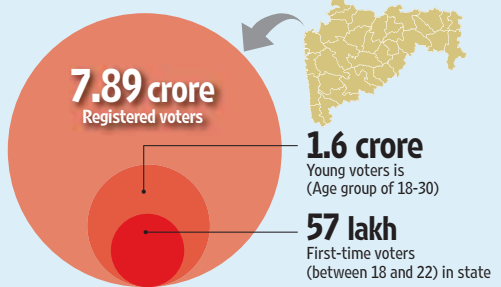


myindia myvote

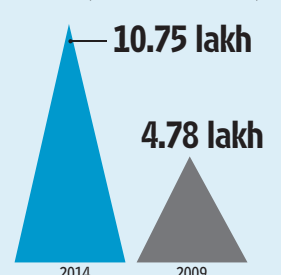
BATTLE FOR MAHARASHTRA

AS THE LOK SABHA POLLS NEAR, HT BRINGS YOU DETAILED COVERAGE OF WHAT'S HAPPENING IN YOUR STATE. WE CRUNCH THE NUMBERS, PRESENT A SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE PARTIES IN THE FRAY, PROFILE THE KEY PLAYERS, HIGHLIGHT THE CAMPAIGN ISSUES, CAPTURE THE VOTERS' EXPECTATIONS, AND MUCH MORE.

THE YOUNG VOICE IN MAHARASHTRA



VOTERS IN THE AGE GROUP OF 18 TO 19 (IN MAHARASHTRA)



A FEW ORGANISATIONS CONDUCTED DRIVES TO REACH OUT TO YOUNG VOTERS. THIS IS HOW MANY YOUNGSTERS THEY HELPED REGISTER

40,000 VOTERS Operation Black Dot	30,000 VOTERS I Vote for a Better India (Art of Living campaign)
38,000 VOTERS We Empower-Mera Haq, Mera Vote and the Mumbai University	7,000 VOTERS Action for Good Governance and Networking in India (AGNI)
	5,000 VOTERS Association of Muslim Professionals

Young voters, more than 1.6 crore in the state, will play a crucial role in the upcoming elections.
KUNAL PATIL/HT

Young, restless and on the fence

UNDECIDED VOTERS Youngsters today are politically informed and want a govt that will provide them with opportunities and focus on development

Mugdha Variyar
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MUMBAI: Lisha Crasto, an economics and political science student from Sophia's College, and her friends spend hours discussing the upcoming Lok Sabha elections starting April 7, but the 22-year-old is confused about who to vote for.

Crasto, who will cast her vote for the first time in the polls, is like most first-time voters — undecided and on the fence — but not ignorant about the actual political situation of the country.

"I have been keeping a tab on political developments by reading newspapers and following blogs online. I discuss the elections with friends, but can't decide who to vote for, as we don't see a clear leader," said Crasto, a Borivli resident.

"I have also considered using the none of the above (Nota) option if I can't make up my mind," she added.

