

Listening Cities

Reconnecting Citizens, Municipal
Leaders & Local Governance

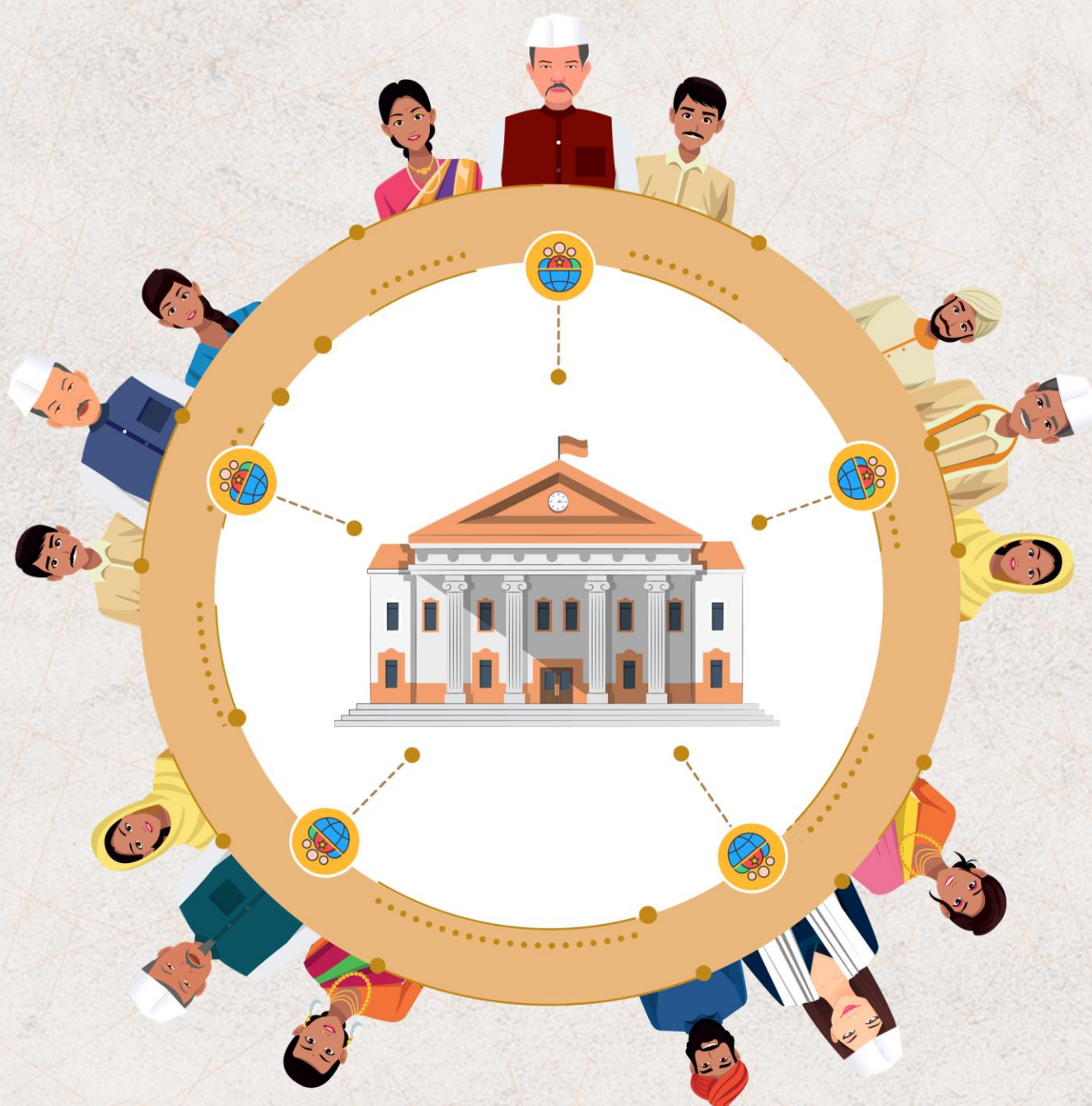


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01 Executive Summary

Municipal governments are the everyday face of democracy—and the quiet architects of a city's future. From managing schools and roads to ensuring safety and sanitation, their decisions shape how we live. But beyond service delivery, they hold the power to transform cities into vibrant growth engines by fostering innovation, enabling local enterprise, and building infrastructure that drives opportunity for all. One of the key pillars of our local government ecosystem is “Citizen Engagement”. We believe in the principle of citizen involvement in local governance is critical for building responsive, accountable, and inclusive systems. When people actively participate in decision-making, they provide valuable insights that help align policies with real community needs. This engagement fosters trust between citizens and local authorities, creating a shared sense of ownership and responsibility for outcomes.

Recognizing the need to strengthen this partnership, Primus Partners conducted a perception survey of urban residents, and the findings are developed into a study titled ***"Listening Cities: Reconnecting Citizens, Municipal Leaders & Local Governance,"*** reveals both challenges and opportunities to reinvigorate local democracy.

Few of the key insights from the survey are:

- About 38% of respondents either did not vote or chose NOTA in the last municipal election, revealing a powerful chance to reinvigorate local democracy by making elections more relevant through youth councils, participatory budgeting, and tangible links between votes and neighborhood improvements.
- With 70% of citizens unaware of or unable to participate in statutory forums like Ward Sabhas. These underutilized forums could become engines of co-creation if reimagined with hybrid (digital + physical) formats, thematic working groups, and clear pathways from ideas to implementation.
- Around 63% find it difficult to approach their local representatives, highlighting the need for consistent, two-way communication that transforms sporadic grievance reporting into ongoing co-creation of community solutions.
- A significant 78% of respondents perceive a disconnect between themselves and their elected officials, opening an opportunity to improve accountability and coordination with administrative machinery, ultimately affecting city service delivery.

