

AUGUST 2026 | INAUGURAL EDITION

The State of Policy in India

REPORT 2026

Youth's aspirations for policymaking in India

Prepared by

Strategic Research and Impact Development Enterprise (STRIDE)



About Us

STRIDE (Strategic Research and Impact Development Enterprise) is a new-age policy think tank that inculcates and executes the perspectives of India's youth into policymaking and the impact sector, working in cohesion with partners across the ecosystem.

STRIDE builds on the journey of Public Policy India (PPI). PPI is the first, largest and most vibrant pan-India community of policy and impact professionals, advancing policy engagement through community engagement, capacity building, and consulting and research. Founded in 2020, the PPI community today has more than 150,000 members across India's 25 largest cities.

OUR VERTICALS

01 Community Engagement

02 Capacity Building

03 Consulting and Research

City Chapters

40+

across India's largest cities

Community Members

150,000+

Institutional Partners

80+



Acknowledgements

Before this report belongs to us, it belongs to the 413 people who answered the questions in the Pulse Survey and the thousands more whose votes shaped it. Many took the time to write several hundred words on questions they could have skipped, some sharing things that clearly weren't easy to put into words. Wherever their words appear here, they come only from respondents who consented, lightly edited and never named. Behind them is the PPI community: more than 150,000 people who have spent six years telling us the truth about this field, in chapter groups, in workshop hallways, in long newsletter replies. This report was fielded by the community it is about, which is both its method and its objective.

Columnists. Dr Ajit Phadnis (IIM Indore) opens Part I on policy education at a crossroads; Dr Namesh Killamsetty (MIT School of Government, Pune) closes the report on where policy ends and politics begins, and why the line should blur. Both share their personal perspectives on how public policy is taught and what else could be added to the curriculum.

Knowledge partners. Six organisations wrote into this edition before seeing what our data would say: Amitav Virmani (The Education Alliance) on education; Shelly Mahajan (Association for Democratic Reforms) on gender; Shrirupa Sengupta (Swasti) on public health; Kriti Trehan (Data & Co – Law & Policy Advisors) on technology; Climate Asia on sustainability; Samridh Joshi (India House) on youth in policy. Each essay is the partner's own; where a partner's reading and ours diverge, both stand.

Reviewers. Jhoomar Mehta and Sahana Iyer read the full draft line by line and asked the questions we had stopped asking ourselves.

Production. Snehaa Rajesh and Kashish Goyal carried the research and writing; Manan Singh carried the field, the chapters, reminders and follow-ups that turn a form into a sample; Kashish Goyal and Sireesha V Reddy led design. PPI's chapter ambassadors did the unglamorous work of asking and asking again; interns and volunteers, many of them the very people this report describes, coded open text and checked figures.

Board of Advisors. Shiv Kumar, Aparajita Bharti, Satyam Vyas, Saubhagya Raizada, Suryaprabha Sadasivan, Jhoomar Mehta, Dr Ajit Phadnis and Kumar Shubham.

Partners and the wider field. More than eighty organizations have worked with PPI across six years; universities, newsrooms and other institutions have always helped make policy a word ordinary Indians recognise. This is the first thing we have published that tries to give something back which allows the ecosystem to better map itself.

EVERY ERROR IN THESE PAGES IS OURS

Not our respondents', not our knowledge partners', not our advisors'. If you find one, tell us: the second edition is due next August, and it will be made better by the corrections than by the compliment.

Yash Agarwal

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Founder's Note

In almost every city we went to, someone asked us the same question. It took six years to admit we could not answer it properly.

A second-year student (BA, Political Science) in Coimbatore asked us last year what a policy career actually looks like. Not the job titles. The life that comes along with it. Whether it pays rent in a city she would have to move to. Whether anyone from her college had ever gotten into one. Does it offer compounding growth, or just a maze of short term professional engagements. I gave her the answer I had given a hundred times in a couple of dozen cities, and it was honest, well meant and entirely anecdotal. On the flight home it occurred to me that I had been improvising that answer for six years, and that everyone she was likely to ask next would improvise theirs too.

That is the strange privilege of the work Public Policy India does. Six years, 25 cities, 40-plus city chapters, several hundred campus sessions, a community now past 150,000. You end up in a lot of rooms where people tell you the truth. Not their LinkedIn version, the real one: the fellowship they could not afford to take, the parents who wanted to know when this becomes a real job, the classmate who quietly went back to a corporate role and does not talk about it. We heard the same sentences in Patna, Kochi and Nagpur. But sentences are not evidence, and, well, impression is a bad instrument.

About a year ago, the same question began arriving from the other directions too. A university asked us what its policy programme should teach. A funder asked what young people entering this field actually struggle with. A journalist asked whether a policy career is financially survivable in India. We answered all three from instinct. That is when it became uncomfortable: we had spent six years assembling the largest room in this field and kept no record of what was said in it. A small team started building this report the following month.

The timing is not incidental. India counted 612 think tanks in the last comprehensive global count, third in the world, against 268 seven years earlier. Degree programmes, fellowships, CSR mandates and advisory units multiplied alongside them. A field that was almost an exotic word in 2020 is now a career that more than a lakh young Indians are actively choosing. Everything about it has been counted except the people walking into it.

So we made one decision early that shaped everything after it: we would not choose the report's subjects ourselves. We asked the community which challenge India should treat as most urgent, and took the answer as our brief. Education came first, then climate, technology, public health and gender. Those five are the report's five themes, and economics runs through all of them because money turned out to be a question about who can afford, not a chapter on its own. The agenda belongs to the people the report is about.



A year later, this is what it stands on. The Pulse carries 413 verified responses, in addition to the nine community polls carrying more than 18,000 survey votes on policy issues from across our chapters. Read carefully, that base resolves this community's centre of gravity and its large, stable differences; smaller reads are marked directional on the page. We chose a measured edition over a flattering one, because a record is only worth keeping if the first entry is true.

Two findings changed my mind. The first: offered seven kinds of support, this cohort rates plentiful jobs highest and funding for their own ideas lowest. We have spent a decade in this sector celebrating young founders. They are asking for employment, apprenticeship and someone to answer their emails. The second is quieter and harder. Belonging is weakest among those still deciding whether to enter, and strongest among those already a few years in. The field is most convincing to the people it has already won, and least convincing to the student in Coimbatore.

That is a difficult thing to publish about work I have given six years to, and exactly why we publish it under our own name. Everything PPI builds for its community stays free to use, and we carried the cost of this first edition ourselves so that its findings could be written exactly as they came. That is the standard we will hold every edition to, and the basis on which STRIDE, launching alongside this report, now carries into work the field can use. This is its first publication and its clearest statement of intent: we would rather be accurate than comfortable.

We will publish this every August. Next year, open this edition first, check what we said, and hold us to it. And if you are the student in that classroom, still deciding: this was written so that the next person who asks has something better than my improvised answer. That is the whole point of keeping a record.

With gratitude,

Yash Agarwal

Founder, Public Policy India and STRIDE

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How to read this report

THE EVIDENCE

Two instruments, kept apart throughout.

THE PULSE SURVEY 2026

The survey collected verified responses from more than 400 current and aspiring policy professionals in July 2026, with one response per respondent. All findings in this report are based on these responses.

COMMUNITY POLLS

Nine community polls, run across PPI's WhatsApp city chapters in the weeks before the Pulse Survey, carry more than 18,000 selections; they set the report's agenda and corroborate its findings; are counted in selections, and never get mixed with the Pulse Survey data.

WHAT COUNTS AS A FINDING

- Full-sample results, on a base of 413, are findings.
- A difference between sub-groups is called established only when it clears a test sized to the groups being compared; a comparison the sample could not settle is marked unresolved, and a reading on a base too small to test is marked directional, always with the base printed beside it.
- Percentages inside a sub-group describe that group and carry its own base.

WHERE THINGS LIVE

National evidence is cited as references at the end. The full method, its limits and the ethics of the exercise are in the apparatus at the back. The questionnaire, codebook, de-identified dataset and consolidated bibliography accompany the online edition at publicpolicyindia.com.

Executive summary

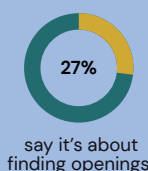
India measures its schools, its labour market and its voters. Until now it has not measured the people entering its policy profession.

This report describes the entry route into India's policy and impact sector: who is trying to enter, how they get in, what stops them, and what would help. The ten findings describe a field with a large, committed talent pool and no reliable way in.

The findings rest on two instruments: the Pulse Survey 2026, which collected verified responses from 400+ current and aspiring policy professionals across India's largest cities and well beyond, and nine community polls, which collected more than 18,000 selections across PPI's city chapters in the weeks before it. Respondents were reached across India's 25 largest cities and well beyond, through PPI's chapters and newsletter and wider professional networks across the policy and impact ecosystem. This is a self-selected sample, so it describes the people entering this field rather than Indian youth as a whole. Bases, tests and thresholds are set out in the apparatus at the back, and the full set of sub-group comparisons is published online with the dataset; survey percentages are calculated on the full base of 413 unless a caption says otherwise.

01

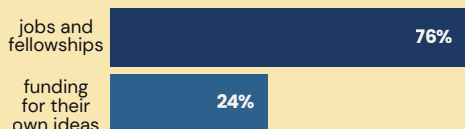
The bottleneck is access, not ability



The main constraint is finding openings and reaching networks. Open job boards, advertised hiring and structured introductions are seen as more useful than adding more training.

02

They want jobs. They rate funding for their own ideas last



Jobs and fellowships were the most valued form of support, with 76% rating them helpful. Mentors, networks and skills followed closely; funding for independent ideas ranked lowest, at 24%.

03

Every route underprepares people, and the most expensive route protects the least.

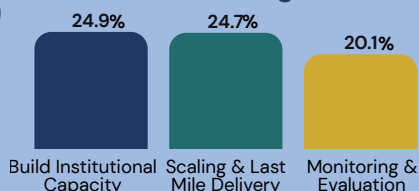


64% say formal study gave theory but few usable skills

For 51%, the most useful addition to formal education is real project experience with a route to placement. Practitioners teaching and practical skills followed at 20% and 17%; only 1% prioritised employers trusting the credential more.

04

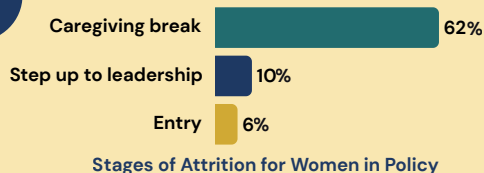
The sector's own diagnosis of itself is delivery, not design



Asked where the sector should spend next, respondents rank institutional capacity and last-mile delivery at the top, with research and policy design fourth. The open-ended answers corroborate it: about half name the policy-to-ground gap as India's biggest challenge, and it recurs in education and public health.

05

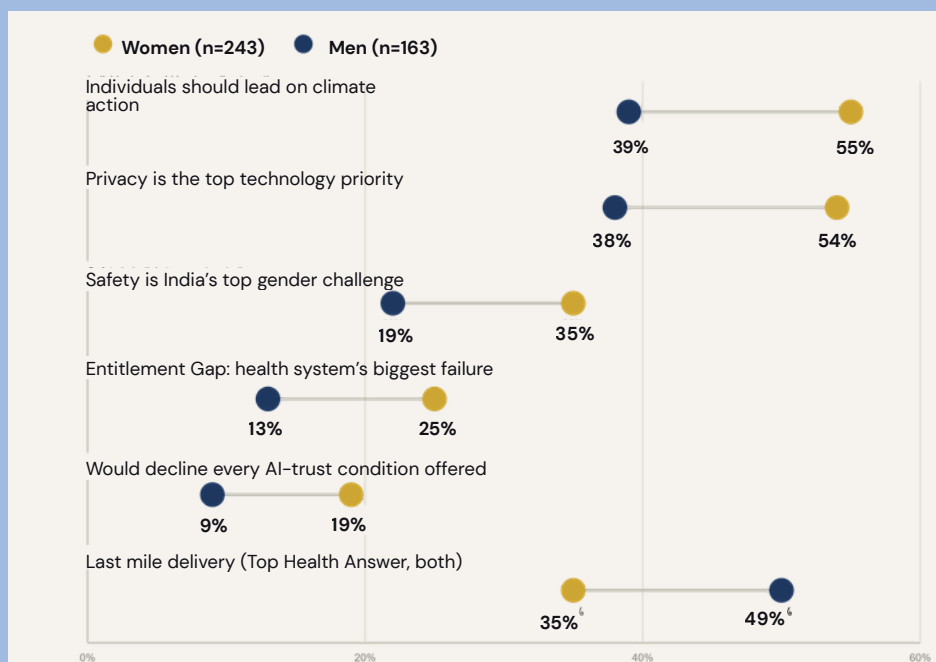
Women leave at caregiving transitions, though caregiving is not the whole mechanism.



The community identifies the years around caregiving as an important point in women's career journeys. But caregiving is only one of several mechanisms behind career breaks, pointing to the need for a broader understanding of what shapes women's progression.

06

Women and men read the same sector differently, and six of eight comparisons hold



Six of eight priorities show the same pattern across women and men. Privacy is the clearest point of difference, prioritised by 54% of women compared with 38% of men.

07

Trust in an AI-assisted government decision is a demand for due process.

See data protection and privacy as India's top tech priority

47%

Trust AI-assisted decisions with human accountability

42%

Eight in ten respondents describe a name, a reason and a route of appeal. All three are features of administrative process, and two already appear in the government's AI governance guidelines as voluntary principles.

08

Belonging arrives after the decision it was meant to inform.

Still weighing entry

Overall
82%

75%

Early-career cohort

88%

Belonging is weakest among people still deciding whether to enter and strongest among the early-career cohort, the group the sector most wants to attract and retain.

09

Geography filters both the opportunity and the framing of every theme.

Delhi Youth

1.6%

Tier 3/
Non-metro

15.8%

Tier-3/rural youth cite metro-concentrated opportunity ~10x more than Delhi youth

Tier-3 and non-metro youth cite metro-concentrated opportunity far more often than Delhi youth. The report argues for decentralising roles and fellowships rather than treating geography as a side issue.

10

A community of policy professionals declined to name an institution on climate.

Individuals

48%

Central +
State Govt

38%

Who should take the lead on India's climate response

The Pulse Survey recorded who respondents thought should lead India's climate response, but not why. That missing reasoning is itself a useful finding and a question for the next wave.

The baseline

*Twelve numbers, stated once here and re-measured every August.
Together they are the series this report exists to maintain.*

Each row below traces to one of the ten findings in the executive summary; these twelve are the measurable core of those ten. They come from eight questions, four of which are reported both as a headline figure and as the sub-group figure that matters more. Those eight are frozen in wording and in option order until 2031, so that a reader in 2029 is comparing answers rather than comparing rewrites. Everything else in the instrument stays open, and each edition is expected to add questions the last one did not know to ask.

THE 2026 READING	SHARE
Hardest part of building the career: finding openings	27%
Jobs and fellowships rated helpful	76%
Funding for one's own idea rated helpful — 24%, lowest of seven	24%
Formal study gave theory but few usable skills	64% (69% among degree-holders)
Real projects with a route to placement, named as the fix	51%
Feel they belong in this space	82% (75% still deciding; 88% early-career)
Say the space loses most women at a caregiving break	62%
Would trust an AI-assisted decision if a named human is accountable	42%
Name personal data and privacy as the top technology priority	47%
Names 'protecting communities hit first' as the climate priority	46%
Say individuals, not institutions, should lead on climate	48%
Say a policy career is financially workable for someone with a middle-class background	43% (38% hard without support)

What to do with these twelve numbers

Three uses, in descending order of confidence. **First, comparison:** open the 2027 edition beside this one and read the same row twice, which is the use the page was built for. **Second, diagnosis:** any organisation working with people entering this field can ask which of the twelve it is placed to move, and whether it is currently spending money on one of the others. A university cannot do much about who is accountable for an algorithmic decision. It can do a great deal about the 51% who want real projects with a route to placement.

The third use needs care. These figures describe more than 400 people who chose to answer, read here as a proxy for the entry pipeline into a whole sector. It is the best proxy currently available and it is still a proxy. Where a decision is expensive or hard to reverse, treat these numbers as the reason to ask your own cohort the same question, not as the answer.

PART 1

The people at the door

Who is standing at the entrance of India's policy and impact sector, how they got there, and what holds them outside it.



A field that counted everything except its entrants

Nearly every domain in India now carries a policy infrastructure: degree programmes, think tanks, fellowships, consultancies, CSR mandates and advisory units, all of them multiplied over the past decade. India also has a strong survey infrastructure, and most of it is very good. None of it is pointed at one question: how do young Indians enter, engage with and experience the policy sector?

The claim is narrow. Young Indians are measured well and often; the sector's entry pipeline, the route from first hearing the phrase public policy to holding a job in the field, has not been mapped. This report closes that gap and no other. It is not a map of the sector, a directory of employers or a career guide, although the recommendations in Part III are written so that each named audience can act on them.