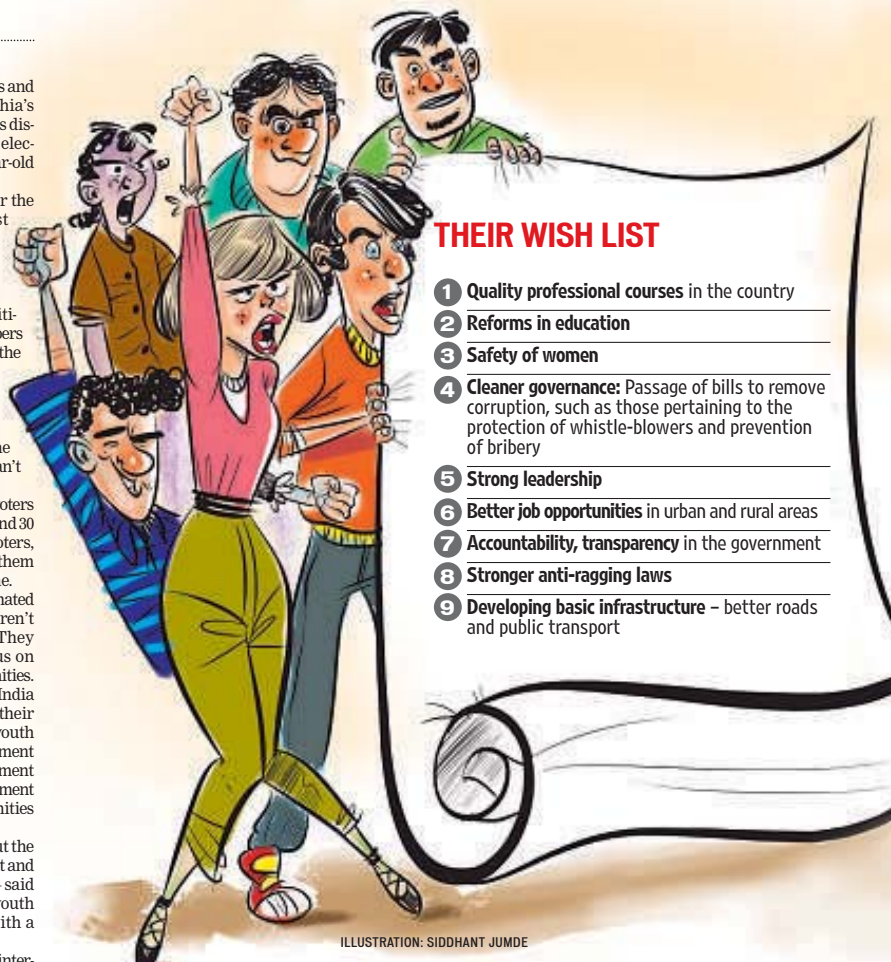
More than 20% of the registered voters in Maharashtra are in between 18 and 30 years. Of the 7.90 crore registered voters, 1.60 are young voters, and many of them will cast their votes for the first time.

One thing is certain, these opinionated and politically-aware youngsters aren't going to be swayed by promises. They want a government that will focus on development and growth in opportunities.

Ankur Garg, 31, founder of I For India website, which allows users to rate their elected representatives, said, "The youth is looking for an accountable government that will take responsibility. Development is a must, as youngsters want employment and professional education opportunities within the country itself."

Garg, whose team has charted out the top 10 governments — led by Gujarat and followed by Goa and Tamil Nadu — said the trend clearly showed that the youth was looking for a strong leader with a vision for development.

Aware that there is a new surge in interest for politics among the young, political parties have



THEIR WISH LIST

- 1 Quality professional courses in the country
- 2 Reforms in education
- 3 Safety of women
- 4 Cleaner governance: Passage of bills to remove corruption, such as those pertaining to the protection of whistle-blowers and prevention of bribery
- 5 Strong leadership
- 6 Better job opportunities in urban and rural areas
- 7 Accountability, transparency in the government
- 8 Stronger anti-ragging laws
- 9 Developing basic infrastructure - better roads and public transport

ILLUSTRATION: SIDDHANT JUMDE

signup

GET REGISTERED

If you are a first-time voter, fill out Form 6 for inclusion of your name in the voters' list and submit it with the documents

There are 43 voter help centres in Mumbai. The list with addresses and phone numbers of these centres is available on www.ceo.maharashtra.gov.in

GO ONLINE

You can register on the websites of the chief electoral officer of Maharashtra and the Election Commission of India — www.ceo.maharashtra.gov.in and <http://eci.nic.in/eci/eci.html>

Fill out Form 6, upload a passport size photo, documents of residence proof and age proof (if relevant)

TO VERIFY INFORMATION

Call the 24x7 voter helpline 1950

Send SMS on service number 9869889966

Check if your name is included in the electoral rolls at the nearest voters' help centre. The list is also available on <https://ceo.maharashtra.gov.in>

OFF THE WALL: SOCIAL MEDIA MAKES ITS WAY TO CAMPAIGN TRAILS

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MUMBAI: When Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal used Facebook to chat with voters on Tuesday, among the hundreds who participated was Mumbai resident Samyak Chakravarty, 25.