The analysis highlights a sense of disconnect between citizens, elected municipal members, and local governance mechanisms. Citizens increasingly view local elections as symbolic and often feel unable to contribute meaningfully to the development of the city. The limited engagement between municipal leaders and citizens hinders the full realization of effective governance and inclusive service delivery. This signals an urgent need to revitalize municipal governance to better address real community aspirations.

India's cities, poised at the frontline of economic and demographic change, must also lead a revolution in governance. We can foster unprecedented collaboration by redefining elected roles as community partners, simplifying policy access, revitalizing engagement, and institutionalizing dialogue channels. Streamlining leader-executive dynamics will further amplify impact. To achieve this, a six-pronged strategic framework can lead the way:

- **Demystifying Municipal Governance:**
Create citizen-friendly resources to explain governance structures. When citizens understand how things get done and who does what, engagement and trust naturally increase.
- **Building Capacity of Elected Representatives:**
Equip municipal leaders with training in citizen-centric governance, participatory decision-making, and responsive administration.
- **Reviving Forums for Local Participation:**
Strengthen ward committees and community dialogues, integrating online and offline mechanisms for wider and continuous citizen engagement.
- **Creating a Transparent Civic Trail:**
Share government actions transparently—publishing decisions, budgets, and project statuses in real-time, making governance visible and accountable.
- **Evaluating Performance with Citizen-Driven Tools:**
Institutionalize feedback through citizen scorecards, social audits and participatory budgeting to measure the effectiveness of municipal services.
- **Crowdsourcing and Collaborative Governance:**
Use digital tools to allow citizens to report issues, suggest ideas, and co-design priorities. Collaborative governance fosters faster problem-solving and stronger city ownership.

Urban governance must now be reimagined not as administration, but as dynamic partnerships between leaders and citizens. If we act decisively, Indian cities can become models of participatory democracy and shared prosperity. The path forward demands institutionalizing transparency, leveraging technology for real-time accountability, and expanding ULBs' mandate to prioritize local resilience, equity, and innovation. Imagine cities where budgets are co-designed with residents, grievances trigger systemic solutions, and every voice—from students to street vendors—shapes neighborhood development. This is the promise of Viksit Bharat: urban spaces where trust is rebuilt through collaboration, and municipalities evolve into dynamic platforms for shared prosperity.

02 Understanding the Disconnect

A. Background

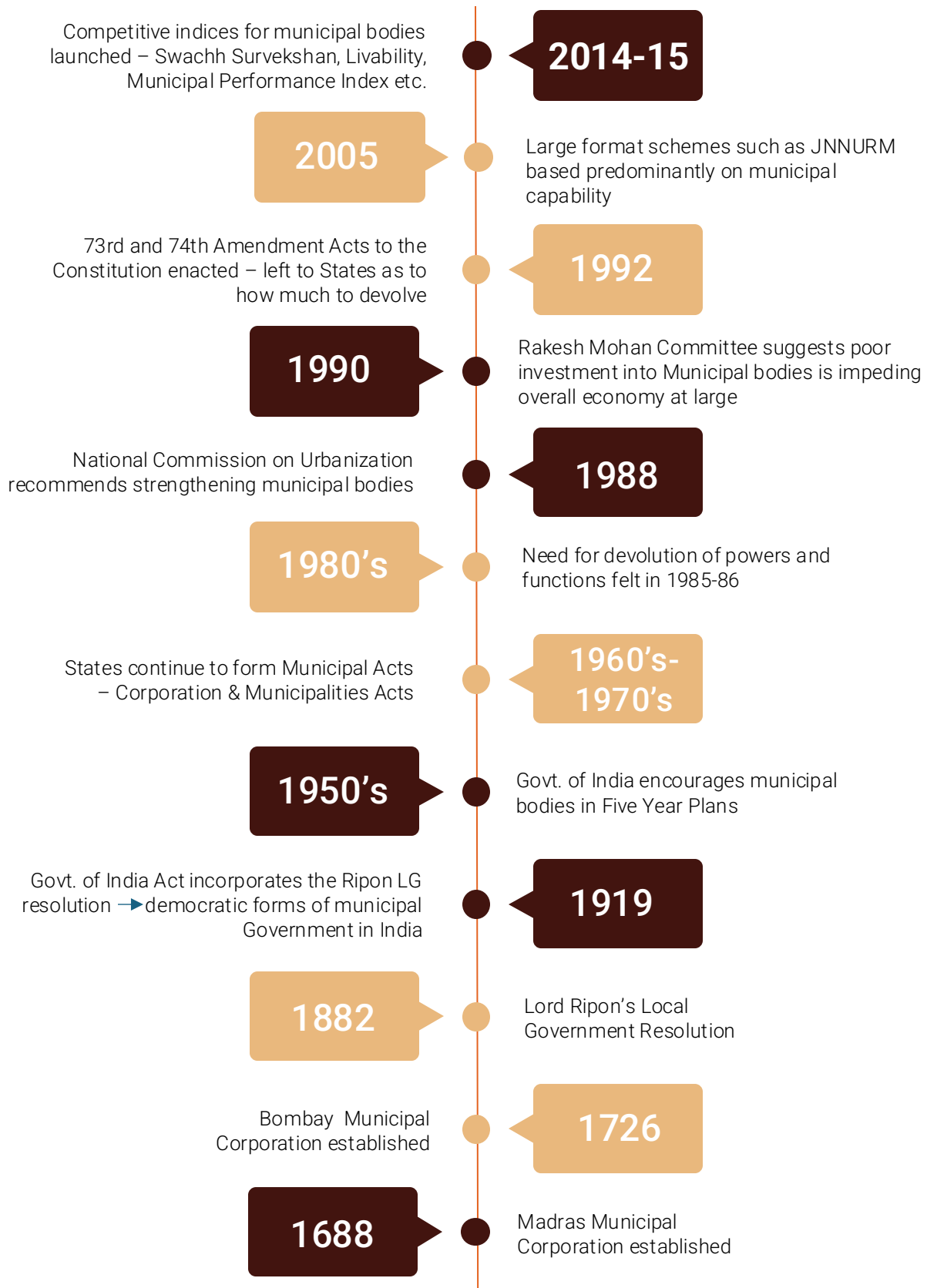
India is expected to have urbanized to around 37% by the time the upcoming census is carried out, retaining the rate of urbanization observed over the past few decades. However, it is anticipated that over time, municipal bodies will play a bigger part in fostering and sustaining urbanization. Despite having elected members and being constitutional entities, municipal bodies' general accountability to the public is still a major concern. Municipal bodies have fluctuated between being administrator-driven (unelected) and public representative entities. Nonetheless, in both their avatars they have upheld their primary goal of providing basic civic services, such as water supply, sanitation, and park and garden maintenance.