Table 1. Four national instruments, and what each of them is for

What this shows. Each of these measures something adjacent to this report's question and none measures the question itself. It is a gap of coverage, not of quality.

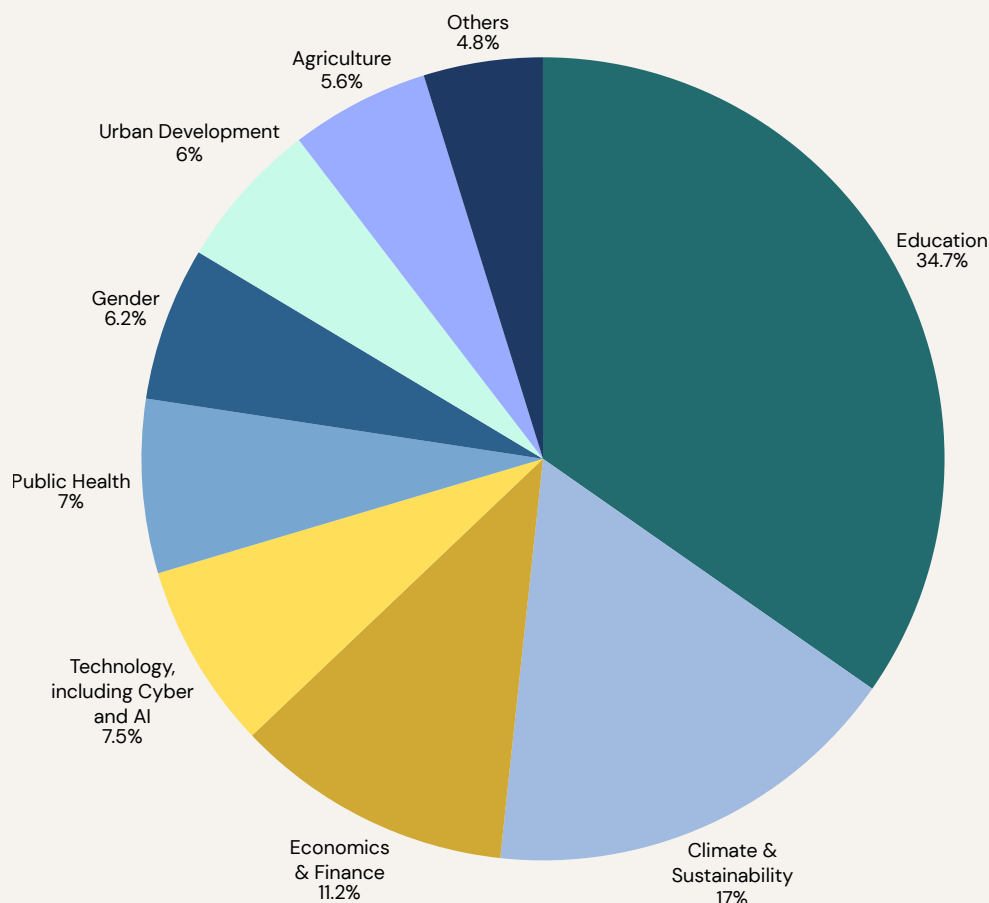
Instrument	What it measures	Why it does not answer this question
ASER, by Pratham	Foundational learning in rural India: 649,491 children across 605 districts in 2024	Measures the schooling system, not the people who go on to work in it.
State of Working India, Azim Premji University	Youth pathways from learning to earning across the whole economy.	This sector is too small to be visible inside a national labour market.
Lokniti, CSDS	Youth opinion across 19 states, 6,000-plus respondents around since 2007.	Measures what young people think, not how they enter this particular field.
PLFS, by MoSPI	The national labour force survey: participation, employment, unemployment.	No occupational category for policy and impact work, so the sector cannot be separated out.

How the six themes were chosen

The themes were not picked in a meeting. Before the Pulse Survey was designed, we put one question to the community in a chapter poll: which policy challenge should India treat as most urgent? The answers became the brief. Five of the top six became this report's thematic chapters. The sixth theme, youth in policy, is not a topic but the lens the whole instrument is built around, so it runs through every chapter and takes one of its own at the end.

Poll 1. India's most urgent policy challenge, in this community's view

What this shows. Education leads by a distance, at more than a third of all selections and roughly twice the share of the next answer. Climate and economics follow. Technology, public health and gender cluster close together in the single digits.



Community poll run in PPI city-chapter groups, June 2026, with 1,527 respondents. Percentages are of total selections rather than of respondents, because the poll allowed more than one choice. Eight options are shown; the residual 4.8% covers write-in answers and themes like trade, safety and security. A poll rather than a Pulse Survey finding, used only to show which way the community leans.

A second, independent chapter poll asks a different question: which themes do members actually work on? Across 3,491 selections, the same five themes emerged at the top, closely mirroring the priorities in the survey. The alignment suggests that the agenda is not just aspirational; it reflects where people in the community are already doing the work.

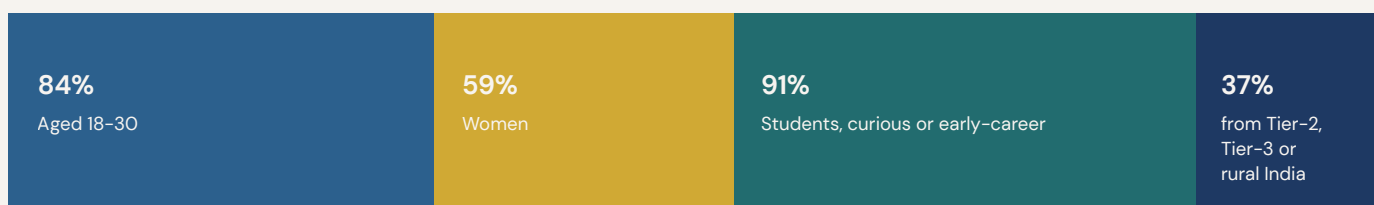
Economics and finance ranked third in the Policy Challenges poll, but was not treated as a standalone chapter theme. That was deliberate. Rather than sitting alongside the other themes, economics runs through them all shaping how programmes are funded, how livelihoods are sustained, and who can afford to enter and remain in the policy field. It is less a separate lane than a condition underlying all the others.

Two instruments, one line between them. Polls are counted in selections, allow more than one choice, and are numbered Poll 1 to Poll 9; they shaped the agenda and add on to the findings of the Pulse Survey. The Pulse Survey is counted in people, one answer each, more than 400 of them verified, and is numbered Figure 1 onwards; it produces the findings. The two are never added, never averaged and never share a common chart.

Who is in the room

The people in this survey are the entry pipeline: overwhelmingly young, women-majority, and standing at the threshold of the field rather than inside its senior ranks. Everything that follows is therefore an account of entry into the sector, and not an account of the sector itself.

Where this report says respondents or this community, it means the people who answered the Pulse Survey, reached across India's 25 largest cities and beyond them through PPI's chapters, newsletter and other channels, and through wider professional networks in the policy and impact ecosystem.

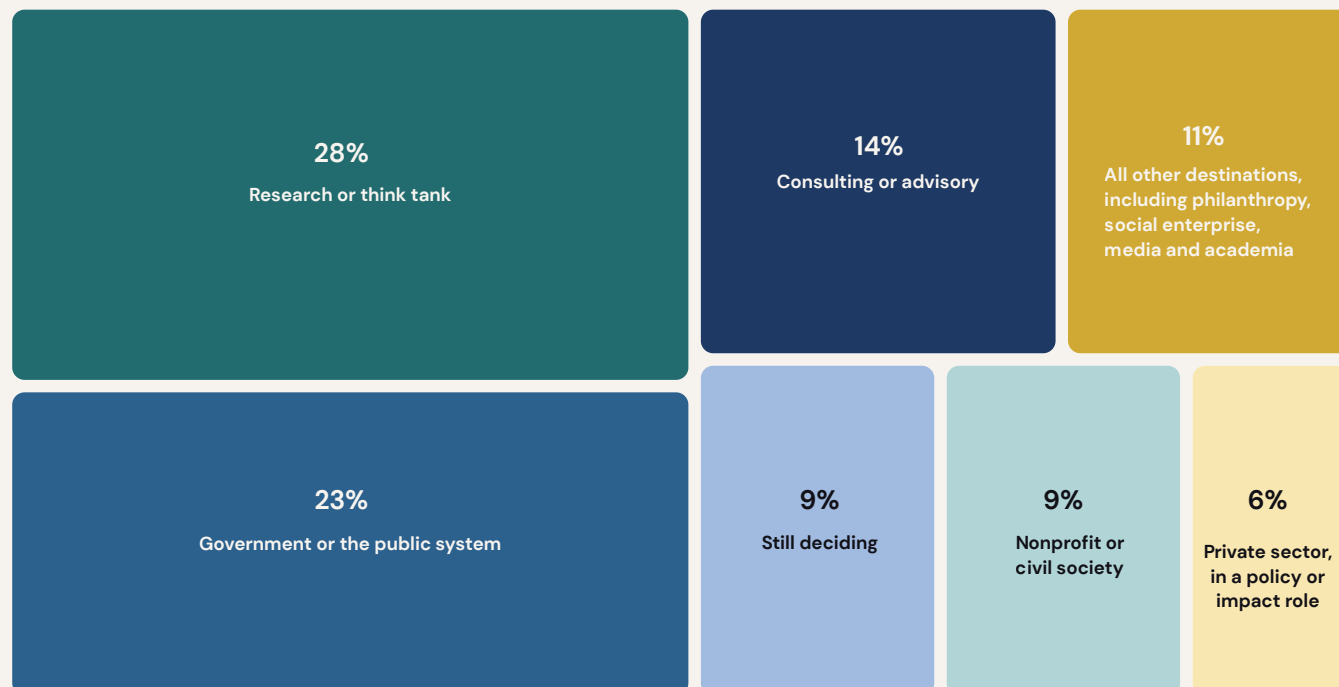


The Pulse Survey 2026, percentages of respondents, n=413. Delhi NCR is the largest single geography at 31%. On gender the categories offered were woman, man, non-binary, and prefer not to choose; the answers were 59% women, 40% men, and just under 2% across the last two combined.

Seven people sit inside that 2% (who chose non-binary and prefer not to choose when asked their Gender). Their answers are counted in every total in this report. A separate column for them is not published, for reasons of disclosure risk: at that base a single cross-tabulation could identify an individual, and a percentage calculated on seven people moves in steps of fourteen points. Hearing that group properly needs deliberate oversampling, a decision for the next wave, taken with advice from the people concerned.

Figure 1. Where respondents work now, or want to work

What this shows. More than half of the respondents are pointed at two destinations, and both are knowledge or state institutions. Philanthropy and social enterprise sit inside the residual group, which is itself a signal about where opportunity and legitimacy are thought to be.



The Pulse Survey 2026, percentage of respondents, single answer, n=413. The final row groups every remaining destination, each chosen by too few people to report on its own.

Why they came

Asked for the main reason they entered the field, 31% named impact and good prospects together, 30% named changing systems and outcomes, and 25% named sheer passion and a wish to lead change. A stable, respected profession drew 5%, and the remaining 9% were still working out where they fit, or wrote in reasons of their own. Across more than 400 written answers, the most volunteered reason was some version of impact, highlighting the intent to help people and communities.

The top line deserves a careful read. The most common answer states prospects explicitly, in the same breath as impact. This cohort does not treat commitment and a living as alternatives, and only one in twenty is here for the standing of the profession. An organisation offering meaning instead of money is offering half of what this group came for.

“Because if no one does, things will stay the same.”

A written answer to the question of why the respondent entered this field. Quotations in this report come only from respondents who consented to be quoted. They are lightly edited and are never named. A quotation shows what a coded theme sounds like; the percentage beside it says how common the theme is.

How they get in and what stops them

Access and networks account for nearly half of all answers about the hardest part of this career; a skills deficit accounts for 15%. As this cohort experiences it, the bottleneck is discovery and matching.

Four of the six barriers below describe one problem from different distances: the field has degrees at the entrance and seniority at the far end, with very little in between that a person can name or apply to.

Table 2. How respondents found their way into the field

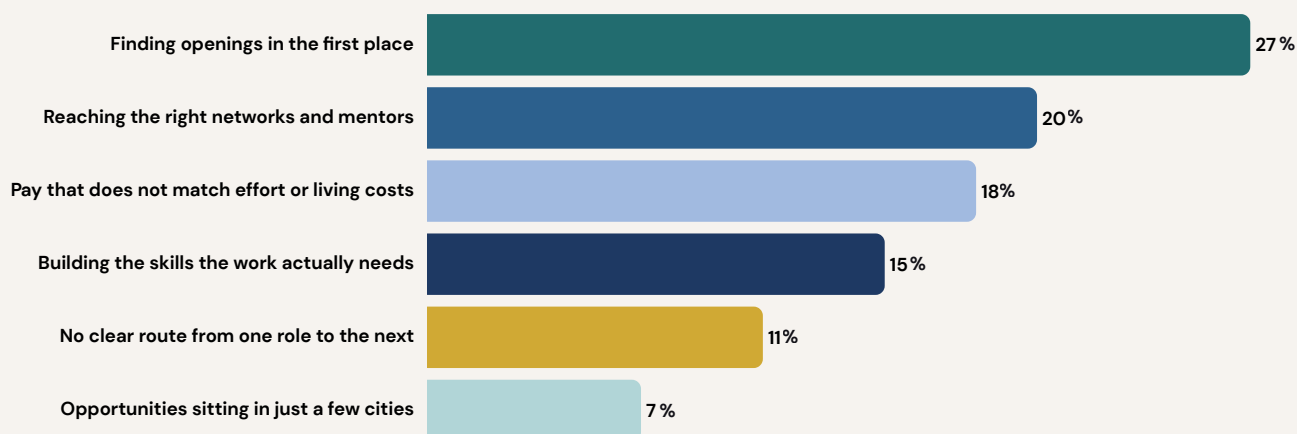
What this shows: The formal degree remains the single largest route, but fewer than half arrived through one. A quarter are self-taught, and one in nine is still working out their route while already in the room.

Route in	Share	Approximate number of people
A formal degree, relevant or related	41%	170
Largely self-taught	24%	100
A fellowship or structured programme	13%	55
Still working that out	11%	44
A move across from another sector	7%	27
Other routes and write-in answers	4%	17

The Pulse Survey 2026, percentage of respondents, single answer, n=413. Counts are exact and sum to 413.

Figure 2. The hardest part of building the career

What this shows. Finding openings and reaching networks together account for 47% of all answers. Building skills, the problem the sector most often funds, accounts for 15%.

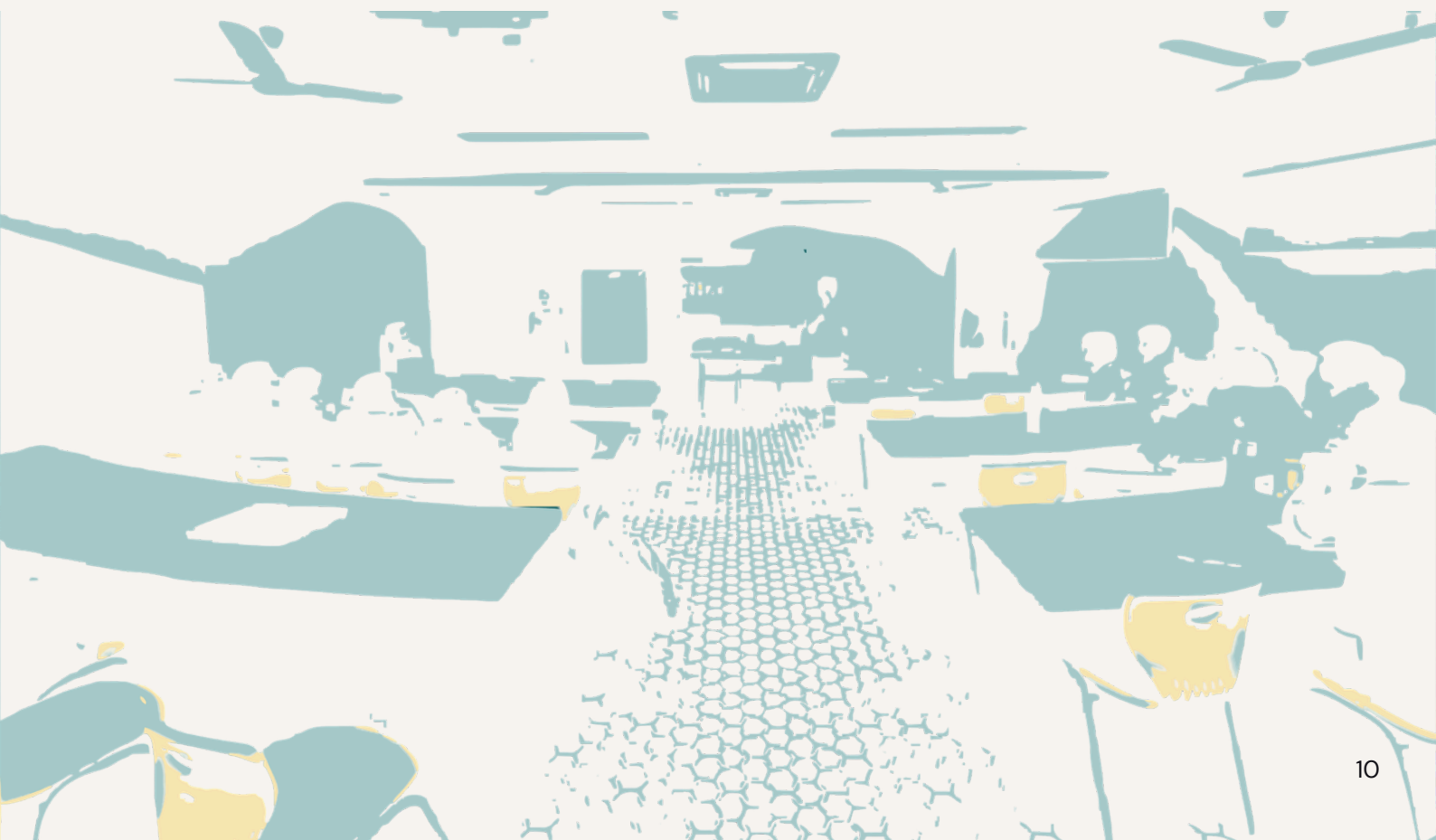


Rounded percentages sum to slightly more than 100. The Pulse Survey 2026, percentage of respondents, single answer, n=413. A remaining 2% wrote in answers of their own, most restating one of the six options above in different words.