This wasn't the first time Chakravarty was using social media for a political purpose, having spearheaded a Facebook campaign to raise awareness about the elections. Through Operation Black Dot, Chakravarty said he has reached out to 4,800 young voters. "On our Facebook page, we discuss important information about registering as voters," said Chakravarty, who is also using Twitter and other social media to spread the word.

Experts said social media has played a strong role during the run-up to the upcoming elections and its influence will continue through the polls, considering it is the dominant platform for the youth to discuss politics.

"On an average, youngsters spend two to three hours a day on digital media. Considering the number of young voters that have registered for these polls, the impact of this platform cannot be ignored," said Rajiv Dingra, founder of the digital agency WATConsult. "Much of the information that they consume is through the social media, and hence it will definitely influence voter sentiments, particularly closer to the elections," he said.

Politicians too have actively used Facebook and Twitter to connect with voters. For instance, prime minister-hopeful Narendra Modi has used Twitter actively with a following of 3.48 million on Twitter, and held many public interactions on Google+ hangout.

"I follow Modi's tweets as he is the most active among politicians on the platform," said Siddharth Saxena, 24, a marketing professional. "However, others are catching up," he added.

However, there is also a limit to the reach of social media, Chakravarty said. "Using Facebook as a two-way medium is not feasible, and I was not able to get across my questions during the AAP Facebook session," he said. "There should be a balance between social media campaigning and physical campaigns."

Social media has also given new momentum to the trend of political parodies, considering its reach and access. "Parodies on political parties and politicians are being widely shared, and every time politicians make controversial statements, the satirical videos go viral," said Dingra, terming it the 'digital video revolution.'

THE YOUTH ARE CLEAR ON THEIR DEMANDS AND THE CHANGE THEY WANT TO SEE POLITICALLY, BUT THEY ARE STILL SEEN AS FLOATER VOTERS

the main focus of the party's campaign.

"We have been conducting presentations in colleges and using social media on a large scale. People are more politically aware than before, and the youth have made up their mind that they want to bring about a change," said Satam.

According to Suraj Singh, city head of the National Students Union of India (NSUI), the student's wing of the Congress, students across the country have come together for the first time to chart a full-fledged manifesto for the elections.

"The issue of corruption tops the list, and most students agree that just the passage of the Lokpal Bill will not help fight it," said Singh.

Though the youth seem clear on their demands and the change they want to see politically, they are still being seen as floater voters, said Mumbai Youth Congress general secretary Agnelo Fernandes. "We don't know who they are going to vote for in the elections," said Fernandes. "Every party is doing their best to reach out to young voters."

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which created political history in Delhi during the Assembly elections, is hopeful that the young voters will help them turn the tide in Maharashtra as well.

Mayank Gandhi, who heads the city branch of the party, said "We have been actively campaigning in colleges as part of our Buzz campaign to reach out to the youth. We are also using social media on a large scale."

Political expert Surendra Jondhale said, "The political perception among the youth is still not clear. Parties are trying to reach out to them, which has been evident by their interest in the Mumbai University's student elections."

There is a consensus that the youth is politically aware, opinionated and eager for change. "Issues of corruption and women's safety have encouraged many youngsters to register as voters. Credit also goes to the election commission, political parties and the media for creating awareness," said Jondhale. "But nothing is guaranteed. Now only numbers will speak."

youngvoices



Shurbhi Sharma
Political science student

"I will use the Nota option when I vote, because I don't support the BJP's ideology and feel that the Congress has been around for too long without having done anything significant. While I support the ideology of the Aam Aadmi Party, I am not sure about their execution. I think they need a few more years."



Nikhil Anand
Management trainee

"I am confused about whom to vote for even though I have been actively following the news. While we have been bombarded with advertisements from political parties, I want to know how truthful their claims are. Citizens can see through the propaganda, and accountability is the need of the hour."



Rohan Deorukhka
Software professional

"I am very sceptical this time, because the party I voted for in the previous elections did not fulfil its promises. Politicians make assurances before elections but forget them afterwards. This time, I will check the credentials and agenda of the candidates from my constituency and only then make a decision."



Ria Narang
BCom student, HR College

"Basic infrastructure, such as better roads, needs to be the focus of the government that comes to power, rather than developing luxuries such as malls and multiplexes. I would give my vote to a party that has policies on improving the access to quality education for the economically-weaker section."