The Constitution of India (74th Amendment) Act, 1992 enforced a mandate of 18 functions under the twelfth schedule to municipal bodies, thus reinforcing their role as service providers. With increasing urbanization, fiscal liberalism, and consumerism, the erstwhile citizen has generally transformed into a consumer – demanding answerability from the municipal body as service providers against the user charges and taxes that they pay.





Evolution of municipal bodies



What does a municipal body do?



The Constitution of India (74th Amendment) Act, 1992 assigns 18 functions to municipal bodies, covering regulation, service delivery, and infrastructure management. Municipal bodies ensure these services are provided, either directly or through partnerships. However, states decide which services to delegate based on feasibility, resources, and municipal capacity. This flexibility allows municipal bodies to focus on essential services while ensuring efficient governance and public service delivery tailored to local needs.



Key Findings



Understanding and Engagement in Local Elections

A collection of observations indicating the extent of public awareness and participation in municipal elections highlighting voter engagement and participation trends.

Approximately **79%** respondents were **aware of the last municipal elections**.



Out of **79%**, about **14%** recalling they were held **more than five years ago**.



Mrs. Kamalti Devi
Homemaker
55 Years
Patna, Bihar

Nurturing Indians

Urban homemakers with higher education, prioritizing family over careers. Actively involved in children's education and community life, their role extends beyond mere management to active participation in their children's education and activities, embodying the essence of social inclusivity and empowerment.

"I always encourage my family to vote, but when I see that I don't have any voice in ecosystem and my representatives are unapproachable, I wonder if my vote truly makes a difference. ."

Around **38%** of the respondents **did not vote or chose NOTA** in the last municipal elections.



Around **40%** of respondents **do not know the name** of their elected representative or Mayor.



Over **51%** of the respondents **were unaware of any electoral promises** made by any party during last municipal elections.



**Ms. Alyssum Aski
Megam Momin**
Student
22 Years
Tura, Meghalaya

Builders of Tomorrow

Urban and semi-urban students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, pursuing education, vocational skills, and extracurriculars. Tech-savvy and globally connected.

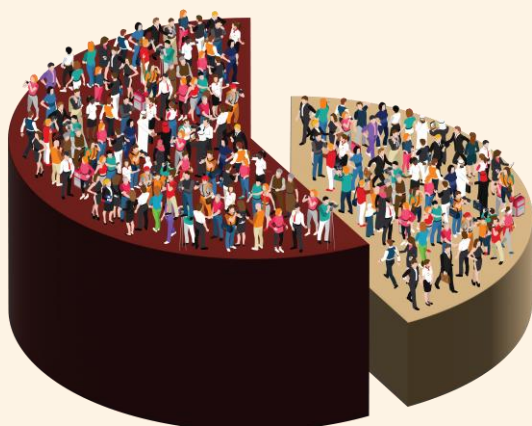
"We learn about democracy in books, but I have never seen my local councillor address issues that matter to my community or neighbourhood, until it's a political issue."



Civic Engagement

Evaluates public participation in forums, decision-making processes, and interactions with local representatives, highlighting the extent of community engagement in shaping local policies and governance.

About **55%** of respondents were **unaware of the roles and responsibilities** of functionaries of local government.



Around **25%** of the respondents believed that **statutory gathering do not exist** while **45%** responded that they were aware of the concept but had **no information/ opportunity to attend such meetings**.



Ms. Neeta Shah
Working Professional
34 Years
Delhi

Corporate Captains

High-income professionals with postgraduate degrees and corporate expertise across industries. As CEOs, advisors, and specialists, they hold significant positions in the corporate world.

"Between work and daily responsibilities, I barely have time to attend community meetings, but even if I did, I wouldn't know where to go or whom to approach."

Only **15%** claimed that they were **invited or attended** the public forum meetings; however, **85% couldn't recall or said no meeting** was held.