When the sector's reputation becomes a barrier

One theme cuts across every barrier above, and responses stating the same as the biggest challenges of public health in India shows it most clearly. Asked in writing what would hold them back from a career in public health policy, the most frequently coded hesitation was not pay, and not doubt about whether the work matters. It was the fear that implementation never lands, with the slow pace of the system and bureaucracy close behind.

The complaint is familiar. Who is making it is not: these are people choosing a career rather than commentators describing one, and the doubt is operating as a reason not to apply. The sector is losing candidates to the very problem those candidates would work on.

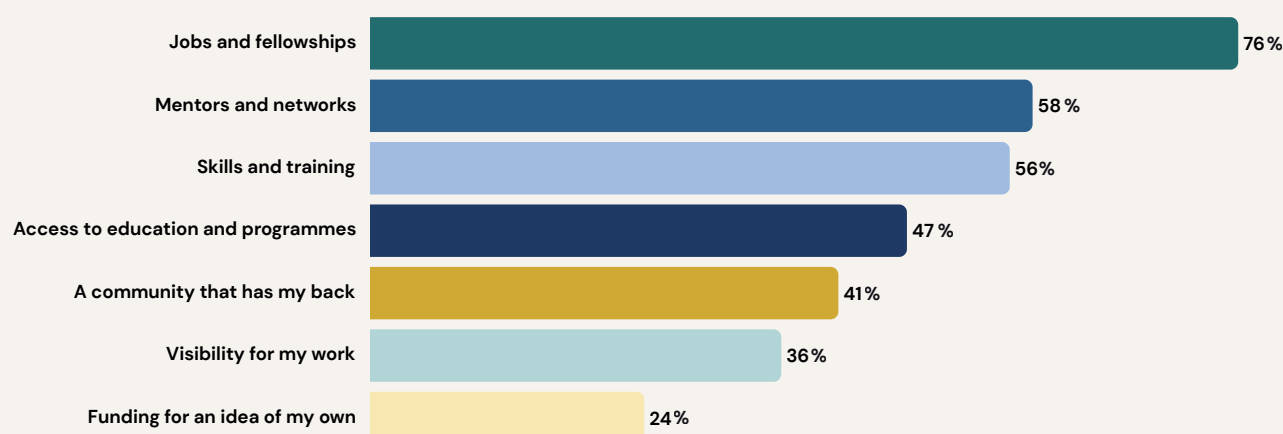


What would help, what it pays, who belongs, and who leaves

Respondents rated seven forms of support, each on its own scale, rather than ranking them against one another. Someone could rate all seven as most helpful, or none, so the column below does not sum to 100 and is not meant to. These are seven separate measurements printed together, not one total divided seven ways.

Figure 3. What would help most, with each form of support rated independently

What this shows. Jobs and fellowships lead everything else by 18 points. Funding for one's own idea comes last of the seven, at less than a third of the top score.



The Pulse Survey 2026, percentage rating each item helpful, n=413. Items were rated independently, so the shares are not exclusive and do not sum to 100.

The funding mismatch

Funding for one's own idea rates lowest of the seven at **24%, against 76% for jobs**. That 52-point gap is the widest in the survey and it is not a close call: at this base each figure could plausibly move by around five points either way, which leaves them nowhere near each other. Now look at what the sector actually supplies: learning programmes, community, visibility and idea grants – all sit in the bottom half of this list.

Each is relatively inexpensive to run and easy to show a funder at the end of the year. Jobs and structured fellowships are neither. On this evidence, funders and programme designers are resourcing the demand they can meet rather than the demand that exists, and are doing it in good faith.

What it pays

43% believe a policy career is financially workable for someone from a middle-class background. 38% say it is hard to sustain without outside support, and 19% are unsure. The strain concentrates where the cost of living is highest and the career is youngest: 44% in Delhi NCR and the other metros against 19% in Tier-3 cities and rural India, and 42% of

18 to 24 year olds against 28% of those over 30. Remoteness, the intuitive suspect, shows the least strain of all. The regional difference clears significance testing ($p = 0.028$) and is reported as a finding; the age gap falls just short of the threshold ($p = 0.055$) and is read as directional.

Who feels they belong

82% of respondents feel they belong in this space, counting yes clearly (54%) and mostly (28%). But that is a number that includes people who are already in. Split by career stage it moves: belonging falls to 75% among those still weighing whether to enter, and rises to 88% among the early-career cohort. The gap is established ($p = 0.024$), meaning that if career stage made no difference at all, a gap this size would turn up by chance roughly 24 times in 1,000.

The implication is uncomfortable. Belonging is conferred after arrival, at the point where it has stopped being the question. For the people still

deciding, the group the sector says it most wants to reach, the field offers a three-in-four chance of feeling wanted. Two further cuts sharpen the picture. Belonging is nearly identical for women and men, at 82% and 81% respectively, which matters for the Gender chapter ahead: women are not losing ground at the door, and the loss this survey records comes later in the career. And by region, Delhi NCR, the sector's densest core, reads lowest at 77% against Tier-2 cities at 87%, a 10-point gap this sample cannot settle and prints as directional. If it holds on a larger base, proximity to the core does not confer belonging.

Read together, this section says one thing

The three results on these pages are usually treated as separate problems, handled by separate people. They are one problem. A cohort that rates jobs first needs a route in, and one in which 38% call the career hard to sustain without support needs that route to pay. When belonging also runs 13 points lower before entry than after it, neither message is reaching the people still deciding.

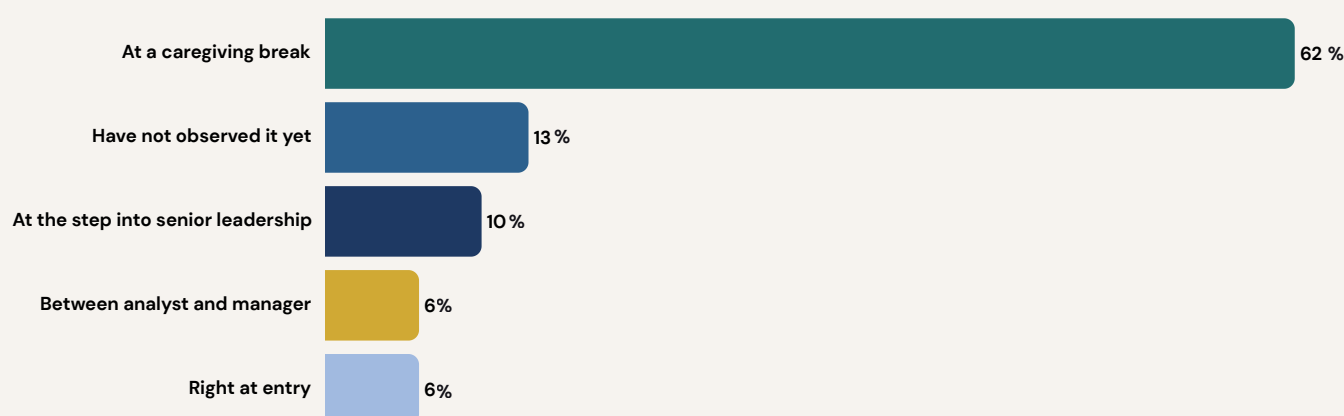
An organisation acting only on the first builds a job board the people who most need it never see. An organisation acting on all three publishes the role, states the pay, and puts it where a second-year student in a city with no policy school will come across it. What separates the two is not budget but whether the three numbers are read as one finding.

Where the pipeline loses women

Two survey questions belong with the career findings above rather than with the Gender chapter's national reading, because they are about this pipeline specifically: at which stage the space loses the most women, and what the biggest barrier is for women building this career. The national evidence behind the first question opens the Gender chapter; the complication in it is boxed below.

Figure 4. The stage at which the policy space loses the most women

What this shows. Six in ten locate the loss at a caregiving break. Entry, the stage most programmes are designed around, is named by 6%



The Pulse Survey 2026, percentage of respondents, single answer, $n=413$. A remaining 3% said the space does not lose women disproportionately.. That 13% answer honestly that they have not yet watched it happen is itself a reading of how young this sample is.

What this means

Asked about the barrier rather than the moment, the answer moves. Accessibility, meaning being unable to relocate and being denied equal opportunity, leads at 46%, with the caregiving load at 23% and the remaining four options taking 31% between them. The two questions are not in conflict. One asks when women leave and the other asks why: the caregiving break is the moment at which the accumulated weight of everything else becomes unpayable, and

treating the moment as the cause is how a sector ends up designing maternity policy for a problem that started years earlier. Naming the caregiving load as the central barrier rises from 18% among 18 to 24 year olds to 35% among those over 30, and accessibility as the core barrier runs at 54% in Tier-3 and rural areas against 36% in Delhi NCR, directional on a base of 57.

The complication, which this report does not resolve

Axis Bank's *The Missing Half*, covering close to 11,000 college-educated women across 42 cities, found that 74% had taken a career break: 88% among mothers, but also 58% among women with no children at all.

If more than half of educated, childless women have still taken a break, caregiving is the most visible cause of exit and not the only one.

Work designed around uninterrupted careers is doing damage before caregiving arrives. The answer printed above may be identifying the most visible moment rather than the full mechanism. That tension is the honest state of the evidence and it is not settled here.

The verdict on their own education

One question comes closer to home than any of the six themes: the education that brought this community here. It is held apart from the Education chapter deliberately, because that chapter reads the schooling system and this section reads the profession's own training. Education is the route most respondents took, and the one they rate most harshly.

64% say formal study gave them theory but few usable skills, or was barely relevant; about a quarter say it prepared them well. The verdict comes from a community in which 41% entered holding a relevant degree; they are describing their own purchase, not something they avoided. Economics (17.5%), Political Science (17.3%), and Public Policy (15.5%) emerged as the three most commonly pursued degrees among respondents in a community poll.

Table 3. Who reports the theory-to-practice gap, read inside each route

What this shows. Every route leaves people underprepared. The complaint is most common among those who paid for a degree and least common among fellowship alumni, but on bases this size the three sit close enough together that no route can be called the best preparation.

Route in	Share reporting the gap	Base	Approximate number of people
Entered through a formal degree	69%	170	117
Largely self-taught	62%	100	62
Came through a fellowship	55%	55	30

The Pulse Survey 2026, n=413. Each percentage is calculated within its own route, not across the sample, so the three do not add up to the headline 64% and are not meant to. The gap between the degree route and the fellowship route does not clear significance testing ($p = 0.077$) and is read as directional; the smaller differences on either side of the self-taught route do not clear it either.

The table does not establish that fellowships are the best way in; a 55-person base can carry the comparison with the degree route, not a full ranking of three. What it does establish is uncomfortable enough: no route prepares people fully, and the most expensive, most institutional route reports the gap

more often than the structured programmes do, a difference this sample cannot establish. Most young people in this field are told that a degree is the safe option and everything else is a compromise. On this evidence the degree is neither the compromise nor the insurance it is described as.

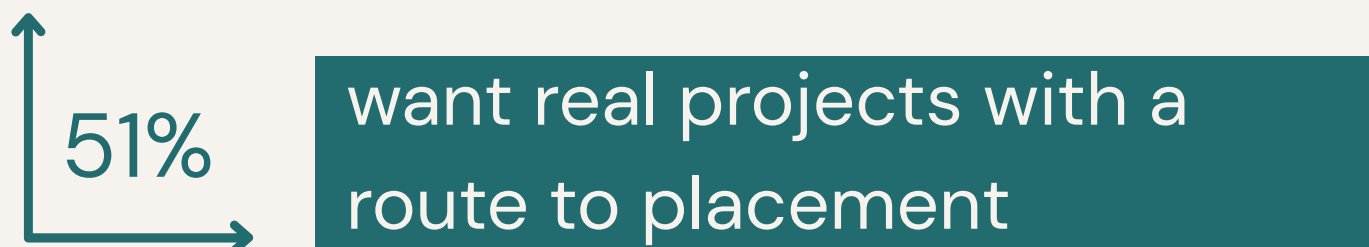
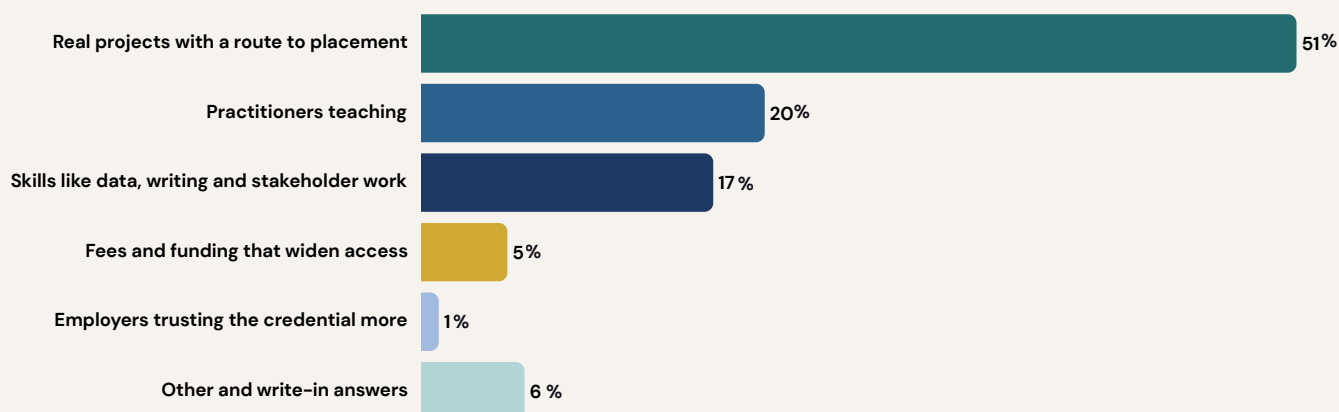


Figure 5. What would make formal education useful

What this shows. Half of this cohort names one fix: real projects attached to a route into a job. Almost nobody is asking for the credential to carry more weight on its own.



The Pulse Survey 2026, percentage of respondents, single answer, n=413.

A chapter poll asked a related but separate question: not what would fix a policy degree, but what a degree should provide in the first place. Of 1,803 selections, the most-chosen answer was not a subject at all. It was an understanding of how the policy system actually moves, at 16.7%, followed by research at 16.3% and data interpretation at 11.5%. None of the eight options on offer asked for abstract theory.

Column · Indian Institute of Management Indore

Public policy education in India at a crossroads

There is a buzz around public policy in India like never before. This is evident in the growing number of schools, fellowships, seminars and think tanks devoted to the field. Some people see policy as a career choice, others as a personal interest, and many are trying to combine both. Organisations such as Public Policy India have played an admirable role in catalysing this growing interest and shaping it into a community.

Given this momentum, it is an opportune time to consider ways to deepen our policy discourse and analysis. One way to deepen a field that has widened its reach is through education. The growth of universities and other educational institutions offering public policy programmes has enabled more practitioners and aspirants to engage seriously with the field. The numbers tell the story: the country had barely 10 public policy schools in 2016; by 2023 that number had grown to 56, with two distinct spurts of growth around 2012 and again after 2019. It is a remarkable pace of institution-building for a field that, for nearly six decades after Independence, existed largely in the shadow of public administration training for civil servants.

