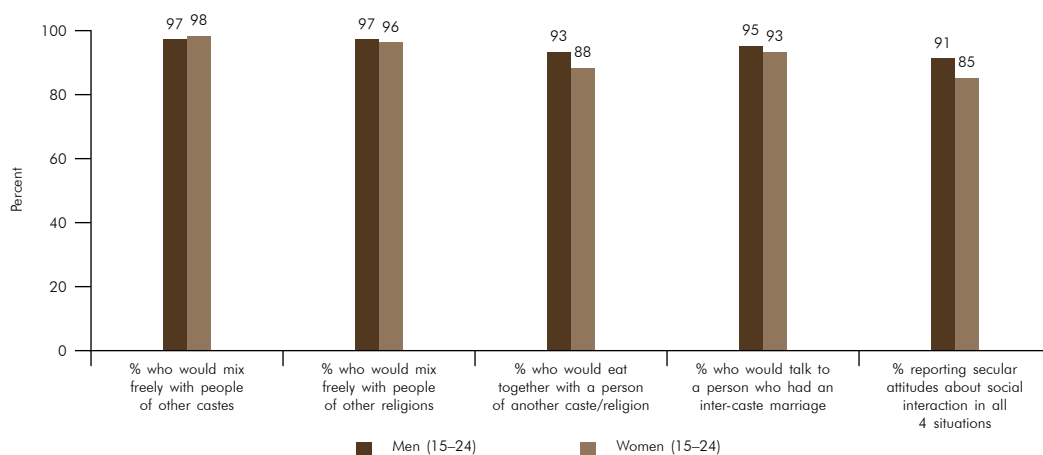
Do young people uphold secular attitudes?

In order to gauge the extent to which youth uphold secular attitudes, two issues were addressed. The first assessed young people's attitude to social interaction with individuals of different castes and religions. Specifically, youth were asked whether they would mix freely and eat together with a person from a different caste or religion, and would talk to someone who had an inter-caste marriage. The second issue assessed young people's tolerance towards someone who showed disrespect to their religion. Specifically, youth were asked whether or not they considered it acceptable to punish someone who showed disrespect to their religion.

Percentage of youth who participated in civil society, according to selected characteristics



Percentage of youth expressing secular attitudes about social interaction





POLICY BRIEF Youth participation in civil society and political life in Andhra Pradesh

Findings show that the overwhelming majority of young men and women expressed secular attitudes about mixing freely with individuals of different castes and religions (96–98%), eating together with a person of a different caste or religion (88–93%) or talking to someone who had an inter-caste marriage (93–95%).

A large number of youth, moreover, reported affirmatively to all four items—91% of young men and 85% of young women. Differences by educational attainment levels, marital status and rural-urban residence were narrow, especially among young men. For example, 89% of better educated young women reported affirmatively to all four items, compared with 81% of their less educated counterparts; corresponding percentages among young men were 92 and 88, respectively. Likewise, secular attitudes in all four situations were reported by 83% of rural young women, compared to 90% of their

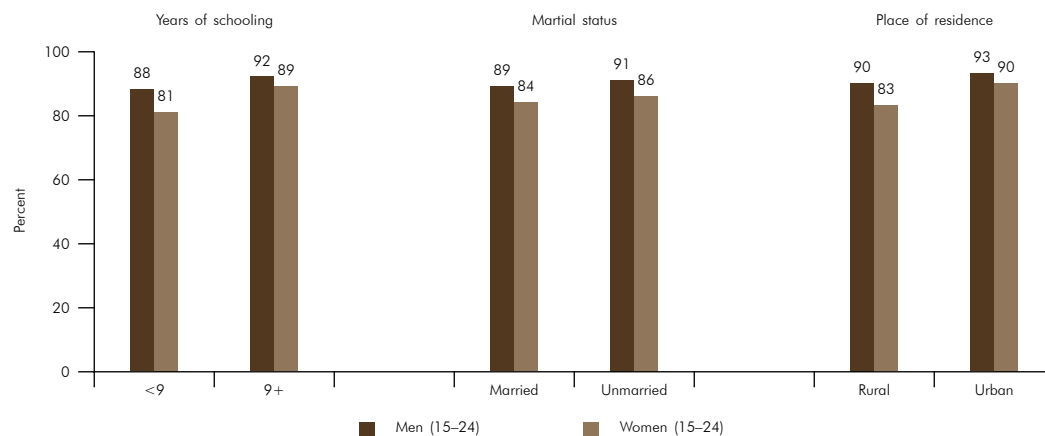
urban counterparts; corresponding percentages among young men were 90 and 93.