About **42% never heard** from their representatives on any platform, while **only 6% heard regularly**.



Over **55%** of the respondents were **unaware of any local development planned/ happening in the neighbourhood**.



Mr. Lakhbir
Security Guard
24 Years
Mumbai, Maharashtra

Pillars of Progress

Engaged in physical labour, construction, security guard services, manufacturing, or similar sectors. Their educational background is often limited, and many are migrants seeking better opportunities in urban settings just to find minimal food and shelter. Their work is characterized by physical demands, long hours, and often challenging working conditions.

"I want to participate in Ward Sabhas to raise local issues and my previous councillor was very active on ground and used to meet us on regular intervals...but the new councillor is unapproachable. Councillors should be available to the people at fixed hours. We need leaders who listen."



Responsiveness of elected representatives

Examines how elected representatives address public concerns, engage with constituents, and respond to community needs, highlighting their effectiveness

About **63%** of the respondents felt that it is **inconvenient to approach** their local elected member.



87% respondents were **dissatisfied or unaware of existing communication channel.**



Mr. Sharan Gakhar
Backend developer

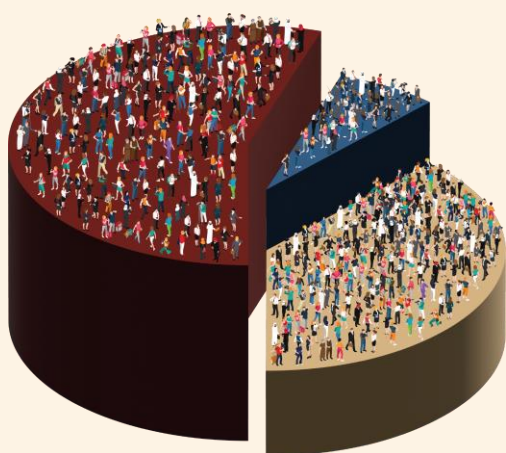
22 Years
Chandigarh

Global Indians

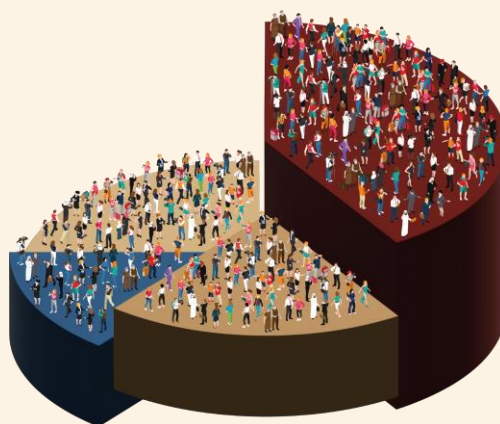
Emerging talent and early professionals with impressive educational backgrounds in engineering, computer science, or related fields. These unmarried or newlywed individuals are spread across continents living independently in major global cities.

"I often raise issues in my locality on social media, but they only get addressed if they gain enough traction—otherwise, they're ignored. We need a system that truly connects digital platforms with urban governance."

Only **7%** respondents **feel satisfied** and **~ 55%** were **dissatisfied** from the responsiveness of the councillor.



Out of people who engaged with their elected members, **41%** met for **grievance redressal**, **14%** for **statutory certificates**, and **20%** for **development proposals**.



Ms. Savita Swami

Auxiliary Nurse
Midwife (ANM)

53 Years

Bikaner Govt. Hospital,
Panchayat Samiti,
Rajasthan

Resilient Indians

Hailing from professional backgrounds such as healthcare, law and order, pharmaceutical, and hospitality, they live in modest urban settings and work as essential workers in challenging environments.

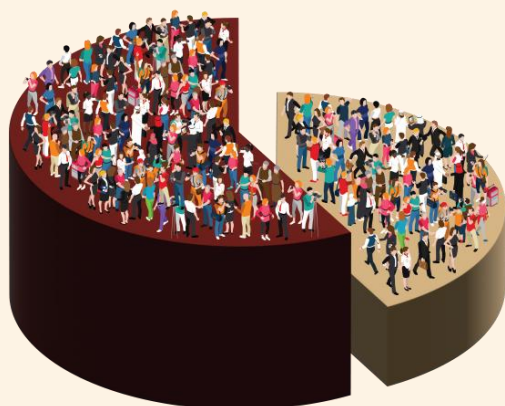
"As a nurse with long working hours and I find it hard to take part in my city's development. Outdated systems make it difficult for people like me to engage. If I had the option to voice my concerns online, stay informed, and contribute without the hassle of attending in-person meetings, it would make participation much more accessible and inclusive."



Accountability and transparency

Examines accountability and transparency of elected representatives highlighting the importance of building public trust

58% of the respondents conveyed **inefficiency in the delivery** of local govt services mainly due to a **lack of coordination between representatives and officials.**



78% of the respondents feel that there is a **disconnect between citizens and Elective representatives** leading to poor service delivery in urban centers.



Mr. Rafique Ahmed
Retired
70 Years
Jamshedpur, Jharkhand

Golden Legacy

Senior citizens in urban areas that are the pillars of wisdom, resilience, and community spirit. With their vast experience, they contribute to civic discussions, mentor younger generations, and actively shape the social and cultural fabric of cities.

"I have seen many local governments, but accountability has worsened over time. Earlier officials/mayors/ward members used to engage with people, but now they seem unreachable."