However, despite this expansion of training and intellectual resources, policy education needs to advance in three key directions.

From outward to inward

Much of India's policy curriculum still draws heavily on international frameworks: economic models, governance theories and case studies rooted in contexts quite different from our own. A closer look at what is actually taught bears this out. Across master's programmes in the country, courses on economics, research methods and policy theory closely mirror the emphasis found in American programmes, while India-specific teaching cases remain scarce, leaving many schools to lean on practitioner-taught modules and fieldwork to fill the gap.

A handful of institutions are experimenting with a different path, building courses around heavy fieldwork, sustained practitioner engagement, or India's own knowledge traditions, but these remain few and far between. There is a need to invest in research that builds India-relevant frameworks that account for the country's federal complexity, unique bureaucratic processes, informal economy and social diversity. This is not a rejection of global scholarship, but a rebalancing, using international as a starting point rather than the final word.

From the metros to the towns

Policy education today is concentrated in a handful of metropolitan cities, taught largely in English, to an audience already familiar with policy language. There are welcome signs of change: policy schools have begun to spread beyond the National Capital Region, with Bengaluru and Hyderabad emerging as alternate hubs and smaller cities such as Mohali, Bhopal, Jaipur and Shillong now hosting programmes of their own. Yet roughly two out of every three schools remain in or close to metropolitan cities, and most still describe their mission in explicitly national rather than regional terms. Geographic presence alone, in other words, has not translated into a curriculum or a pedagogy oriented toward the local realities of a district or a state.

If policy is to shape real outcomes, it must reach practitioners, elected representatives and citizens in smaller towns, in the languages they speak and through formats they can access. This could mean regional-language course material, local-language policy publications, or partnerships with state-level training institutes that already have that reach. A district administrator in Bihar or a municipal councillor in Tamil Nadu should be able to access the same level of policy grounding as a graduate student in Delhi, without first having to master an unfamiliar academic vocabulary.

From the periphery to the core

Policy is too often treated as a specialised pursuit for a small set of experts, rather than as a form of civic literacy relevant to everyone. This niche framing is starkly evident in the career paths of policy graduates. Corporate policy teams typically employ no more than four or five people.

Government fellowships usually carry an age cap of around 30 with no guaranteed path to a full-time role, and many graduates end up “fellowship-hopping” from one short-term postings to the next in the absence of a structured career track. Civil service aspirations still dominate policy students' mindshare, not necessarily because the civil service is the best fit for them, but because of low awareness of policy careers outside government.

Just as financial literacy has become a mainstream expectation, policy literacy, understanding how decisions are made, budgets allocated, and public institutions run, deserves the same standing. Making policy education part of general education, not just a niche professional pursuit, would strengthen the quality of public discourse at every level and broaden the range of destinations a policy education is seen as preparing someone for.

Taken together, these three shifts, inward shift in curriculum, outward shift from the metros, and into the core of public life, point to a more mature phase of policy education in India. The initial wave of enthusiasm has built the community.

The next task is to make its knowledge more rooted, more accessible and more universal. If this decade saw policy become a subject of interest, the next should see it become a shared civic language, one that strengthens not just those who practise policy, but the democracy all of us are part of.



Policy is too often treated as a specialised pursuit for a small set of experts, rather than as a form of civic literacy relevant to everyone.



Dr. Ajit Phadnis

Associate Professor of Public Policy
Indian Institute of Management Indore

PART 2

Five themes, and the thread through them

Five themes the community chose, plus the one that runs through all of them. Each chapter states the national evidence first, then what this community said, then what it changes for someone doing the work, then an argument from a practitioner in that field.



Education

Access, cost and quality of education, and how well it prepares the people entering for the world.

The national picture

Two things are true about Indian education in 2026, and the tension between them is why this chapter exists. Measured foundational learning is recovering, and it is recovering fastest where public money is being spent.

ASER 2024, which covered 649,491 children across 605 rural districts, found the share of Class 3 children in government schools able to read a Class 2 text rising from 16.3% in 2022 to 23.4% in 2024, while private schools moved only from 33.1 to 35.5%, still short of their own 2018 level of 40.6%. In Class 5, government schools moved from 38.5 to 44.8% against private schools' 56.8 to 59.3%. Government-school reading now stands above its pre-pandemic level, the highest ASER has recorded since 2005.

It is a real recovery and an unfinished one. Even after the best two years ASER has recorded, fewer than one in four children in Class 3 in a government school can read text written for Class 2.

The system's own designers do not think the job is close to done: ASER 2024 was cited in the Economic Survey, and in NITI Aayog's May 2026 report on school education, and the Rajya Sabha standing committee used it to recommend extending the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy mission to 2032. Further up the pipeline the picture thins. PLFS 2025 puts average formal education at 10.0 years for those aged 15 and above, finds 4.2% of 15 to 59 year olds have had any formal vocational training, and places roughly a quarter of 15 to 29 year olds outside employment, education or training entirely.

Combined Centre and state education spending has run between 2.7 and 2.9% of GDP for a decade, against the 6% first recommended by the Kothari Commission in the 1960s and re-adopted by NEP 2020.

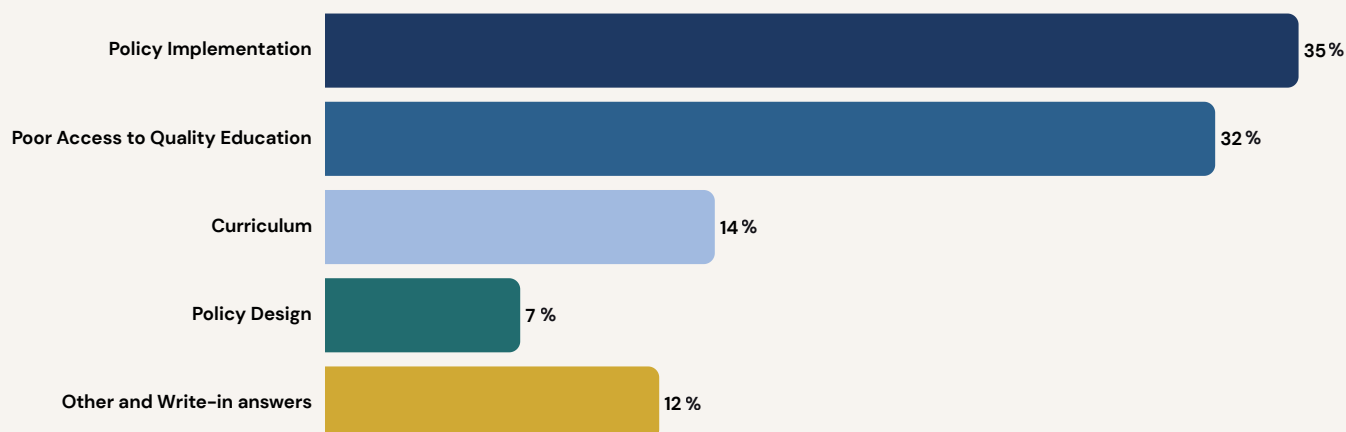


What the community said

On education as a policy domain, respondents point at delivery rather than design: at what happens to policy after it is written, and at what does not reach a child.

Figure 6. India's biggest education challenge, in this community's view

What this shows: Implementation and access take two-thirds of all answers between them. Curriculum and design, where most of the sector's expert attention sits, take barely one in five.



Note: The Pulse Survey 2026, percentage of respondents, single answer, n=413. Read this as a first-place finish on a fixed list: 35% of everyone who answered chose implementation ahead of the other options, not 35% more than the option below it.

The diagnosis shifts with experience. Respondents under 30 name policy implementation at around 38%; those over 30 name curriculum at 18% against the sample's 14% and put the quality of schooling first at 51% against 43%. Time in the system moves the diagnosis from delivery toward design. Neither group is wrong. They stand at different distances from the same system, and the older group has watched more designs fail on contact. By region, Tier-3 and rural respondents feel access as acutely as implementation, both around 40%, and curriculum barely registers at 7% against 17% in the larger metros. On the Tier-3 base of 57 neither read is established, and both are printed as hypotheses for 2027.

When discussing recommendations, 43% leaned towards addressing school-education quality first. Reforming school-education was weighed well above upskilling and teacher training, which stood at 22% each.

What this changes in practice

If you design education programmes, the useful result is not that people are dissatisfied but where they locate the fault. This community names implementation and access over curriculum by roughly three to one, and its own experience of policy education says the same thing from the inside: the complaint is not that the theory was wrong but that nothing connected it to work.

Both readings point at one design principle. A programme that adds a module has changed the curriculum. A programme that attaches a live project to a placement route has changed the delivery. Only the second is being asked for.

ACTIVITY

The syllabus you would write

Three things my education taught me that I actually use

01

02

03

Three things I have had to learn on my own since

01

02

03

If I could add one thing to the syllabus, it would be:

Essay · The Education Alliance

We asked for compromised inputs. We got compromised results.

We negotiated our win to say mediocrity.

Something has been sitting with me, and I believe it is the most important conversation civil society is not having. For decades we have asked for less than we knew was needed. It was not out of ignorance. We asked for less because we wanted the ask to be accepted, and we learned the art of asking for only what the system can absorb.

I have come to believe that some of the biggest challenges in Indian education today are not failures of implementation. They are the predictable consequences of ambitions we chose to lower before the conversation ever began. A compromised ask produces a compromised design, and a compromised design produces exactly the outcomes we then commission studies to explain.

Average became our alibi, from RTE to NEP 2020

Look at the Right to Education Act 2009, which our sector rightly celebrates as a landmark. Then read its Schedule. A primary school with up to 60 children requires two teachers. Two teachers, five grades. That norm authorises one adult teaching Class 1 and Class 4 together, and calls it compliance. The same Schedule gives that school a head teacher only once enrolment crosses 100. Below that, leadership is an extra charge on someone already handling five grades. School leadership is among the few things we know moves learning reliably, and we made it a function of headcount.

Then came National Education Policy 2020. Faced with very small schools, its answer was pooling and sharing. Do not build a library, send the children to another. Do not build a playground, arrange access elsewhere. In an urban school with no land, do not raise the question of land.

Where that led us: arithmetic always settles the argument

ASER 2024 recorded a genuine and welcome post-pandemic recovery, still found that under a quarter of Class 3 children in rural India can read a Class 2 level text, about a third can do subtraction,

and fewer than a third of Class 5 children can solve a division problem. These are not failures of children. They are not failures of teachers. They are the honest output of the input we asked for. The system is not broken. It is delivering exactly what we designed it to deliver.

What we should be doing instead?

Let me put this out for everyone.

You cannot have a Viksit Bharat if a child's first lesson at school is how to do without. Not if we blame a teacher for children who cannot read, having never taught her to teach reading. Not while teachers sit in schools with no children and children sit in schools with one teacher. Not while a school is judged by its building instead of by what a child walks out able to do. Not while a state average is our measure of success. Not while the last child pays the cost of being reached. And you cannot have a Viksit Bharat by asking only for what will be approved, and then blaming the approval.

If the requirement was 100, we opened at 100, allowed ourselves to be talked down to 50, and called it a negotiated solution. We congratulated ourselves on being pragmatic, on being realistic, on understanding the constraints of the system. Then we sat back and waited for a 100 outcome to emerge from a 50 input.

To those of you early in this work, that is the habit I would most want you to refuse to inherit. You will be rewarded for knowing what will pass, for arriving with the version that embarrasses nobody. Learn that skill, and then keep it out of your first draft. Put the requirement on the table with its full price attached. What is done to it afterwards is someone else's to defend, in their own name.

What asking for 100 sounds like

I am not asking anyone to be unreasonable. I am asking us to stop pre-negotiating with ourselves. State the requirement in full. Say that a school needs a teacher for every grade, not a ratio that permits one teacher for five. Say that every school needs someone whose work is to lead it, whatever its enrolment. Say that a teacher needs continuous, in-service, mentored, feedback-rich professional development, and say what that costs. Say that a teacher's day belongs to teaching, and that every non-academic duty added to it must have something else taken away. Say that a child needs a playground, a laboratory and a library in her own school, and let the cost of that be visible and debated on its merits.

Some of it will be refused. Some of it will be phased. Some of it will take a decade. That is the government's prerogative and a legitimate one. But let the compromise be made in the negotiation, in public, by those accountable for it. It should not be smuggled into our own ask, in our own handwriting, before the conversation has even begun.

The moment we compromise the ask, we have already conceded the outcome. No dashboard, no mission, no monitoring framework will rescue a design that was compromised on the day it was written. Ask for what is required, not what is possible. Compromised inputs will always produce compromised results, and a compromised nation is not the Viksit Bharat any of us signed up to build.



A compromised ask produces a compromised design, and a compromised design produces exactly the outcomes we then commission studies to explain.



Amitav Virmani
Founder & CEO
The Education Alliance

Gender

Representation, safety and equity, both across policy careers and across policy outcomes.

The national picture

Part I measures, alongside the other career questions, the stage at which the policy space loses the most women. In a vacuum that is a leading question. It is not asked in a vacuum: three national datasets point at the same stage, and a fourth, boxed beside the finding in Part I, complicates it. This chapter reads the other half of the subject: what respondents name as the country's gender challenge.

PLFS 2025 puts female labour force participation at 40.0% against 79.1% for men, and the stated reasons for being outside the labour force diverge almost completely: 69.8% of men cite continuing their studies, while 44.4% of women cite childcare and home-making. The Time Use Survey 2024 found women spending 289 minutes a day on unpaid domestic services against 88 for men, and 137 minutes on unpaid caregiving against 75.

Among women aged 15 to 59, unpaid domestic work alone stood at 305 minutes, down from 315 in 2019. Five years of national attention moved that number by ten minutes. The Economic Survey 2023-24 discussed the same pattern as a motherhood penalty, estimating that female participation falls by around 20% for each additional hour of daily caregiving.



What the community said

The sample carrying this chapter is 59% women and 40% men. Where women leave the pipeline, and at which moment, is measured with the other career questions in Part I; the question here is national.

Where the readings diverge

Eight comparisons between the women and men in this sample were tested. Six clear conventional significance testing, an unusually high share at a base of 413, and are reported in full rather than hedged. The two that fail are printed with them, because a reader is entitled to know what was looked for and not found.

Across the full sample, the answers rank: unequal opportunities 30%, safety 28%, a lack of respect and dignity 18%, and low representation 15%. The table reads the first, second and fourth of these by sub-group; respect and dignity is answered almost identically by women and men, at 19% each, and shows no sub-group difference this sample can establish.

Table 4. India's biggest gender challenge, read by gender and by age

What this shows. Women name safety far more often than men do, and the youngest respondents name it more often than those over 30. Read down the columns, the two age rows describe a life-stage arc: safety recedes as unequal opportunity takes its place.

Who is answering	Base	Names safety	Names unequal opportunity	Names low representation
Women	243	35%	26%	13%
Men	163	19%	35%	18%
Aged 18 to 24	175	31%	26%	14%
Aged 31 and over	65	14%	42%	14%

The Pulse Survey 2026, percentages within each sub-group. Established: the women against men gap on safety (16 points), the 18 to 24 against 31 and over gap on safety (18 points), and the age gap on unequal opportunity (15 points). Unresolved: the men against women gaps on unequal opportunity (9 points) and representation (6 points), both short of what this sample can carry.

Women name safety as India's top gender challenge at 35% against men's 19%, a 16-point gap that clears the test, and women foreground the threat they experience. The apparent tilt among men toward naming exclusion instead does not clear the test, so no claim is made about it here.

By age the two thematic answers rearrange themselves completely. Safety falls from 31% among 18 to 24 year olds to 14% among those over 30, and unequal opportunity rises from 26 to 42% across the same two groups. The youngest respondents are describing what they fear. The oldest are describing what has already happened to them.

What this changes in practice

The operational lesson is about timing rather than about policy content. A sector that locates its gender problem at entry will build outreach and scholarships. Part I records the loss at a caregiving break several years after entry, so the outreach arrives early and the intervention arrives late or not at all.

The Axis Bank finding belongs beside this one. If 58% of childless college-educated women have also taken a break, the mechanism starts before caregiving and caregiving is where it surfaces. An organisation designing only for the visible moment is designing for the symptom.

ACTIVITY

Yesterday, in four numbers

Paid work, including study for work.

How long I spent on paid work: _____ minutes.

National average: women spent 341 minutes, while men spent 473 minutes a day on paid work.

Unpaid domestic work: cooking, cleaning, laundry.

How long I spent on unpaid domestic work: _____ minutes.

National average: women spent 289 minutes, while men spent 88 minutes a day on unpaid domestic work.

Unpaid caregiving: children, elderly, household.

How long I spent on unpaid caregiving: _____ minutes.

National average: women spent 137 minutes, while men spent 75 minutes a day on unpaid caregiving.

The one thing I did not do yesterday because of the three rows above:

Essay · Association for Democratic Reforms

Beyond Reservation: What Still Keeps Women out of Electoral Politics?

