

Urban millennials in India have had much to reveal in five years

It's a generation with an ironic mix of sticky biases and rebellious instincts that took in-depth surveys to understand better



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This month marks five years of a series of biannual surveys of urban Indian millennials that *Mint* conducts with YouGov India, a market research firm, and the Centre for Policy Research, a Delhi-based think tank. From tracking widening political fault-lines and small-town India's shift towards Instagram, to bleak job market sentiment and fast-changing investment and spending choices, these surveys have chronicled half a decade of an exciting demographic group's evolving mindsets. Along the way, we also found pivotal, timely trends to better understand India's difficult experience with the covid pandemic, at a time when prompt data was hard to come by.

The results of the survey's 10th round, which took place in June, have been published in *Mint* over the last two weeks, starting 15 August (bit.ly/3YH0IoF). The latest round, which covered 10,072 respondents, sought to understand the views of urban Indians on the country's newfound status as the world's most populous nation. Varied themes such as this have been at the core of the surveys, trying to decode the psyche of India's digital natives in different ways in each round.

The first round, whose results were published in August 2018, covered 5,000 respondents across 180 cities (we've grown coverage significantly since then). The job market was already under stress, and we found that over two-thirds of young respondents were finding it 'extremely' or 'fairly' difficult to find a job. This was an eye-opener at a time when many were pointing out the economy's 'jobless growth' and debate was rife around the state of employment ahead of the 2019 general elections.

Considered the 'holy grail' for consumer-focused businesses, millennials and post-millennials are often under the scanner for their choices. They can make or break consumer-facing industries; remember that in 2019, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman blamed this generation for a slump in car sales because they allegedly preferred ride-hailing apps. Several such views—both with and without basis—on young India's quirks and inadequacies feature in drawing-room chats as well.

Not all theories about this little-understood generation are true, as these surveys have found time and again. Take the same case: the survey conducted in late 2019 showed that millennials were, in fact, more likely than pre-millennials (those born before 1981) to plan purchases of high-value assets such as apartments or cars. There were also times the surveys proved widely-held notions right, offering possible reasons as well.

The surveys have also documented striking contradictions within this generation. Young urban India is more likely to be politically aware and participate in protests, but few discuss politics at



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home—older Indians do it more. Nearly one in six post-millennials who claimed to identify as feminists did not approve of women out-earning their husbands. While around 90% of respondents in one round said men and women should always share household chores, a significant portion pinned the duty of child-rearing on women. The regular 'partisan index' in the survey has found rising alignment with political sides, which has shown clear links with outlooks on democracy, history, culture and even personal relationships.

India is a young country with a median age of 28.2 years, according to the United Nations. It is also becoming more urban, with an estimated 36% of its population now residing in urban localities. This population is online and digitally savvy, too, born at a time of tremendous changes in India. That's why YouGov India and *Mint*'s pioneering data journalism team (and the Centre for Policy Research, which joined the survey in 2019) thought studying the country's post-liberalization generation and its viewpoints—its ideas of money, leisure, society, politics, families and more—could make for a valuable story waiting to be documented, studied and dissected. This is broadly the same segment that popular misnomers such as 'the great Indian middle class' refer to, the one that attracts brands, corporates and politicians as a target audience. Understanding millennials is part of understanding India, and we believe these surveys have helped fill a space that was

full of theories but devoid of specifics.

We consistently cover fairly large samples of 10,000-12,000 respondents. India doesn't have many such regular surveys of this scale, frequency and discipline, with such a thematic focus on understanding the social, economic, and political attitudes of youngsters. The YouGov India panel of nearly 200,000 respondents represents adult urban internet users, using weights to maintain certain quotas by age, gender, city tiers and regions for representativeness. However, these quotas are derived on the basis of the last Census, which is 12 years old. Structural social inequalities could also mean skewers are possible in terms of reaching disadvantaged castes and minorities, who we know are less likely to be online. Still, in many ways, it is largely representative of India's urban middle and upper-middle class youngsters, and we hope our efforts throw light on a changing India reliably, if not adequately.

Since 2021, we have published the full raw data for our surveys. (bit.ly/3NBu6b3) We invite academia, journalists and other civil society actors to put this data to greater use, and give us feedback and suggestions for further rounds. In these five years, we believe we have offered a better informed understanding of India. We have found how similar millennials remain to generations before, and how they differ. It is this generation, with its ironic mix of sticky biases and rebellious instincts, that will lead India forward.