About **82%** of respondents were **unaware of the budget** of their ULB and feel that same in **non-transparent**.



55% respondents agreed that **elected representatives are accountable** for development decisions in their areas.



Community Educator

Educated individuals teaching in government schools, Anganwadis and colleges, actively participating in educational initiatives within the City. Passionate about literacy, they drive educational initiatives while balancing family life.

Mrs Shiwani Mamgain
Teacher (PGT)
45 Years
Dehradun, Uttarakhand

"Civic education is key, but even as a teacher, I struggle to find clear information about municipal budgets and decisions that affect our neighbourhoods."



Ms. Manjulata
Street Vendor
34 Years
Nellore, Andhra Pradesh

City Sustainers

Individuals with basic education, sustaining their families through street vending, tailoring, cobbling, and crafting in urban areas. Vital to the local economy's fabric with their resilient work ethics and adaptability.

"A lot of time we need support of our local representatives on issues such as vendor licencing, encroachment challenges etc. but we don't know how to approach them whom to contact. They don't even acknowledge our struggles to earn a living on the streets."



Mr. Lakhan
Delivery Agent
32 Years
Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

Urban Lifelines

Urban gig workers in roles like delivery services, driving and freelance work, among others. They exhibit high mobility and adaptability to technology. Juggling multiple gigs, their primary focus is on achieving financial stability and accessing better opportunities.

"I interact with countless people and places daily and see issues firsthand—broken roads, delayed services, open potholes—but I rarely have time to complain. If the system made participation easier, people like me could serve as a vital link between citizens and the government, helping to create real change."



Mr. Simon Joseph
Local Kirana Store
Owner
41 Years
Bengaluru, Karnataka

Enterprising Indians

Retail business owners with high school or college education, rooted in urban neighbourhoods. Their shops are local landmarks, blending commerce with community.

"Business is tough when roads are broken, and garbage piles up outside. I have tried reaching out to our representatives, but no one listens."



Trends Observed

Millennials in Focus: The Political Core of Urban Respondents



A significant proportion of respondents (70%) are under 40 years of age, with millennials (aged 30-40) making up the bulk. This age group demonstrates higher levels of political awareness and participation in local elections. However, their engagement remains sporadic, often driven by immediate needs rather than sustained civic involvement. This trend highlights the potential of millennials as key stakeholders in urban governance while underlining the need for strategies that harness their political awareness, aspirations and, preferences to foster long-term civic engagement.

Urban Services Viewed as Consumables: A Citizen Perspective

Respondents see municipal services like water, sanitation, and roads as products they pay for rather than shared responsibilities. This mindset reduces accountability and discourages cooperation between citizens and the government. When people view services as consumable goods, they are less likely to engage in civic activities or take ownership of municipal issues.



Career-Life Style-Aspiration OR Civic Duty: Priorities of Urban Respondents



Respondents are more focused on their career growth and financial stability, which leaves little room for involvement in civic activities. As a result, there is low interest in public forums, municipal budgets, and interactions with local governance. Even though platforms like ward sabhas and mohalla samities exist by law, many people don't know about them, showing a lack of proper outreach and usage which also leads to apathy from supply side. This trend highlights how personal goals often take priority over community engagement, making it important to raise awareness and provide incentives to encourage more civic participation.

Disconnect in Urban Governance

While 47% of respondents are aware of councillor responsibilities, 55% hold them accountable for decisions impacting their areas. However, 58% believe poor coordination between elected representatives and the executive is the main reason for inadequate physical infrastructure. This disconnect impedes effective governance and undermines public trust. Strengthening collaboration between elected officials and executives through institutional reforms and better communication channels can address these systemic challenges and improve service delivery.



Grievance Redressal Dominates Interactions between citizen and elected representatives



Grievance redressal remains the main reason citizens reach out to their councillors/mayors, even though formal public grievance systems are available. Other forms of citizen participation, such as for area planning, feedback, community engagement etc to strategize local development, seem to have minimal impact. Satisfaction with grievance redressal mechanisms is mostly neutral, suggesting these systems are not highly effective. This may be because councillors often lack the capacity or authority to fully address issues. Strengthening grievance redressal mechanisms, while also empowering councillors with better resources, training, and a broader mandate to involve citizens in developmental planning, can improve satisfaction and foster greater trust in local governance.





Understanding the logic behind the observations



Service Provider vs. Strategic Planner

Municipal bodies in India are primarily seen as service providers rather than strategic planners for local development. Globally, especially in developed countries, basic services are often managed by private players under municipal oversight. This shift allows municipal bodies to focus on strategic initiatives. In contrast, Indian municipal bodies often prioritize service delivery over broader planning, limiting their impact on sustainable urban development.



Citizen Preference for Higher-Level Representatives

Citizens tend to approach elected representatives from state legislatures or Parliament rather than local representatives for any assistance. This preference stems from the overlapping roles and limited visibility of municipal elected body representatives. To address this, distinct roles and responsibilities for local representatives must be defined and communicated effectively.



Role of Elected Representatives

In regions/state where service delivery is handled by specialized parastatal agencies, elected representatives tend to focus on public grievances and gain higher trust from citizens. Conversely, in municipal bodies tasked with direct service delivery, elected representatives often lose visibility and public engagement, as their roles become secondary to executive decision-making. This dynamic underscores the need for clarity in their roles and enhanced public accountability.