Close to 49% of India's population is female, while only 14% (75 members) of the current Lok Sabha Members are women. After nearly three decades and several unsuccessful attempts, Parliament passed the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam in September 2023. This was a significant moment in India's democratic history. By reserving one-third of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the state assemblies, the legislation reaffirmed the commitment to gender-inclusive governance. Yet, the elections held after its passage raise an important question: is India creating more opportunities for women to enter politics, or is it just promising representation in the future?

Although the proportion of women in the Lower House has increased gradually over successive general elections, by June 2026, it remains below the global average of 27.5% and the South Asia regional average of 15.9% for lower or single houses of Parliament. As of 1st June 2026, India ranks 152nd out of 185 countries in women's representation in Parliament according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). It continues to fall behind many countries in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Africa in achieving fair representation of women in national legislatures. The answer lies not just in the number of women holding seats, but also in who receives party nominations, who can afford to contest elections, and who has access to political networks.

Our analysis at ADR of ticket distribution following the passage of the Women's Reservation Bill 2023 shows that of the 39,789 candidates we analysed for the 2024 General Election and subsequent State Assembly elections, only 4,073, (10.2%), were women. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, 152 (28%) constituencies had no women candidates. In none of the Assembly elections we analysed did women account for more than 14% of candidates

Political parties remain the main gatekeepers to elected office..

Their choices on candidate selection largely determine who can compete in elections. However, securing a ticket is just the first hurdle. Elections in India require significant resources. To contest elections on equal footing, considerable financial support is required, making political finance one of the biggest barriers to women's political participation, as observed in the 2008 Equality in Politics IPU survey. Women often have fewer chances to build donor networks, mobilise financial support or access influential political circles that help in fundraising.

These financial disparities reinforce views about women's electoral viability and affect parties' nomination decisions. Women made up about 10% of all candidates contesting the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. BJP and Congress allocated only 16% and 13% of their tickets to women candidates, respectively. None of the 279 independent women candidates contesting the 2024 Lok Sabha elections won, given the lack of party support and financial backing. On the contrary, ADR's analysis shows that BJP women candidates won at a strike rate of 45%, comparable to the strike rate of 56% of their male counterparts. 11 out of 12 women candidates of TMC were elected.

These results indicate that women are highly electable when provided with adequate organisational support, resources, and favourable electoral opportunities. ADR analysis further shows how financial resources impact electoral success. During the General Elections 2024, millionaire women candidates had a 25% chance of winning, compared with 19% for millionaire men. By contrast, a female candidate with assets less than Rs 1 crore had a 1.49% winning chance.

Even among the women who succeed electorally, a trend appears. ADR report released in September 2025 analysed 5,203 sitting legislators across state assemblies, Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha and state legislative councils. Among the 539 sitting female

MPs, MLAs and MLCs, 47% (251) hail from political dynasties. Notably women legislators are more than twice as likely as men to have a dynastic political background. Political lineage has helped many capable women to enter public life. However, if family connections become the primary way to enter politics, representation risks becoming socially narrow rather than broadly inclusive. Women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds should be able to access political office without relying solely on inherited political networks. This can lead to fairer and more inclusive policymaking, as women's representation can influence policy priorities, public spending, and how institutions address gender-related issues.

Reservation indeed creates long-term incentives, and the Women's Reservation Act has renewed optimism about their political representation and participation. However, unless political parties also tackle structural barriers such as access to nominations and campaign finance and create opportunities beyond political dynasties, true political inclusion will still be a work in progress. The implementation of the Act is contingent on delimitation. In the interim, parties can adapt their candidate selection strategies, introduce internal gender quotas and capacity-building programs for women.

Political finance reforms aimed at gender equality, including public funding that offers financial incentives to parties that meet the required share of women candidates/elected representatives, must be explored. The political system and electoral processes need to encourage and support first-generation women leaders in decision-making roles. Most importantly, steps must be taken to lower the costs of running for office and to introduce a comprehensive law regarding political parties' functioning, including internal elections and candidate selection.

For young women aspiring to enter politics, ability is rarely a barrier; access is. A truly representative democracy is not measured only by the number of women in legislatures but by whether women from all backgrounds have fair opportunities to get there.



It is measured by whether women from all backgrounds have a fair chance of getting there.



Shelly Mahajan
Programme and Research Manager
Association for Democratic Reforms

Public Health

Access, delivery gaps and financing pressure, as experienced on the ground.

The national picture

India's health financing story over a decade is good, and it deserves stating in full before this chapter adds what it does not cover. All figures below are from the tenth and most recent National Health Accounts round.

Government health expenditure rose from Rs 1.30 lakh crore in 2013–14 to Rs 3.85 lakh crore in 2022–23, the government share of total health spending from 28.6% to 43.7%, and per capita government spending about 2.7 times over. Out-of-pocket expenditure fell from 64.2 to 43.4% of total health spending across this nine year period. An enormous amount of household financial pain no longer happens. One number moved the wrong way: out-of-pocket spending fell to 39.4% in 2021–22 and then rose to 43.4% in 2022–23. The decade-long trend is still steeply downward and the most recent single year is not, and the likeliest explanation

is the unusually high public spending and suppressed private care of the pandemic year before it.

Social security health expenditure, including Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY, rose from 6 to 9.9% of total health spending, and private health insurance from 3.4 to 9.2%. This community grew up inside that build. The unfinished half is volume: government health expenditure stands at 1.43% of GDP against the National Health Policy 2017 target of 2.5% by 2025. The composition of Indian health spending is improving faster than its level.

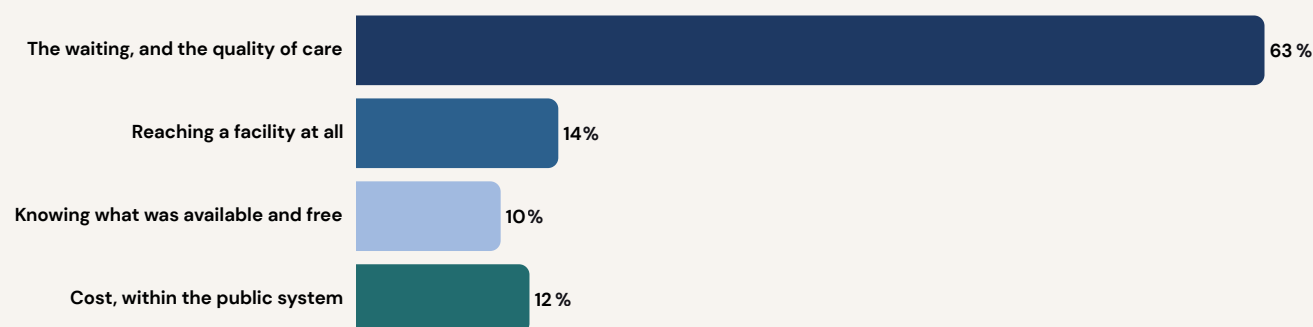


What the community said

One question asked what actually happened the last time respondents or their families used public health services. Alone in the instrument, it records a lived experience rather than an opinion, and it produced the most one-sided answer in the report.

Figure 7. The hardest part when respondents or their families used public health services

What this shows. Nearly two-thirds name the waiting and the quality of care. Cost inside the public system is named by 12%.



The Pulse Survey 2026, percentage of respondents, single answer, n=413. Every respondent chose one of the four options; percentages sum to 99 through rounding.

This community is more health-literate and better resourced than the general population, and it says money is no longer what stops it. Nearly two-thirds reached the facility, could afford it, and then waited, and what they received was not good enough. The last decade of financing reform was built for a different problem, and its instruments will not solve this one.

Figure 8. Where the biggest gap in India's health system sits

What this shows. 86% locate the gap somewhere after the policy is written. Around 5% locate it in the writing itself.



The Pulse Survey 2026, percentage of respondents, single answer, n=413. Top three of six options shown individually; the remaining three are grouped, each having been chosen by too few respondents to report separately.

Two gender readings hold here. Reaching the last mile is the top answer for both groups, but men give it 49% of their answers and thin out sharply afterwards, while women spread across three: 35% on delivery, 28% on data and accountability, and 25% on people not knowing what they are owed, against men's 13% on that last one. Both are calculated inside their own group, on bases of 243 and 163. A consultation that hears only the delivery answer will design for the half of the problem both groups agree on, and miss the half only one of them can see.

What this changes in practice

Two things follow from a cohort that reached the facility, could afford it, and then waited. The next decade of health reform is a quality and throughput problem for this group in a way the last decade's financing reform was not. And the awareness gap, named by 25% of women against 13% of men, is the cheapest of these to close, because it needs information rather than infrastructure.

The recruitment loop recorded in Part I belongs to this chapter's delivery problem: people decline to work on implementation because they do not believe implementation lands. What breaks the loop is visible delivery that a young applicant can point to.

ACTIVITY

Match each scheme to what it actually does



Read the schemes in the left column and match them to what they actually do in the right column

Scheme	What the scheme does
1.  Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY	A: National teleconsultation.
2.  Janani Suraksha Yojana	B: Free essential diagnostics and primary care at upgraded sub-centres.
3.  Mission Indradhanush	C: Conditional cash transfer promoting institutional delivery.
4.  Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana	D: Rs 5 lakh cover per family per year for secondary and tertiary hospitalisation.
5.  Ayushman Arogya Mandir	E: Full immunisation for children and pregnant women who are unvaccinated or partly vaccinated.
6.  e-Sanjeevani	F: Quality generic medicines at reduced prices through dedicated outlets.

Answers at the foot of the page.

Essay · Swasti

India's Public Health Journey: Every Challenge Taught us Something

If history judges India's public health journey solely by the challenges it overcame, it will have missed the bigger story. India's greatest public health achievement is not that it eliminated smallpox, eradicated guinea worm, became polio-free, or delivered one of the world's largest COVID-19 vaccination campaigns. It is that, over the last seven decades, it has continuously expanded its understanding of the building blocks of good health and wellbeing. Every public health challenge forced India to ask a new question. Every policy transformed that learning into institutional capability. Every success revealed the next frontier.

In the years following Independence, the question was simple: how do we stop people dying from preventable and manageable health conditions? Faced with infectious diseases, high maternal and child mortality, malnutrition, poor sanitation and rapid population growth, India adopted disease-specific programmes targeting malaria, tuberculosis, leprosy, smallpox and family planning. Those vertical programmes reflected the realities of a newly independent nation with limited resources, and they achieved remarkable success. India was certified guinea worm-free in 2000, and polio-free in 2014, while decades of immunisation culminated in the eradication of smallpox globally.

Yet these victories taught lessons far beyond the diseases themselves. Guinea worm demonstrated that safe water, sanitation, surveillance and community ownership could eliminate a disease without a vaccine. Polio proved that logistics, behavioural insights, frontline workers and public trust could be as important as scientific breakthroughs. Malaria highlighted the relationship between environment and health, while Leprosy reminded us that eliminating a disease is not the same as eliminating stigma.

By the 1990s the question had evolved: how do we reach everyone? HIV fundamentally reshaped public health thinking by exposing the limitations of a purely biomedical response. The epidemic demonstrated that discrimination, gender inequality and social exclusion were themselves determinants of health.

Through the National AIDS Control Programme India pioneered a model that combined epidemiology with community leadership, rights-based approaches and behaviour-change communication. Public health was no longer simply about controlling disease. It was about understanding people.

The next transformation came with the National Rural Health Mission in 2005 and later the National Health Mission, which shifted the focus from programmes to systems. ASHAs, decentralised planning and strengthened primary healthcare, brought services closer to communities, contributing to sustained improvements in maternal and child health. The National Health Policy 2017 further embraced Universal Health Coverage, while Ayushman Bharat expanded financial protection through PM-JAY and comprehensive primary care through Health and Wellness Centres (MoHFW, 2017). Simultaneously, digital public infrastructure—including CoWIN, the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, eSanjeevani and Tele-MANAS—demonstrated how technology could strengthen access, continuity and resilience.

COVID-19 accelerated this transition. The pandemic exposed weaknesses in preparedness, workforce capacity and health financing, but it also catalysed vaccine manufacturing, digital delivery and unprecedented public engagement with health. More importantly, it reminded us that hospitals alone do not protect societies. Resilient systems do.

Today, India confronts a very different question: How do we build a society that supports peoples' health and wellbeing before healthcare is ever needed?

India's public health ecosystem today reflects both the complexity of its federal democracy and the scale of governing the world's largest population. Health remains constitutionally a state subject, resulting in remarkable diversity in capacity and outcomes—from states such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu, which have consistently invested in strong primary healthcare and public health systems,

to larger northern states that continue to grapple with workforce shortages, infrastructure gaps and poorer health indicators (NITI Aayog, 2023). At the national level, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare provides policy direction and stewardship, supported by institutions such as the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and NITI Aayog, while state governments retain responsibility for implementation. Over the past decade, India has also emerged as a global leader in digital public health through initiatives such as the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, CoWIN, eSanjeevani and Tele-MANAS, demonstrating how digital public infrastructure can strengthen continuity of care, surveillance and access (Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, 2023). Yet healthcare delivery remains a mixed ecosystem. The private sector provides a substantial proportion of outpatient and inpatient care, albeit within a regulatory environment that continues to evolve, while the public system remains the backbone for preventive services, immunisation, disease surveillance and care for the most vulnerable. Surrounding this core is an equally important ecosystem of multilateral organisations such as the World Health Organization, academic institutions, think tanks, philanthropic foundations, and a vibrant network of civil society organisations that have shaped everything from HIV prevention and tuberculosis care to nutrition, community mobilisation and digital health innovation. Increasingly, India's public health ecosystem is no longer defined by a single ministry or sector. It is a collaborative architecture in which governments, researchers, communities, technology platforms and development partners collectively shape how health is protected, promoted and delivered.

Communicable diseases persist, but they now coexist with a growing burden of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancers, mental health conditions and chronic respiratory illnesses. Tuberculosis continues to remind us that poverty, nutrition and housing remain clinical issues. Dengue demonstrates that climate resilience, urban planning and water management are now public health interventions. Antimicrobial resistance challenges decades of medical progress, while climate change is reshaping the geography of disease itself.

Nutrition mirrors this evolution. India's early concern was food security—ensuring enough calories to prevent hunger. The focus then shifted to child undernutrition through ICDS and POSHAN Abhiyaan. Today, the country faces the double burden of persistent undernutrition alongside obesity

and diet-related non-communicable diseases. Initiatives such as Eat Right India recognise that food safety, dietary diversity and healthy food environments are as important as food availability. The future of public health will therefore be shaped as much by agriculture, food systems and consumer behaviour as by hospitals.

This reflects the most significant shift in India's public health discourse. Health is no longer produced by the health sector alone. Agriculture determines nutrition. Education shapes health literacy. Water and sanitation prevent disease. Urban planning influences physical activity. Climate policy affects vector-borne diseases. Social protection improves resilience. Public health has evolved from being the responsibility of a single ministry to becoming the organising principle that connects them all.

Looking ahead, India's public health architecture must evolve from a healthcare system into a health and wellbeing creating system. The future will demand stronger primary healthcare networks that seamlessly integrate with tertiary care through digital platforms, interoperable health records and referral pathways. Public health institutions must become more anticipatory than reactive, using real-time surveillance, artificial intelligence and predictive analytics to identify emerging risks before they become crises. A dedicated public health workforce—combining epidemiologists, behavioural scientists, environmental health experts, data scientists, nutritionists and social scientists—will need to work alongside clinicians to address increasingly complex health challenges.

Equally important will be institutionalising a true Health in All Policies approach, where decisions in agriculture, food systems, education, housing, transport, urban planning, climate action and social protection are routinely evaluated for their health impact. As India grapples with ageing, antimicrobial resistance, climate change, mental health, food insecurity and the growing burden of non-communicable diseases, resilient governance will matter as much as resilient hospitals.

The next generation of public health institutions

should therefore be measured not by how efficiently they respond to outbreaks, but by how effectively they prevent illness, reduce inequities and enable people to live longer, healthier lives. In that future, success will no longer be defined by the number of hospital beds built or patients treated, but by the healthy years added to people's lives and the resilience of the systems that make those healthy lives possible.

To me, India's public health journey can be understood through four questions: How do we stop people from dying of preventable and manageable health conditions? How do we reach everyone? How do we build resilient health systems? And finally, how do we build healthy societies? Every public health challenge has expanded our understanding of what health truly means. If the twentieth century was about defeating diseases, the twenty-first is about creating the conditions in which fewer people fall ill in the first place. That is India's next public health challenge—and perhaps its greatest opportunity.

“
India's public health architecture must evolve from a healthcare system into a health and wellbeing creating system.”



Shrirupa Sengupta,
Chief Executive Officer
Swasti

Technology

Governance of emerging technology, digital rights, and public trust in technology-driven policy.