Aman Mantry
B.Tech student, IIT-Bombay

We look forward to a government that has a road map for sound economic and education reforms. The party that comes to power should look at the pressure faced by students and ensure we are not overburdened by academics. It should do something about the system of competitive exams, which put immense pressure on us."

Politically aware and seeking change Awareness drives in colleges encourage youth to register

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MUMBAI: Over the past few months, conversations in corridors, canteens and classrooms between lectures in colleges have been less personal and more political.

Breaking the notion that the youth are unaware or unconcerned about the political landscape of the country, campuses across the city are abuzz with discussions about the power of the dot.

Some youngsters have also gone the extra mile, doubling up as interns for political outfits, participating in public debates on government policies and coming up with charters for development.

Take, for instance, 21-year-old Nidhi Pant, a B.Tech student from the Institute of Chemical Technology, Matunga. Even as she juggled academics and her responsibilities as the cultural secretary of her college, Pant, who wanted a grassroots perspective on the functioning of democracy, didn't think twice before signing up as an intern for the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) when she learnt of the opportunity. This, she said, made her more informed and helped her understand governance. "We need a lead-

THE GROWING POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS COULDN'T HAVE COME AT A BETTER TIME, CONSIDERING THE ROLE YOUNG VOTERS STAND TO PLAY IN THESE POLLS

ership with strong views about foreign direct investment (FDI), nuclear power, Article 377 and other contentious current issues," she said.

Many others said their initial reluctance to step into the political puddle has given way to a realisation that the youth can't shrug off responsibilities, if they expect good governance. "Voting is the most important duty, which we need to do just once every few years. If we demand our rights at the age of 18, why not do our duties?" asked Gurdeep Sachar, a student of Rizvi Law College, Bandra (West). Sachar said he wants to be a successful lawyer and later, a politician, to amend existing laws for better governance.

The growing political consciousness couldn't have come at a better time, considering the role young voters stand to play

in these polls. This year, 57 lakh first-time voters (between 18 and 22 years old) in the state and crores below the age of 30 have registered themselves

Academicians attribute the increase in awareness among youngsters in recent years to the influence of social media and its evolution from a space for making connections to one where information is disseminated. "Social media platforms, have played an important role in building the perspective of students. Messages forwarded as political jokes and stories shared online have made them more aware and interested in politics. Unlike the previous generation, the current one raises questions and talks about the moral fabric of leaders," said Mahesh Bhagwat, associate professor of political science at the Mithibai College.

This awareness has given rise to a more opinionated breed of voters who know what they want from their leaders, said Chandrakant Puri, chair professor at the Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Contemporary Studies, University of Mumbai. "The youth are more concerned about their social environment and experiments like the AAP have given a boost to the youth, who now want to go beyond voting."

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MUMBAI: In a bid to raise awareness among first-time voters, the chief electoral office is conducting a state-wide awareness programme, along with citizens' group We Empower-Mera Haq, Mera Vote and the Mumbai University.

Thirty-eight thousand voters have registered since the campaign was launched a month ago in 181 colleges, with the help of volunteers from the National Service Scheme (NSS).

To ensure more registrations, debates on democracy and employability tests were held, besides giving incentives such as free mobile recharge.

"We gave colleges and students a reason to participate in the registration through an incentive-based approach. While we gave certificates of appreciation to students for participating in the debate, colleges with the best registration counts were given awards. Through tie-ups with serv-

ice providers, we offered a free Rs20 recharge for every registration," said Sujoy Chourasia, core team member, Mera Vote Mera Haq.

Among the highlights of the campaign is creating awareness about the none of the above (Nota) option.

The campaign also conducted free-of-cost employability tests for 6,000 students.

"Money and employment opportunities are on top of the youth's priority list today. We wanted to bridge the gap between the requirements of the corporate sector and the abilities of the students through the psychometric tests. This gave them an idea of where they stand," said Pankaj Kumar Rai, another member of the campaign and a social entrepreneur.

University officials said the campaign gave them an insight into the students' political views and their preferences.

The employability tests gave students an additional push to register as voters, said officials.