

What the young want

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Introduction:

In the current round of assembly elections, one of the issues that is reportedly high on the minds of voters, but not framed adequately by parties, is that of youth unemployment and the missing opportunities.

What is the issue and how parties are dealing with it?

1. The lack of jobs situation is exacerbated by widespread scams and interminable delays in the entrance examinations and announcement of results for government jobs and professional degrees in the states.
2. In Telangana, Congress has promised a job calendar; and the BJP, a transparent and timebound resolution to Telangana Public Service Commission examinations.
3. In Rajasthan, there is reportedly support for candidates who speak out against the serial delays in recruitment in government jobs.
4. Examinations conducted by the Rajasthan Public Service Commission have been mired in controversies involving paper leaks, manipulation of results and litigation that have led to the cancellation of eight examinations in the last four years.
5. In Madhya Pradesh, a state still haunted by the spectre of the Vyapam scam, handouts might have trumped employment as a poll issue but only by relegating the concerns and priorities of young voters.

The unemployment scenario in the poll-bound states:

1. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey of 2022-23, youth unemployment in the five election-bound states stands at 15.1 per cent, 12.5 per cent, 11.9 per cent, 7.1 per cent and 4.4 per cent in Telangana, Rajasthan, Mizoram, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh respectively.
2. Of these, Telangana, Rajasthan and Mizoram have recorded a higher youth unemployment rate than the national average of 10 per cent.
3. The figures for women in the same age group are even higher.

Consequences of huge unemployment in these states:

1. What this translates into is a culture of anxiety and cut-throat competition, worsening predicaments already pockmarked by the inequities of caste, class, gender and religion.
2. This is evident in the proliferation of coaching centres in places like Kota, where students flock every year to train for competitive examinations and which register a distressing number of students' suicides.
3. How to reduce the students' distress by reducing number of students opting for competitive exams?
4. Reducing the number of students taking competitive examinations can be achieved through a

combination of strategies that address both the supply and demand sides of the equation.

On the supply side:

1. Promote diverse career paths: Encourage students to explore a wide range of career options beyond those traditionally associated with competitive exams. This can be done through career counseling, exposure to different industries, and highlighting the diverse skills and talents that lead to success in different fields.
2. Expand access to quality education: Ensure that all students have access to quality education, regardless of their socioeconomic background. This includes providing equitable access to resources, qualified teachers, and a supportive learning environment.
3. Reduce the emphasis on rote memorization and high-stakes exams: Shift the focus of education from rote memorization and test preparation to developing critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity skills. This can be achieved through a more holistic approach to education that values inquiry-based learning and experiential experiences.

On the demand side:

1. Increase job opportunities in diverse fields: Create more employment opportunities in fields that are not traditionally associated with competitive exams. This can be done through government initiatives, industry partnerships, and promoting entrepreneurship.
2. Improve salary and working conditions in non-competitive exam fields: Make careers in non-competitive exam fields more attractive by offering competitive salaries, good working conditions, and opportunities for advancement.
3. Raise awareness of non-competitive exam career paths: Inform students about the diverse and rewarding career opportunities that exist outside of competitive exams. This can be done through career fairs, workshops, and online resources.
4. Reduce the societal pressure to pursue competitive exams: Address the societal pressure that often pushes students towards competitive exams. This can be done through public awareness campaigns, parent education, and shifting parental expectations.
5. By implementing a combination of these strategies, it is possible to reduce the number of students taking competitive examinations and create a more equitable and diverse career landscape.

Conclusion:

Parties in poll-bound states need to heed the clamour for jobs, and for a system that opens up spaces and opportunities.