The national picture

India settled its opening position on AI governance nine months before this survey went into the field. On 5 November 2025, MeitY released the India AI Governance Guidelines under the IndiaAI Mission, a principle-based framework working through existing law rather than legislating separately for AI. Two of its seven principles are Accountability, meaning a clear allocation of responsibility, and Understandable by Design, meaning explanations sufficient for users and regulators to grasp how a system operates. The community's answers below track those two ideas almost exactly, which is striking given that no respondent was shown the guidelines. Alongside them, the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules 2025 were notified on 13 November 2025, with substantive obligations on notice, consent, security and retention phasing in over eighteen months. While this survey was in the field, India had a data protection regime that existed on paper and was not yet fully in force.

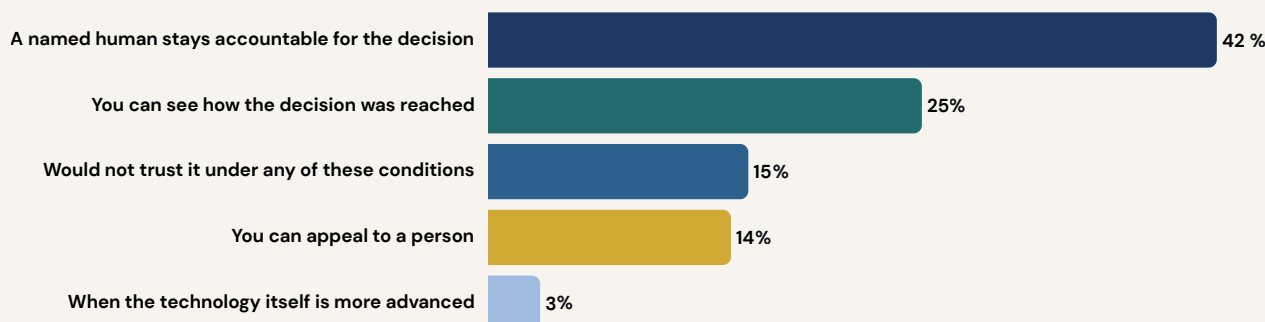
Access itself remains uneven. TRAI's indicators for the quarter ending March 2026 record 1,092.79 million internet subscribers and penetration of 76.59 per hundred people nationally. The gap inside that number is the point: overall tele-density stands at 151.47% in urban India against 60.46% in rural India. A governance framework that is largely voluntary, a data protection law that is still phasing in, and a country with large swathes that are a little more than half connected. Anyone designing AI into public service delivery in India is designing for that combination.



What the community said

Figure 9. What would make respondents trust an AI-assisted government decision

What this shows. Top two answers together take 67%: someone is answerable, the reasoning is visible, or a person can overturn it. Only 3% ask for better technology.

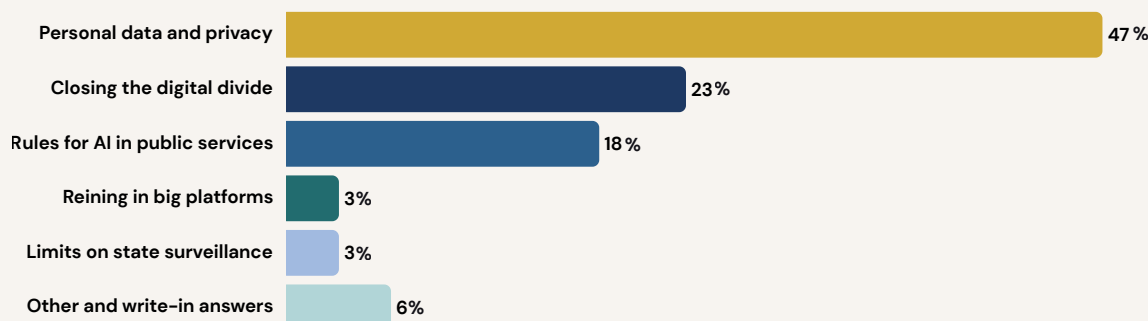


The Pulse Survey 2026, percentage of respondents, single answer, n=413. The example given in the question was an algorithm deciding who qualifies for a benefit. Every respondent chose one of the five conditions; percentages sum to 99 through rounding.

The two leading answers map almost exactly onto the Accountability and Understandable by Design principles in the government's own guidelines, where they remain voluntary. The state has already written down what respondents are asking for. What is missing is making it binding, and visible to the citizen rather than to the deployer alone. A recent chapter poll of 543 selections points the same way: asked what would make AI platforms more accessible, members chose mentorship, free-tier access, native-language datasets and plain-language explanation, human scaffolding rather than better models.

Figure 10. India's most urgent technology-policy priority

What this shows. Privacy leads at 47%, a full 24 points clear of the next answer. Reining in large platforms and limiting state surveillance, which absorb a great deal of India's technology-policy commentary, sit at the bottom of this list.



The Pulse Survey 2026, percentage of respondents, single answer, n=413. Percentages sum to 100.

Two gender differences clear the test. Women rate privacy as the top technology priority at 54% against men's 38%, a 16-point gap that is, by a whisker, the largest gender difference anywhere in this survey, matched only by the climate-responsibility split in the Sustainability chapter, and 19% of women decline every condition offered for trusting an AI-assisted decision against 9% of men. The split is not restraint against solutions: men are, if anything, slightly likelier to demand the named accountable human (45% against 41%). Men also prioritise closing the digital divide (28% against 21%) and active rule-making (24% against 14%).

What the 19% is, and what it is not

That second figure is easy to misread. 19% of women and 9% of men said none of the four conditions offered was sufficient. They were not asked whether they understand the technology, and nothing here measures that. Read alongside the rest of this chapter, the more coherent interpretation is a judgement about institutions rather than about machines: the same respondents rate privacy 16 points higher than men do, and are twice as likely to name not knowing your entitlements as the health system's biggest gap. A person who has found it hard to obtain what she is already owed by an ordinary government office has reason to doubt that a right of appeal against an algorithm will work any better.

This report cannot confirm that, because the instrument recorded the refusal and not the reason. Declining an assurance is not the same as failing to understand it, and the difference matters for anyone designing consent and grievance mechanisms into public systems.

By geography, Delhi respondents are likeliest to demand a named accountable human, at 49% against Tier-2's 34%, while Tier-3 and rural respondents put access above privacy. For them the technology question is reach before it is rights. Both patterns are directional, resting on bases of 128, 94 and 57.

What this changes in practice

The result that should travel furthest is the 3%. Almost nobody here believes better technology is what would make an AI-assisted government decision trustworthy. What they ask for is accountability and a route of appeal, both administrative law rather than machine learning. For anyone building AI into public service delivery, that reframes the trust question: less about making the model more accurate, more about publishing who is answerable when it is wrong, then making that person findable by the citizen rather than by the regulator.

One smaller result is directly fixable. Asked what would make them hesitant to pursue technology policy, 3.9% said they lack the technical background to belong in the room. The belief is false: most technology-policy roles need policy judgement, not an engineering degree, and programme descriptions should say so.

ACTIVITY

Who do you call?

Something goes wrong in a public service you are entitled to. What would you do?

01 Your ration is denied because the biometric scanner will not read your fingerprint:

02 An automated camera issues you a challan for a violation you did not commit:

03 Your name is missing from the voter roll after a de-duplication exercise:

04 There is a six-hour power cut in your area and no announcement:

Answers at the foot of the page

Answers

1. Alternative authentication (iris, face or OTP), then the District Grievance Redressal Officer and the State Food Commission.
2. Object on echallan.parivahan.gov.in within the SMS window, after which it moves to a Virtual Court.
3. Fill Form 6, not Form 8.
4. Contact the DISCOM helpline on your bill, then the Consumer Grievance Redressal Forum under Section 42(5) of the Electricity Act, 2003. Escalation routes vary by state; verify current state rules.

Essay · Data and Co.

In Tech we Trust?

As technology becomes more autonomous, good policy must do more than create safeguards. It must ensure that people can see, understand, and experience those safeguards, and know that they retain agency in them.

At the India AI Impact Summit earlier this year, I was fascinated by the NPCI exhibit. About 20 of us watched a demonstration on agentic payments on UPI. The AI assistant could provide a recipe (gajar halwa in this case), connect to a grocery platform, and place the order for all the raw materials automatically. As a true blue tech enthusiast, my eyes shone with excitement and anticipation, while my brain raised operational questions around authentication requirements and liability. The others around me, who weren't immersed in the tech policy world, were thinking about something entirely different. Will it spend money without asking me? Can I stop it? How will I get a refund if it places an order by mistake? How will I prevent my money from being stolen?

These concerns, as you can probably infer from the language, were not about curiosity in the tech, but rather fundamentally about control. We see similar worries in the discourse across technologies and their manifestations, whether we're talking of AI, payments, privacy, digital identity, healthcare, or whatever emerges next. As the representative tried to explain the underlying technical architecture, I watched him slowly lose the room. I found myself sitting with a more elemental question – that as tech becomes increasingly autonomous, how do the contours of human agency evolve, and what role can public policy play in answering the “who is in charge” question? At that moment, it struck me that beyond building trustworthy systems, the next frontier of tech policy must necessarily focus on people and their agency.

When we think about public policy, we typically imagine writing laws, publishing consultation papers, hosting open house discussions where (generally speaking) experts put forth their perspectives. I'd argue that in the context of tech,

increasingly the work of public policy is much broader. Beyond regulations, policy can take the form of standards and industry best practices, and shape the principles of product design, interoperability, and transparency. We collectively debate on whether or not regulation is the right approach in specific circumstances.

Even then, all of these individual elements, while extremely important, are not the whole story. The missing piece of this puzzle, to my mind, is helping people understand (the tech, the regulation, and everything in between) and gain confidence in the ecosystem. I'm reminded of my Jurisprudence lectures in law school, where I learnt that *justice must not only be done, it must also be seen to be done*. Increasingly I find myself borrowing this principle beyond the courtroom – that tech should not just be trustworthy, it must also be experienced as trustworthy, or that governance must not only exist, it must also be understandable, or that control must not just be preserved, people must know it has been preserved.

Neither, however, is an end in itself. Regulation, consultation, standard-setting, and best practices create guardrails and safeguards. Understanding why they exist and how they work gives those safeguards legitimacy. And legitimacy, in turn, builds trust. That, to my mind, is the goal – trust as the outcome. Trust in tech, governance, regulation, enforcement.

This thinking is not unique to Indian tech policy. Across jurisdictions, we see policy stakeholders wrestle with similar questions – how do we enable innovation, preserve agency, and make accountability visible? The mechanisms differ, whether we consider the human oversight requirements in Europe, testing frameworks in Singapore, transparency obligations in South Korea, or explainability and contestability in Canada. The objective, however, is common: to help people remain in control even as the tech becomes more autonomous.

At the NPCI exhibit I mentioned earlier the public was asking about the same thing – what is the system allowed to do, and how do users remain in charge? They weren't asking whether or not AI was intelligent (pun intended) enough to spend their money, but that if it did, would they remain in control. The challenge for the current and next generation of tech policy stakeholders will be to go beyond what technology should be allowed to do, into the domain of ensuring that people understand how these systems work, what boundaries govern them, where accountability lies, and how they retain agency.

And if trust is the outcome rather than the intervention, then perhaps the true test of tech policy is not whether technology can act for us, but whether, when it does, we still understand and experience ourselves as being in charge.



As technology becomes more autonomous, good policy must do more than create safeguards. It must ensure that people can see, understand, and experience those safeguards, and know that they retain agency in them.



Kriti Trehan
Founder

Data & Co – Law and Policy Advisors

Sustainability

Awareness of climate policy, appetite for green careers, and local impact.

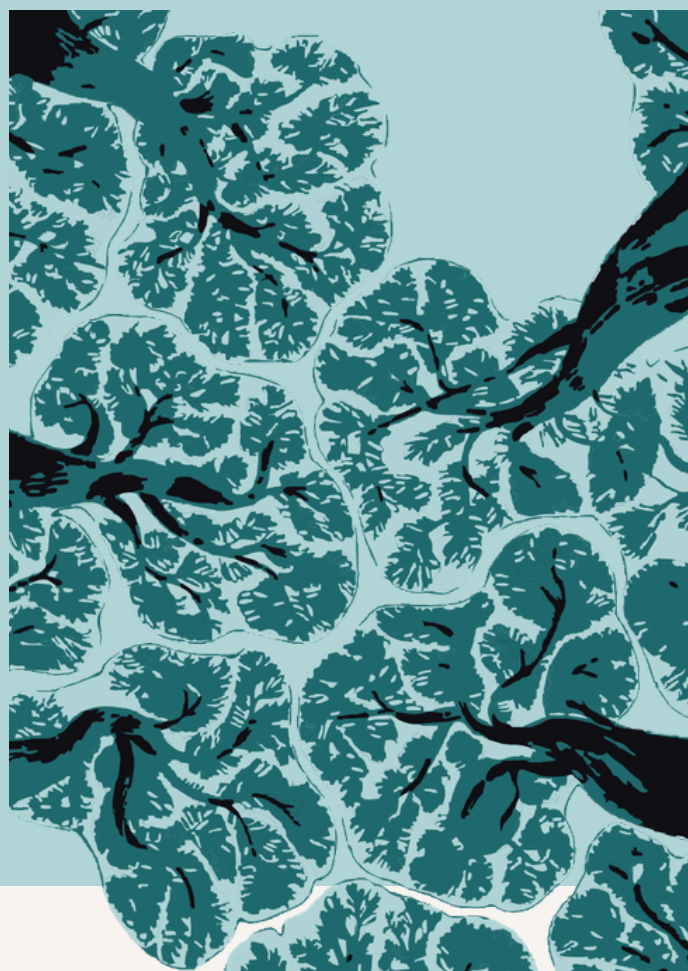
The national picture

India is the largest extractor of groundwater in the world, at close to a quarter of global extraction. The Dynamic Ground Water Resources of India 2025 assessment, released on 30 December 2025 by the Ministry of Jal Shakti with the Central Ground Water Board and state agencies, covered 6,762 blocks, talukas and mandals. It records annual recharge of 448.52 billion cubic metres against extraction of 247.22 billion cubic metres, which after deducting natural discharge gives a national stage of extraction of 60.63%.

The direction is good. Units classified as safe rose from 62.6% in 2017 to 73.14% in 2025, and over-exploited units fell from 17.2 to 10.8%. That still leaves 730 over-exploited units, concentrated in the north-west, the west and the south, with a further 11.21% semi-critical and 2.97% critical. Roughly a quarter of India's assessment units remain under some degree of stress.

This chapter opens on water rather than on emissions for a reason. Asked to name India's biggest

sustainability challenge, respondents did not name industrial pollution or plastic. It named depleting groundwater, effectively tied for first: an unusual answer from a young, largely urban and peri-urban cohort, at odds with a public conversation that runs heavily on air and waste, and well supported by the assessment above. This report takes no position on India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), on burden-sharing between countries, or on the pace of transition. Those are contested questions which merit deeper enquiry.

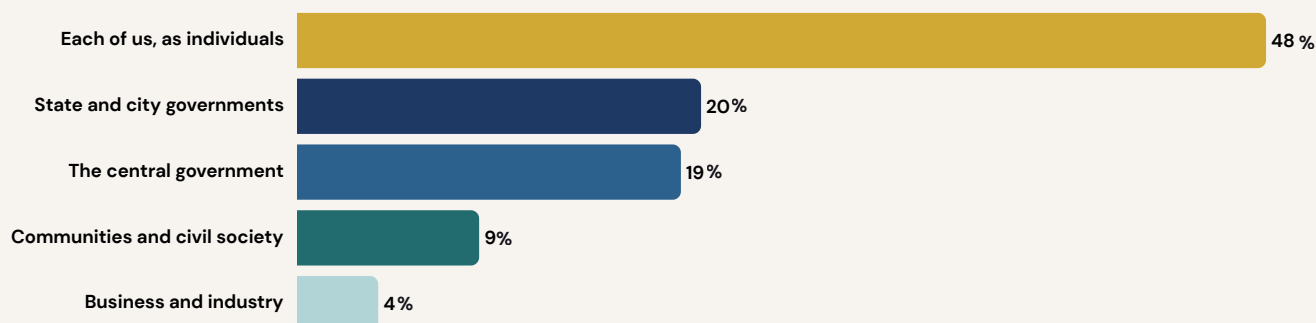


What the community said

Asked to assign responsibility for the defining collective-action problem of their working lives, nearly half of respondents declined to name an institution at all.

Figure 11. Who should take the lead on India's climate response

What this shows. Individual responsibility outpolls the central government by more than two and a half times, and business, the source of most emissions, by roughly ten to one, in a sample of policy professionals and aspiring ones.