Transparency and Accountability Challenges

In regions/state where service delivery is handled by specialized parastatal agencies, elected representatives tend to focus on public grievances and gain higher trust from citizens. Conversely, in municipal bodies tasked with direct service delivery, elected representatives often lose visibility and public engagement, as their roles become secondary to executive decision-making. This dynamic underscore the need for clarity in their roles and enhanced public accountability.

03 What would be a workable strategy?

To improve public participation in municipal governance, we must first strengthen accountability, build trust, and ensure transparency in governance. When citizens trust the system and understand how decisions are made, they are more likely to engage. These values create the foundation for meaningful and sustained civic involvement. This can be achieved through the following six strategies:



1. Demystifying Municipal Governance

A sustained campaign by both the State and municipal governments can help citizens understand municipal administration processes, their responsibilities, and how they fit into the governance framework. Many citizens remain unaware of "who does what" within the municipal structure, making them disengaged from civic affairs. By simplifying the complexity of governance and highlighting the role of citizens, the campaign can create awareness and foster trust. Tools like infographics, public seminars, and easy-to-access digital platforms can effectively demystify processes, empowering citizens to participate actively in decision-making.

Why It Matters?

- Municipal systems are generally perceived as opaque
- Citizens often lack awareness of the appropriate officials or departments to approach
- Consequently, this situation results in frustration and diminished civic participation



Charting the course for future: Key Principals



Processes

- People should be aware of the workflows and processes of key functions and citizen services.
- This awareness will lead to better understanding and right expectations from municipal ecosystem.



Policies

- All the key policies and acts should be made accessible to citizens in a simplified manner.
- This will lead to improved insights of functionaries and roles of municipal functions and regulations.



People

- Citizens should be provided with clear information on roles of key executive officials, elected members and citizens themselves.
- This will improve deeper knowledge on roles and responsibilities, dependencies, and citizens in different capacities.

Potential Interventions To Be Considered



Digital Knowledge Campaigns: Targeted campaigns through government portals and social media using short-form videos to explain key roles and responsibilities, processes and citizen services.



Traditional Outreach: Utilize infographic and visual communication using posters and illustrations in Govt. offices, transport hubs and community centers to answer common governance related questions.

Outcomes: Empowered Citizens And Accountable Governance



Reinforced Accountability



Strengthened Public Participation



Improved Govt. Responsiveness



Fostered Public Trust



Promoted Inclusiveness



2. Building Capacity of Elected Representatives for Citizen-Centric Governance

Elected representatives sit at the intersection of policy and people, yet many begin their tenures without a structured understanding of how municipal systems function. To bridge this gap, capacity-building must evolve into a sustained, multi-modal effort—far beyond one-off workshops. It should help representatives not only understand the nuts and bolts of municipal governance but also internalize the critical role that citizen participation plays in building inclusive, responsive cities. Well-designed training modules must enable them to navigate municipal laws, grasp service delivery workflows, and most importantly, cultivate a mindset that sees the citizen as a partner, not a passive beneficiary. When leaders embrace listening, co-creation, and accountability, they unlock a new kind of leadership—one that builds trust from the ground up.

Why It Matters?

- Building the capacity of elected members enables proactive governance, institutional accountability, and better alignment between political intent & administration.
- Understanding the principles of citizen-centric governance helps elected leaders become more accessible, empathetic, and responsive to public needs.
- When elected members are well-versed in urban systems and oversight mechanisms, they can better prioritize local issues and coordinate effectively with municipal departments.
- Empowered leaders can institutionalize citizen participation through structured platforms & inclusive decision-making processes which enhances transparency.



Charting the course for future: Key Principals



Build Foundational Capacities through Structured Orientation

- Design interventions that prioritize systematic induction programs for newly elected representatives covering core municipal functions, budgeting, service delivery, and governance protocols.
- This ensures a uniform baseline understanding and empowers them to make informed, strategic decisions from the start.













Embed Citizen-Centricity in Leadership Development

- All capacity-building efforts should cultivate values of empathy, transparency, and responsiveness. This includes training on community engagement, communication skills, and grievance redressal mechanisms
- It helps leaders build trust-based relationships with constituents.

Potential Interventions To Be Considered

- Design structured onboarding programmes for newly elected representatives, covering municipal functions, budgeting, and stakeholder roles.
- Localized municipal governance handbooks in local languages explaining councillors' roles & workflows with case studies.
- Host webinars & virtual training sessions on citizen-centric governance, communication skills, & participatory tools.
- Facilitate simulation-based training modules to navigate real-life governance challenges.
- Establish peer-learning circles and monthly knowledge exchanges among councillors for collective problem-solving.

Outcomes: Empowered Citizens And Accountable Governance

-  **Reinforced Accountability** 
-  **Strengthened Public Participation** 
-  **Improved Govt. Responsiveness** 
-  **Fostered Public Trust** 
-  **Promoted Inclusiveness** 

3. Reviving Forums For Local Participation

Improving citizen participation requires a two-pronged approach: organizing forums for dialogue and encouraging community involvement. Reviving platforms like ward committees and mohalla samitis is critical, alongside engaging residents through associations and workplaces. Digital tools should complement these efforts but not replace physical interactions. By fostering discussions on local issues and decisions, municipalities can build a participatory culture. Active involvement ensures citizens feel invested in governance, encouraging accountability and informed decision-making at the grassroots level.

Why It Matters?

- Enables direct dialogue, promoting inclusive, community-led decisions.
- Creates space for open discussion, driving responsive, and accountable governance.
- Encourages active engagement, strengthening civic ownership, and public trust.