In contrast, fewer youth reported secular attitudes with regard to retaliation against someone who showed disrespect to their religion: one-third of young men (34%) and three-fifths of young women (57%) considered it unacceptable to retaliate, through punitive action, against someone who showed disrespect to their religion.

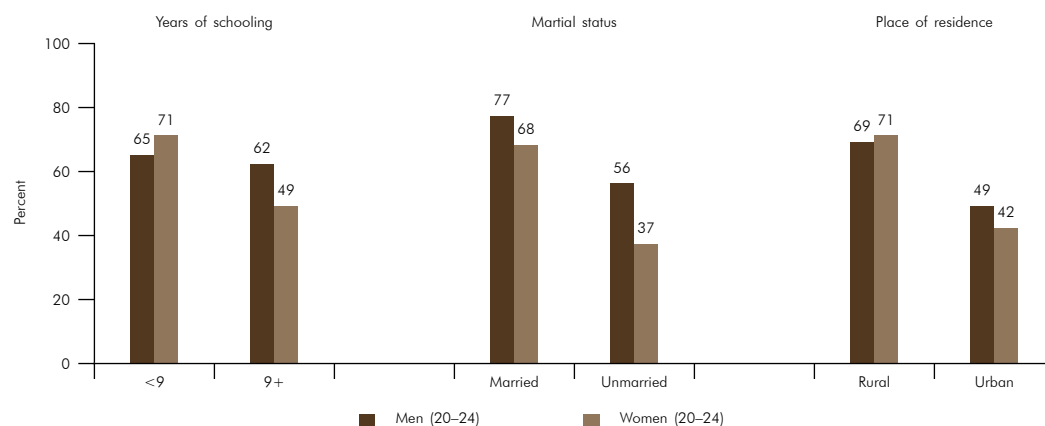
What do young people think about the commitment of political parties and fairness of the electoral process?

Considerable proportions of youth reported disillusionment with the commitment of political parties to work for change at the community level. Indeed, 60% of young men and 53% of young women believed that improvement in their village (rural youth) or neighbourhood (urban youth) was unlikely, no matter which political party governed the state.

Percentage of youth expressing secular attitudes, according to selected characteristics



Percentage of youth aged 20 and above who voted in the last election preceding the interview, according to selected characteristics



It is notable, however, that the majority of youth—89–90%—perceived that the electoral process was fair and one could vote without fear or pressure. Even so, slightly less than one-tenth (8–9%) felt that one could not vote freely.

Do young people exercise their voting rights?

Findings suggest that of those who were eligible to vote in the last election preceding the interview (aged 20 years and above at the time of the interview), almost two-thirds of both young men and women (62–63%) had cast their vote. Rural youth were much more likely to have voted in the last election than their urban counterparts—69% and 49% young men and 71% and 42% young women, respectively. While better educated young men were about as likely to have voted as their less educated counterparts (those with less than 9 years of education), less educated young women were much more likely than their educated counterparts to have voted (71% versus 49%). Marital status differences suggest, moreover, that the married were more likely than the unmarried to have voted in the last election: 77% and 56% among married and unmarried young men, respectively; and 68% and 37%, respectively, among young women.

Programme recommendations

Findings call for actions to promote youth participation, particularly the participation of young women, in civil society and political life. Programmes are required at the school, college and community levels—through national service programmes, sports and other non-formal mechanisms—that encourage civic participation. Special attention must be paid to developing community-level programmes for young women, large proportions of whom had not participated in civil society. Findings that many youth are disillusioned with the commitment of political parties to work for change at the community level highlight the need for the political system in the state to make special efforts to address the concerns of youth and encourage youth participation in the political processes in more meaningful ways.



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