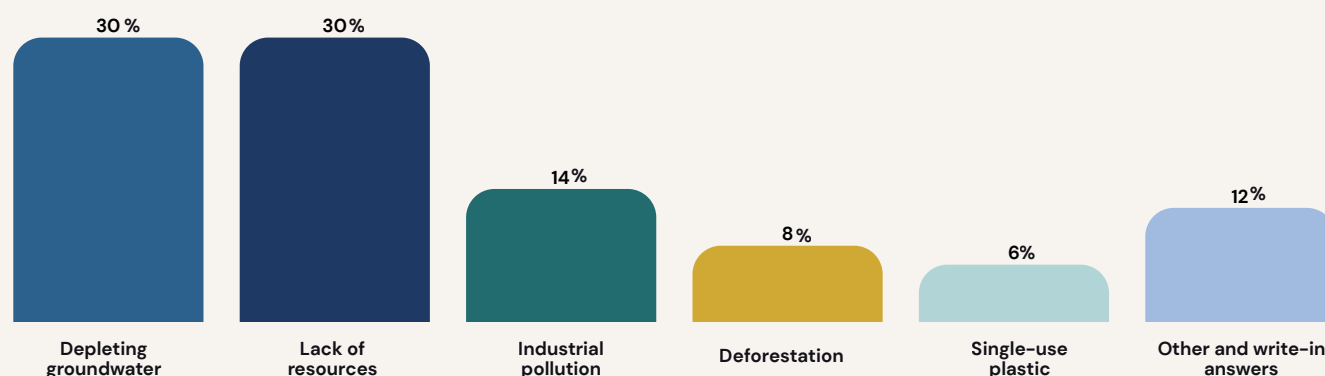
The Pulse Survey 2026, percentage of respondents, single answer, n=413. Every respondent chose one of the five options; percentages sum to 100 after rounding.

One plausible reading, unsupported by this instrument, is that a community fluent in institutional failure defaults to individual responsibility when asked who will actually act. The survey recorded the choice and not the reasoning, a design gap the 2027 wave will aim to close with a follow-up question.

On what India's climate policy should weigh most – protecting the communities hit first and hardest leads at 46%, a fast shift to clean energy takes 25% and growth and jobs 15%. Holding wealthier nations to their promises, a staple of international climate argument, draws under 4%.

Figure 12. India's biggest sustainability challenge, in this community's view

What this shows. Depleting groundwater and a lack of resources are effectively tied at the top. Single-use plastic, which dominates a great deal of public campaigning, is named by 6%.



The Pulse Survey 2026, percentage of respondents, single answer, n=413.

Two sub-group readings hold. Women lean harder into individual responsibility, at 55% against men's 39%, while men look more to state and city governments. And those over 30 uniquely look to civil society to lead, at around 22% against roughly 7% among the under-30s. Time in the system produces a more institutional reflex, as it did in the education chapter. One reading does not hold, and it is named here because it looks impressive: support for a fast clean-energy shift runs at 32% among other-metro respondents and 11% among Tier-3 and rural ones, a 21-point gap that clears the test on paper but reconstructs into 41 people out of 127 against six out of 57. The direction is credible; the size is not.

What this changes in practice

A community of policy professionals assigning climate leadership to individuals rather than to institutions is either a finding about climate or a finding about institutions. The present data cannot separate the two, and the follow-up question in the next wave is designed to.

The groundwater result can be acted on now. A young, largely urban cohort named depleting groundwater ahead of industrial pollution and plastic, and the national assessment supports them. Climate communication aimed at this age group should start from the concerns they actually hold.

ACTIVITY

One Choice, Ten Years

Circle the option in each row that matches how you actually live. Then answer the last question.



WATER

- ☐ Private borewell ☐ Municipal connection
- ☐ Municipal connection + rainwater harvesting



ENERGY

- ☐ Grid, cheapest appliances ☐ Grid plus efficient appliances
- ☐ Rooftop solar plus grid



TRANSPORT

- ☐ Public transport and walking ☐ Two-wheeler
- ☐ Car

Which of the three did you actually choose, and which was chosen for you by where you live?

Essay · Climate Asia

The Green Jobs Conversation Stops at Placement

India counts who was trained and who was placed. It is much less likely to ask what happened to them a year later.

Ask a green-skilling program how many people it trained last year and the answer comes quickly. Ask how many are still working twelve months later, and whether they earn more than when they started, and it becomes much harder to find. India's 500 GW non-fossil capacity target and the National Green Hydrogen Mission are estimated to generate more than 44 lakh full-time-equivalent jobs. Around 12.8 lakh of these are expected in operations, maintenance and manufacturing, roles that last as long as the project does.

A full-time-equivalent job-year measures labour input: one person working full-time for one year. It is not the same as one person in lasting employment. The headline number tells us how much work the transition may generate. It tells a 24 year old far less about whether their first job will last, whether their certificate will improve their pay, or whether there is another role to move into afterwards. I have spent the past year on the workforce side of India's energy transition, and this is the question I find hardest to answer.

In July, at a workshop Climate Asia helped convene, I spent a morning with around thirty people from research institutions, training bodies, philanthropy, advocacy and civil society, mapping India's clean-energy jobs and skills system. The map filled quickly with researchers, training providers, funders and policy organisations. Employers appeared far less often. Workers and trainees barely appeared as actors at all. We kept returning to one question: who is actually going to hire?

The problem was not a lack of impactful work; it was that nothing in the system depends on knowing what happened after placement. Training providers are funded and judged on enrolment, completion and placement. Government schemes count placements because placements can be counted.

Philanthropy funds cohorts, and cohorts have end dates. Month twelve sits outside everyone's contract, so month twelve goes unmeasured.

There is also a question of who the employer is meant to be. Much of the work in clean energy sits with contractors rather than the companies whose names are on the projects. Labour on site is hired through an engineering contractor, who hires through a manpower contractor, for as long as the build lasts. When the site is finished, so is the arrangement. Often no company has a continuing interest in that worker, which is part of why the demand side of our map was so empty.

Training is also designed before demand is understood. Curricula are written, batches enrolled, employers brought in once a programme is under way. When graduates struggle to find work, the problem is described as a skill gap. Sometimes it is. Often the job is in another district, the wage does not justify relocating, the certificate is not recognised, or the role leads nowhere.

We have organised the system around the training batch. It should be organised around the worker: from the search for a course, through the first job, to the point someone leaves.

The gaps show in who ends up doing what. Women are 11% of the workforce in solar and wind deployment and manufacturing, and 62% of those women work in administration, accounts, human resources and other non-technical roles. Awareness is not the constraint either. In a 2023 survey of 2,328 candidates across five metro cities, 85% had heard of green or climate-positive jobs, but only 35% knew of specific roles or where to train for them. Ask a 22 year old why they would take this route and the answer is rarely about belief in the transition. It is that fixing panels across a district does not, today, compete with an air-conditioned office in Gurugram, on pay or on where it leads. Until someone can show what the second and third jobs look like, that calculation keeps going the same way.

India has already tested outcome-linked instruments in skilling, including impact bonds that pay against retention, and they work. They sit at pilot scale, while the standard training contract still pays on placement. The growth is real too: around 6.5 lakh workers joined India's clean-energy sectors between FY23 and FY26, 62% of that from rooftop solar, and more will need training as the sector expands. But training at that pace without following anyone beyond placement produces churn while the programme still looks successful.

So the first move is not another training programme, or a new structure beside the ones India already has. It is to change what success means. Part of public and philanthropic funding should depend on whether people are still working twelve months after placement, and those results should be published.

Then one question should sit in every review of a green-skilling programme. Twelve months after the last batch graduated, how many are still working, what are they earning, and has the job taken them anywhere?



We have organised the system around the training batch. It should be organised around the worker: from the search for a course, through the first job, to the point someone leaves.



CLIMATE | A S I A

Institutional Contribution
Climate Asia

Youth in policy

The cross-cutting theme this report is built around: how young people enter, shape and participate in policy across every sector.

The national picture

India's youth cohort is larger and better schooled than any before it, yet is less prepared for work than the sectors receiving it assume. PLFS 2025 records youth unemployment among 15 to 24 year olds falling from 10.3 to 9.9%, real progress, while a quarter of that same age group is in neither employment, education nor training.

The strain falls hardest on the educated: the ILO and the Institute for Human Development record graduate youth unemployment at 29.1%, nearly nine times the rate among those who cannot read and write, which is national-scale evidence that credentials without routes are the constraint. The policy and impact sector is one small corner of that picture, and this report is the only measured account of that corner in existence.



What the community said

This chapter turns on a result already reported in Part I. Rating seven supports independently, this cohort put jobs and fellowships first at 76% and funding for an idea of their own last at 24%. The three items at the bottom of that list, visibility, community and idea funding, are the cheapest to run and the easiest to show. The two at the top are neither. The sector has organised its offerings around what it finds easy to deliver.

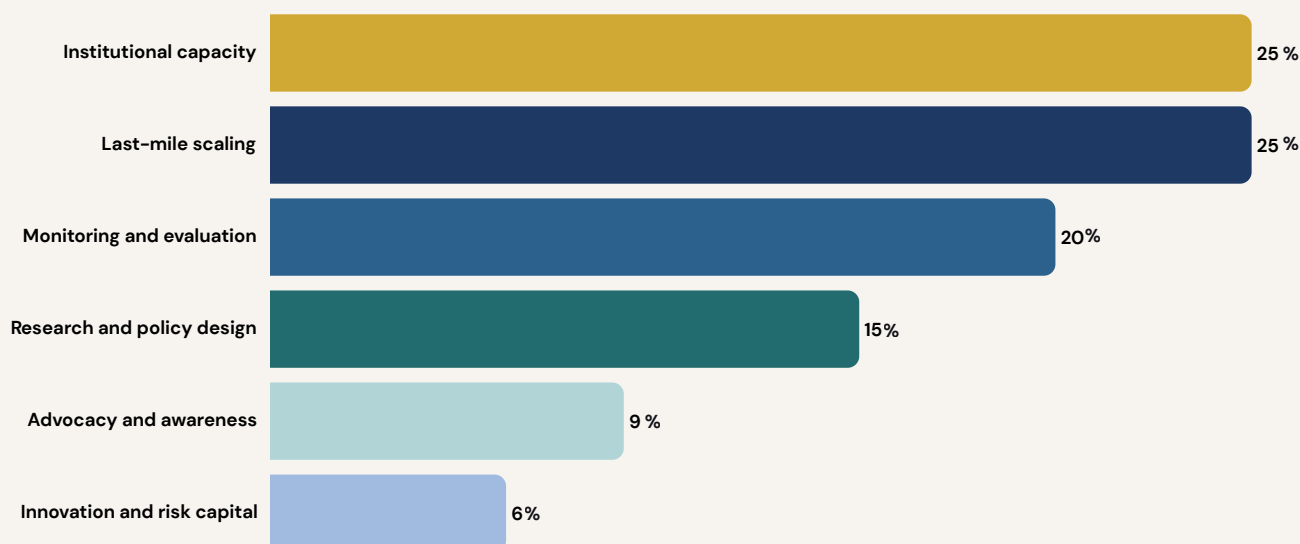
Given an open microphone to policymakers, funders

and employers, the written answers cluster in a consistent order: to be trusted with genuine roles rather than tokenistic seats; to be given real jobs and clear entry routes; to be mentored; and, running through all of it, to be judged on merit rather than on pedigree. Pay is raised unprompted by only a small minority, an odd silence beside the 38% who say this career is hard to sustain without outside support. This cohort is readier to describe the problem as access than as money, even when its own answers elsewhere point at money.

“Consider the issues and design policy based on needs and localized availability, as well as utilise resources properly” – A written answer to the open question addressed to policymakers, funders and employers.

Figure 13. India's top funding priority, in this community's view

What this shows. Institutional capacity and last-mile scaling tie for first. Research and policy design, where a large share of the sector's prestige and funding sits, ranks fourth.



The Pulse Survey 2026, percentage of respondents, single answer, n=413. A chapter poll of more than 1,100 selections on where the sector should build capacity returns the same order: delivery and institutional muscle ahead of research and design.

An interest declaration

What follows is about the publisher of this report, and it is drawn from PPI's own chapter polls rather than from the Pulse Survey. Readers should weigh it accordingly.

Asked what they look for in PPI's city-chapter groups, jobs, internships, fellowships and part-time roles together account for around 63% of selections, and 85% of members say they check the group whenever there is a notification. Asked what would improve the experience, the top answers are resume/profile reviews, a regular flow of opportunities, and mentorship calls.

Those three asks map almost one to one onto the survey's two leading barriers, finding openings and reaching mentors. We are recording that our own community asks us for the same things it says the sector fails to provide. It is corroboration, not proof, and it comes from an interested party.

What this changes in practice

The seven-support ranking is the most directly actionable result in this report, and the one most likely to be resisted, because it asks the sector to fund the expensive thing. Visibility, community and idea grants can be delivered by a small team in a quarter. Jobs and structured fellowships cannot.

Organisations reading this can state which of the two they are funding and why. Running the lower-cost programmes is a legitimate choice under a real budget constraint. Describing them as what young people asked for is not supported by this data, and this page makes the distinction checkable.

ACTIVITY

The door you came through

Think about the openings that shaped your journey, and the ones you can create for others.

01 The first opening in this field I ever heard about, and how I heard about it

02 The person who told me. Would a stranger from another city have had access to them?

03 One door I could open for somebody else this month

Essay · India House

India's Youth in Action: How the Public Policy space is opening up to New Realities

A decade ago, public policy in India was a niche space, largely associated with the civil services, academia and a small circle of Delhi-based think tanks. Wrapped in jargon and hierarchy, policymaking felt distant and inaccessible to young people.

Today, that landscape looks very different. The number of public policy master's and executive programmes grew from eight in 2012 to at least 37 by 2022. Governments recruit through fellowships, consultancy roles and lateral entry, while universities, non-profits, philanthropic organisations and companies build policy teams.

At the heart of this shift are India's youth in action. Curious about governance, eager to contribute and impatient with the status quo, they are entering policy with energy and ambition. Public policy is no longer an obscure domain reserved for a select few. It is becoming a credible pathway to nation-building and shaping India's future. We examine how young people discover policy, what motivates them, how they build careers, the gaps limiting participation and what India must do to enable them to act in policy.

The Beginnings: Learning What Policy Means

The first encounter with policy rarely happens in an organised manner. Some students encounter it in senior school through political science, economics or current affairs. Most, however, do not recognise it as a distinct field until college. Internships often provide the first serious exposure, moving students from reading policy to practising it. NITI Aayog's year-round internship programme remains among the most popular routes into government policy work. Think Tanks such as ORF, Vidhi, CPPR, CCS and CCG offer internships in research, legal analysis and advocacy. Policy consultancies, non-profits and corporate public affairs teams provide exposure to regulation, stakeholder engagement and programme implementation. Organisations such as India House, and PPI also introduce young people to the field through programmes such as Start Thinking in Policy and campus events such as PPI Talks.

The Motivations: Why Young People are Drawn to Policy

Our interactions with policy aspirants and applicants to India House programmes suggest that impact and nation-building remain the primary motivations. More than half of applicants and cohort members cited impact, consistently across age, gender and experience. This is an encouraging sign for a country seeking to harness its demographic dividend. This extends beyond our cohort. Deloitte's 2026 India survey found that 99 per cent of Gen Z respondents and 98 per cent of millennials considered purpose important to job satisfaction. Public policy offers a strong route to channel this desire.

Motivations also vary by field of study. Law remains the most common specialisation, reflecting policy's legislative and regulatory focus, though more young people from engineering and technical backgrounds are entering the field, which is encouraging. Public policy degrees also offer an alternative to traditional professional qualifications. For many, a Master's in Public Policy is emerging as an alternative to the MBA, which is often perceived as saturated.

Training and Building a Career: How Young People Act in Policy

Once curiosity turns into intent, young people begin building careers in policy. With no single entrance examination, qualification or established ladder, many turn to formal training. For nearly six decades after Independence, policy education remained embedded in public administration courses for government aspirants and officials. Over the past two decades, public policy programmes have opened the field to students and professionals from diverse backgrounds.

Master's programmes at IIT Delhi and the National Law School of India University, specialised institutions such as the Indian School of Public Policy, and shorter applied programmes such as India House's Policy Pioneers Program have created clearer pathways into the field.

Many, however, enter without specialised training and acquire skills on the job. This reflects the sector's versatility. Unlike careers requiring fixed qualifications, entry-level policy roles often value research, writing, subject knowledge and curiosity over prior policy experience, allowing young people to contribute soon after graduation. The sector also rewards a multidisciplinary approach, which is less common in many other fields. Perspectives from economics, law, engineering, systems thinking and design thinking are considered valuable assets. Career pathways are diverse. Many enter as Young Professionals in government or as Consultants and Associates in the private sector. Fellowships have also become popular. The LAMP Fellowship by PRS and Chief Minister fellowship programmes allow young people to work with legislators, policymakers and bureaucrats early in their careers.

Most encouragingly, public policy opportunities have expanded significantly over the past decade. Today, more than eight states run Chief Minister fellowship programmes, more than 20 ministries and departments have recruited Young Professionals, and an increasing number of entry-level positions are opening across the sector.