Charting the course for future: Key Principals



Structure Dialogue Forums (74th CAA)

- Revive Ward Committees and Mohalla Samitis to enable direct engagement between citizens and municipal authorities.
- Create platforms and forums for citizen participation and dialogue exchange.
- This will invoke a sense of contribution and feeling of belongingness with the local development, which will ultimately lead to improved trust in the municipal ecosystem



Encourage Community Driven Initiatives

- Create platforms and processes for citizen participation in social audits, budget preparation, master planning, volunteer projects etc.
- Digital tools to support in enabling real-time citizen reporting.
- Combining offline action with digital tools to build lasting civic responsibility.

Potential Interventions To Be Considered

- Participatory Budget Portals.
- Virtual Ward committees and Mohalla samitis.
- Social Audit systems.
- Civic Engagement Platforms.
- Neighbourhood Associations & RWAs.
- Awareness Rallies & Walkathons.
- A day with elected member campaign for students.

Outcomes: Empowered Citizens And Accountable Governance



Reinforced Accountability



Strengthened Public Participation



Improved Govt. Responsiveness



Fostered Public Trust



Promoted Inclusiveness



4. Creating A Transparent Civic Trail

Civic engagements must be backed by structured documentation, such as meeting minutes, action reports, and project updates, which are made publicly accessible. For citizens, this ensures transparency and an avenue to monitor governance. For elected representatives, it enables informed discussions and effective decision-making during council meetings. An accessible clear document trail fosters mutual accountability, ensuring every stakeholder can track progress, highlight concerns, and collaborate on solutions, thereby enhancing overall trust in governance.

Why It Matters?

- Enables real-time tracking of government actions and active public participation
- Supports informed decision-making and accountability by elected members and government officials.
- Consequently, it builds trust through transparency and mutual accountability.



Charting the course for future: Key Principals



Access To Key Documents And Decisions

- Key documents such as meeting minutes, action reports, and project updates should be publicly accessible through official government websites.
- This ensures information is traceable and reliable, fostering greater transparency and strengthening accountability in municipal governance



Use Of Technology For Tamper-proof And Accessible Systems To Improve Trust

- Use technology to secure the citizen-centric data and provide simplified access to citizens.
- This ensures every record is traceable and auditable, fostering greater trust and confidence in local government operations.

Potential Interventions To Be Considered

A digital public platform that:

- Digitise and archive citizen-centric documents and provide trail.
- Provide easy and instant access to information through QR code.
- Use social media to share documents and updates.
- Integrate blockchain for maintaining tamper-proof records.

Outcomes: Empowered Citizens And Accountable Governance



Reinforced Accountability



Strengthened Public Participation



Improved Govt. Responsiveness



Fostered Public Trust



Promoted Inclusiveness



5. Evaluating Performance with Citizen driven tools

Tools such as citizen scorecards, balanced scorecards, and social audits can help evaluate the effectiveness of municipal services and representatives. These tools provide measurable insights into governance performance and ensure accountability. While several Indian municipal laws adopted these tools in the 2000s, their lack of consistent follow-up has limited their impact. Regularly implementing and monitoring such tools can bridge the gap between citizens and governance, fostering an environment of trust and transparency.

Why It Matters?

- Internal audits and admin reviews miss the citizen perspective—the actual service users.
- Citizen-driven tools offer quantifiable feedback from ground-level data to improve service delivery and policy decisions.
- These tools turn passive recipients of services into active participants in governance, strengthening civic engagement, and ownership.



Charting the course for future: Key Principals



Institutionalize Citizen Feedback

- Establish formal mechanisms within municipal systems to regularly collect, analyse, and act on citizen feedback.
- It strengthens transparency and responsiveness in governance, leading to better service delivery and greater public trust in municipal institutions.



Citizen-Based Performance Evaluation Tools

- Citizens should be given direct access to evaluate municipal service performance and allowed actively participate in the decision-making process.
- Empowering citizens to evaluate municipal services and participate in decision-making fosters accountability, inclusivity, and responsiveness in municipal governance.

Potential Interventions To Be Considered

- Deploy citizen scorecards for direct feedback from citizens on municipal services.
- Use feedback portals for quick grievance redressal.
- Integrate digital polls and surveys to gather public opinion on specific issues.
- Implement participatory budget to democratise decision-making on public fund allocation.

Outcomes: Empowered Citizens And Accountable Governance



Reinforced Accountability



Strengthened Public Participation



Improved Govt. Responsiveness



Fostered Public Trust



Promoted Inclusiveness



6. Crowdsourcing and Collaborative Governance for Enhanced Service Quality

Provision of standing and subject committees represent citizens and can negotiate with service providers on issues like tariffs, service quality, and reliability. These committees can act as supplementary platforms where citizens and elected representatives interact directly with providers, ensuring transparency and accountability. Examples like School Management Committees under the Right to Education Act show how collaborative models can work. Expanding such mechanisms to other services allows for participatory governance and strengthens citizens' trust in local representatives.

Why It Matters?

- The feedback of the end user on quality of services should be given prime importance.
- Creates direct, institutionalized channels for citizens to influence service delivery.
- Strengthens participatory governance by making citizens equal partners in oversight and decision-making.



Charting the course for future: Key Principals



Co-develop Urban Priorities with Citizens

- Citizens should be involved in setting service benchmarks, defining quality standards, identifying infrastructure needs, shaping local solutions, and preparing budget.
- It will ensure municipal services meet local needs, optimal resource use, and improved public ownership.