Tracing the gaps: Why Much Remains to be done

Despite the changing landscape, significant gaps remain. Career aspirations are still centred on conventional government pathways, while alternative policy careers lack comparable social validation. A 2023 Lokniti-CSDS study found that 61 per cent of young Indians preferred government employment over private jobs or entrepreneurship.

Early-career stability is another concern. An unhealthy pattern of "fellowship hopping" is emerging, with young professionals moving between short-term opportunities because the sector lacks a structured career ladder. This creates uncertainty around tenure and progression. Only a few move into senior roles, while many remain at the lower rungs.

Demand has not kept pace with the growing supply of aspirants. A policy institution may receive more than 200 relevant applications for a single entry-level opening.

Curriculum design for early-career public policy programmes also remains challenging. Curricula and policy frameworks continue to draw heavily from the West, raising questions about their applicability to India.

Public policy also remains poorly defined as a profession.

Young people may enter without understanding the nature of the work, their place in the ecosystem or how entry-level roles can lead to sustainable careers.

Future Outlook: Enabling Youth Action in Policy

Young people's enthusiasm for policy is increasingly visible on social media, where they analyse decisions, question outcomes and debate governance and social change. How can India translate this interest into meaningful action?

The first task is to convert enthusiasm into capability. Policy education must become more accessible, applied and grounded in Indian realities, combining research, data, writing and communication with field immersion, practitioner engagement and live public problems. Curricula should develop Indian case studies, strengthen areas such as ethics, technology and health policy, and draw from the experiences of governments and communities.

The second task is to convert capability into credible opportunity. Young people need clearer career pathways, structured internships, mentorship and stable entry-level roles across government, universities, think tanks and companies, including beyond major cities. Fellowships should lead to longer-term opportunities, employers need clearer competency frameworks, and India must track policy jobs, compensation and career progression. The goal is not to create more policy commentators, but to develop professionals equipped to research, design, implement and evaluate policy.

Finally, India must inspire young policy professionals to pursue higher ideals, not merely career advancement. Nation builders such as Swami Vivekananda can inspire pride, zeal and a spirit of seva in public life. India's youth are ready to shape public policy. The task now is to build an ecosystem that guides their ambition, deepens their capability and sustains their contribution.



Samridh Joshi

Senior Manager and Head of Research
India House

PART 3

What should change

A guest column on where policy ends and politics begins opens the part. Six recommendations follow, specified so that completion can be checked, and then the list of what we will re-measure.



Column · MIT School of Government, Pune

Where Policy Ends and Politics Begins, and Why the Line Should Blur

Everyone wants to work in policy. Almost no one wants to work in politics.

India's policy ecosystem has grown into something worth studying in its own right: think tanks, fellowships, consultancies and a generation of young professionals who describe their ambition as "working in policy." What is striking is how rarely that same generation describes an ambition to work in politics. The two are treated as separate vocations, one respectable and technical, the other messy and best avoided.

This separation is comfortable, but it is also false. Policy is the substance of governance: the evidence, the drafting, the modelling of what a subsidy or a regulation will actually do. Politics is the process by which any of that substance becomes real: the coalitions built, the trade-offs negotiated, the public persuaded or resisted. A brilliant policy paper that nobody can get adopted changes nothing. A political movement with no policy underneath it changes things badly. Young people who want impact, not just employment, need fluency in both, because the professionals who shape outcomes in this country are rarely pure technocrats or pure politicians. They are people who can write the memo and also read the room it will be read in.

The reluctance to engage with politics is understandable. It is adversarial where policy work feels collaborative, and it asks for a kind of public exposure that a research role does not. But that reluctance is already being tested from below. Over the past few months, a youth movement that took the satirical name Cockroach Janta Party grew from an online response to a dismissive remark about unemployed graduates into a nationwide mobilisation over exam integrity, joblessness and institutional accountability, and it did not stop at commentary. It organised, marched, negotiated and eventually saw a central minister resign over its central demand.

Whatever one makes of any single grievance in that movement, the pattern is instructive: a generation often described as allergic to politics proved entirely capable of practising it, once it decided the stakes were worth the exposure. That leaves institutions with an awkward question. Training in policy analysis is now reasonably common. Training in the politics of getting policy adopted, how legislatures actually move, how coalitions form, how public argument is won or lost, remains rare, even as young people are learning that second discipline anyway, on the street rather than in the classroom.

A curriculum that teaches cost-benefit analysis without ever asking a student to build political support for a proposal is teaching half a discipline. This is precisely the ground the MIT School of Government tries to occupy: pairing rigorous policy training with genuine engagement in the political and institutional processes that determine whether good ideas survive contact with the real world, through coursework, simulations and direct exposure to legislative and administrative practice. We do not ask our students to choose between being credible technocrats and being effective political actors. We ask them to be both.

Institutions that take this seriously have to sit deliberately at the intersection, treating political literacy as a core competency rather than an unfortunate necessity, and it is a shift that changes what a classroom looks like. It means fewer purely hypothetical case studies and more contact with the actual machinery of decision-making, sitting in on a committee hearing rather than only reading the transcript afterward, drafting a coalition strategy alongside a policy brief rather than treating the two as separate assignments. Our students leave equipped to do both, because India's institutions need people who can.

Reports like The State of Policy in India 2026 matter because they put a number on something long felt anecdotally: that India's youth are already deeply invested in shaping public life, with a policy community skewing young, largely non-metro and far more gender-balanced than the field around it. That investment should not stop at analysis. It should extend into the harder, more contested work of politics itself, and the institutions training this generation would do well to say so plainly rather than leave it implied.



A generation often described as allergic to politics proved entirely capable of practising it, once it decided the stakes were worth the exposure.



Dr. Namesh Killemsetty
Director

MIT-WPU School of Government, Pune

Six recommendations

Six recommendations, four audiences. Each is derived from a stated finding, written so the audience named can act on it without commissioning anything further, and specified so completion can be checked in August 2027. None is addressed to PPI, and none is something PPI will claim credit for if it happens.



FOR EMPLOYERS AND INSTITUTIONS THAT HIRE

Publish entry-level roles as entry-level roles.

Name and count the roles genuinely open to someone with under two years of experience and no postgraduate specialisation, and publish that count. A role requiring three years is not an entry point, whatever it is titled. The 2027 check is simple: can the organisation state its entry-level count for the year, and did it publish those openings somewhere a stranger in another city could find them?



DERIVED FROM. Finding openings is the most-cited barrier (27%), and jobs rate first of seven supports (76%).



FOR EMPLOYERS AND INSTITUTIONS THAT HIRE

Drop the pedigree proxy from one hiring track, and design the caregiving transition before you need it.

Run one recruitment round scored on a work sample rather than on institution, degree or years served. One round, not the whole system, because one round produces evidence and a whole system produces resistance. Separately, publish re-entry pathways, relocation flexibility and phased-return terms before anyone asks, since a policy that has to be requested filters for confidence.



DERIVED FROM. 62% locate the loss of women at a caregiving break, and nationally 74% of college-educated women have taken one, including 58% of those with no children.



FOR FUNDERS

Fund delivery as well as design, and price a job against an idea.

Move a named share of the portfolio to last-mile execution and the state capacity that carries it, and report that share publicly so it can be tracked. For every seed or incubation programme, run one arithmetic check before approval: what would the same money buy in paid apprenticeships, and how many people would that reach? The answer may still favour the seed programme. It should be on the paper either way.



DERIVED FROM. About half of 411 written answers name the design-to-delivery gap, and jobs rate at 76% against 24% for seed funding, on margins that do not overlap.

04



FOR UNIVERSITIES AND PROGRAMME DESIGNERS

Put a real project and a placement route in the core, and teach how the system moves.

By the 2027 intake, every policy programme should be able to name the live project each student worked on and the route it opened. Not an optional module, and not a capstone that ends in a report nobody reads. Teach how governance actually moves, the single most-requested item in this community's own poll on what a degree should provide. And stop describing technology policy as a technical field, because that description is keeping capable people out of the room.



DERIVED FROM. 51% say real projects with a placement route would fix a policy education; 69% of degree-holders report the theory-to-practice gap; and only 3.9% who hesitate about technology policy cite a genuine technical barrier.

05



FOR GOVERNMENT AND THE PUBLIC SYSTEM

Attach a name, and grievance recourse to every algorithmic decision.

Where AI is used in eligibility or entitlement decisions, publish the accountable officer, the reasoning, and the route of appeal to a human being. Two of those three already appear as principles in the India AI Governance Guidelines. The remaining step is making them binding on the deployer and visible to the citizen, rather than voluntary and visible to the regulator.



DERIVED FROM. 81% want a name, a reason or an appeal route. 3% ask for better technology.

06



FOR GOVERNMENT AND THE PUBLIC SYSTEM

Measure the wait, and make the existing route of appeal findable.

Publish waiting times and quality indicators at facility level, because a queue that is not measured is a queue nobody is accountable for. For the most common service failures, publish the named officer, the form number and the escalation path in one place, in plain language, in more than one language. Most of these routes already exist in law. What does not exist is a person who can find them in five minutes.



DERIVED FROM. 63% name waiting and quality as the hardest part of using public health services against 12% naming cost, and 20% name not knowing their entitlements as the biggest health-system gap, rising to 25% among women.

The 2027 watchlist

A reader of the next edition should be able to open this one beside it and check whether the field has moved. One clarification before the table: PPI measures these numbers and does not claim to move them. Change in them belongs to the actors named in the recommendations.

Theme	The 2026 number	What we are watching
Entry	27% name finding openings as the hardest barrier	Whether it falls, and whether employers can state their entry-level count when asked
Jobs against ideas	76% rate jobs most helpful; 24% rate funding their own idea	Whether the 52-point gap narrows, and whether programming follows it
Education	About a quarter say study prepared them well; 51% want real projects	Whether the first rises and the second falls
Gender	62% 62% locate the loss at a caregiving break; six of eight comparisons hold	Whether a larger base sharpens or softens those six comparisons
Technology	42% require a named accountable human; 3% want better technology	Whether a named human is still the price of trust
Public Health	63% name waiting and quality as the hardest part	Whether it falls, and whether any state publishes facility-level waiting times
Sustainability and belonging	48% assign climate leadership to individuals 75% still weighing entry 88% a few years in	Whether either moves, and what the new follow-up question establishes about why

Figures in the middle column are Pulse Survey 2026 readings (400+ verified respondents), set alongside more than 18,000 community poll selections that shaped the instrument.

Apparatus

Method, precision, sources and limits

Written to the disclosure standard of the American Association for Public Opinion Research. Where an item cannot yet be met, it is stated rather than omitted.

Rankings in this report describe where respondents placed their weight, not which challenges matter; a theme ranking low is a fact about this sample, not a verdict on the theme. None of it is an institutional position.

Instruments, population and recruitment

The Pulse Survey 2026 is a self-administered online questionnaire of 32 substantive questions, fielded from 8 to 28 July 2026. It was distributed across Public Policy India's city chapters and newsletter and, beyond them, through PPI's and its team's public and professional networks: LinkedIn, other social platforms, and partner and peer networks across the policy and impact ecosystem. Respondents were reached across India's 25 largest cities and in smaller cities and rural districts besides. It remains a non-probability, self-selected sample, since respondents chose to answer rather than being drawn at random, and its 413 base responses (reported in the text as more than 400) are what remained after screening. Verified means each response was individually reviewed before inclusion: duplicate submissions were identified through response metadata and the optional contact fields and removed, and incomplete submissions were excluded. Nine community polls, fielded in the weeks before the survey, carry more than 18,000 selections and shaped both the choice of themes and the wording of the instrument.

Precision

Because this is a non-probability sample, no margin of sampling error is reported and none should be inferred. The real uncertainty is greater than any interval quoted here, since self-selection introduces error no interval captures. Each construct is measured by a single item, so question wording contributes an unquantified share of every result; the seven supports were rated independently rather than ranked against one another, which fixes their order more securely than their exact spacing.

Sub-group bases exclude the seven respondents based outside India (region), the seven who chose non-binary or prefer not to choose (gender, for the disclosure reasons set out in Part I), and the three respondents under 18 (age), which is why regional and gender bases sum to 406 and age bases to 410 against a total of 413. This is why gender and regional bases sum to 406 and age bases to 410 against a total of 413. Throughout, a percentage calculated inside a sub-group answers what is true of those people and carries its own base; a percentage across the sample answers how many people are like that. The two are never compared with each other. Poll data are counted in selections, allow multiple choices at times, and are never combined with survey data.

No data were weighted, because no reliable population parameters exist for this workforce: there is no census of people entering India's policy sector against which a sample could be corrected. Open-ended answers were coded to themes derived from the responses rather than imposed in advance, and checked for question-stem echo, meaning answers that repeat the question's own language back.

As a floor on that uncertainty rather than a measure of it, the widest 95% band at a 50-50 split runs to plus or minus 4.8 points on the full sample, and widens as bases shrink. Intervals use the normal approximation, calculated at a 50-50 split where they are widest, so the printed bands are conservative for every result in the report. These bands exist to size the sub-group tests; they are not a margin of error, and quoted without the self-selection caveat above they would overstate what this sample can promise.

Table 5. How much imprecision each base carries, and the smallest gap it can detect

What this shows. Uncertainty roughly triples between the full sample and the smallest sub-group, and the bar for calling a difference a finding rises with it. The bar tracks the base, not the importance of the question.

Base	People	Widest 95% band at a 50–50 split
Full sample	413	±4.8 points
Women	243	±6.3 points
Men	163	±7.7 points
Delhi NCR	128	±8.7 points
Other Metros	127	±8.7 points
Tier 2	94	±10.1 points
Tier 3 and rural	57	±13.0 points
Aged 31 and over	65	±12.2 points

Bands are the widest 95% interval at a 50–50 split for each base. The smallest gap each pairing of bases can establish follows from them: about 14 points for women against men, and about 22 points for the metros against Tier-3 and rural India, which is why several regional contrasts in this report are printed as directional. These detection thresholds are a property of the bases alone, fixed before any result was seen; where a comparison sits near one, the p-value quoted in the text governs. A difference below a threshold has not been disproved, only left unestablished, a distinction that matters most for the groups hardest to reach.

Significance testing

Chi-square tests of independence were used for cross-tabulations, with continuity correction for two-by-two tables, and two-proportion tests for pairwise sub-group comparisons. Write-ins were grouped and rows with under twelve responses excluded. Three cross-tabulations clear the 5% threshold and are reported as findings: geography against the hardest part of the career ($p = 0.002$, reported in counts because the cells are small), career stage against belonging ($p = 0.024$), and geography against financial workability ($p = 0.028$). Three do not clear it and are reported as unresolved: gender against the biggest barrier facing women ($p = 0.166$), gender against belonging ($p = 0.326$), and gender against financial workability ($p = 0.509$).

All comparisons are bivariate. Age, gender, geography and career stage are correlated with one another in any sample of this kind,

so a difference reported by age may carry some part of a geography or gender difference with it; multivariate models are planned for the next edition, when the sub-group bases can support them. Beyond the tests above, a further six sub-group comparisons were tested and could not be settled, five of them regional; unsettled means the sample was too small to tell, not that the groups are the same.

With more than twenty sub-group comparisons made across the report, roughly one or two will look significant purely by chance, and no correction has been applied for this: individual sub-group readings are therefore best read as hypotheses for the next wave, while the ten findings in the executive summary rest on full-sample results and are unaffected. The complete table of all twenty-one comparisons, settled and unsettled, is published in the online annexe alongside the dataset.

Three terms used throughout

- A **p-value** tests whether a gap between two groups is large enough to take seriously given how many people are in each. Anything at or under 0.05 is treated here as established.
- **Unresolved** marks a comparison this survey tested and could not settle. It is not a finding that the two groups are the same; several may well resolve in 2027 on a larger base.
- **Directional** marks a read resting on a base too small to establish a difference. The direction is worth knowing; the size is not reliable. Such reads are printed rather than hidden, always with the base attached.

The sample against a known benchmark

No population parameters exist for this workforce, so the closest available benchmark is PPI's own late-2025 membership survey. Against it, the Pulse sample is 58.8% women to 55.6%, and 39.5% men to 42.7%. Roughly three points either way, which indicates a composition consistent with the wider population this survey drew from. It is not evidence that the sample represents India, and no such claim is made.

Ethics

Names and email addresses were collected as optional fields. No respondent is named anywhere in this report. Quotations appear only from respondents who gave explicit consent, and illustrate a coded theme rather than the distribution of answers. A de-identified dataset is intended for release under a Creative Commons licence, alongside the questionnaire and codebook.

The report was researched, written and produced by PPI and STRIDE almost entirely out of our own resources, is free to read, and exists with the purpose of serving as a novel, public repository of knowledge and insights. Every essay is written in the contributing author's personal capacity, commissioned to a shared brief, format and length before contributors saw any result, which accounts for their common structure; the arguments and positions are entirely the authors' own. Corrections found after publication are logged in the online edition with a dated note.



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