Leverage Real-time Data in Decision Making

- Incorporate real-time data citizens provide to validate infrastructure data and monitor asset health in real time.
- It fosters dialogue between citizens, representatives, and service providers, enabling problem-solving and building participatory governance.

Potential Interventions To Be Considered

- Deploy Citizen Service Oversight Platforms for citizens to act as ears and eyes service delivery and variations.
- Use mobile-based tools to allow citizens to geo-tag broken infrastructure (e.g., potholes, water leaks).
- Integrate keywords-based algorithms in govt. Social media handles to source issues related to municipal services.
- Develop GIS-based visualisations from citizen reports to identify infrastructure stress zones.

Outcomes: Empowered Citizens And Accountable Governance



Reinforced Accountability



Strengthened Public Participation



Improved Govt. Responsiveness



Fostered Public Trust



Promoted Inclusiveness



04 The Space Between Elections and Engagement

As India advances on the path to becoming a Viksit Bharat, the role of its cities must evolve from being mere infrastructure development centres to becoming platforms for democratic renewal and inclusive governance leading to sustainable social and economic development. Around the world, successful cities are not just defined by their infrastructure or investment portfolios, but by the vitality of their civic relationships — particularly the bond between citizens and their elected representatives. This relationship is the lifeblood of effective governance, not limited to the act of voting every five years, but nourished through consistent dialogue, participatory decision-making, and collective accountability.

In India, however, local governments, our Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) often remain underpowered and under recognized. The potential they hold to democratize urban development and deepen local governance is yet to be unlocked. If our cities are to drive India's next developmental leap, we must urgently shift focus to what happens between elections — in the streets, ward meetings, grievance platforms, and citizen assemblies. Today, this critical space is undernourished in India. Municipal governments often find themselves confined to executing basic service delivery, while citizens engage sporadically, mostly during crises or elections. The disconnect has grown, partly due to structural under-empowerment, and partly due to a lack of consistent civic engagement. Yet, if India's cities are to be the laboratories of innovation, resilience, and inclusion this disconnect must be addressed head-on.

To realize this, we must move toward a people-first, future-ready urban governance model driven by :-

- Creation of a New Culture of Civic Engagement to encourage co-governance. Make participation convenient, continuous, and meaningful — especially for the youth and underserved communities.
- Reinvigoration of Municipal Leadership with structure capacity building initiatives focused on urban planning, citizen communication, and digital tools for governance. Equip them to act not just as representatives, but as civic entrepreneurs and change-makers.
- Re-engineer the horizon of ULBs to include community resilience planning, citizen well-being, data-driven policymaking, and local economic development. A broader remit will naturally require deeper citizen involvement and greater strategic vision.

A new vision for local governance must focus on transforming the municipal experience for both citizens and elected representatives. We must treat municipal leadership not as a junior arm of government, but as a critical democratic institution — on par with state legislatures in terms of relevance and responsibility. Only then will the role of local governance shine through as a space of political empowerment and community-led progress.

India's urban future cannot be built on concrete and code alone. It must rest on trust, collaboration, and shared purpose between governments and people. If cities become democratic anchors , participatory, transparent, and inclusive , they will serve not just as engines of economic growth, but as the foundation of a truly Viksit Bharat.





05. Annexure Survey Blueprint

To explore the hypothesis of the disconnect between citizens and local government, including elected representatives and municipal bodies, a survey has been conducted. The aim was to assess the degree of public connection with elected representatives at the local level and understand the nature of these interactions. The survey also examines whether citizens perceive elected officials as integral contributors to municipal operations and daily governance which directly or indirectly impact their quality of life.

The survey was structured into six thematic categories, providing a holistic view of governance and public sentiment:

1



Demographic
Information

2



Awareness of
Local Governance

3



Engagement and
Participation

4



Perception of
Service Delivery

5



Governance,
Accountability and
Coordination

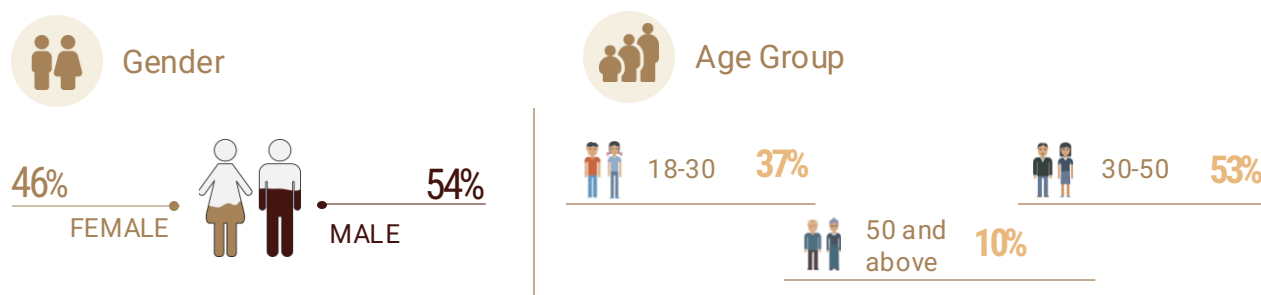
6



Improvement
Opportunities
(Open ended)



With over 2,547 responses received, the survey was conducted exclusively online, reflecting input from individuals proficient in English and comfortable with digital forms. Although it does not capture the views of the entire population, the results provide meaningful insights into a segment of urban residents.



The survey data indicates that 70% of respondents were aged 40 or younger, with males accounting for roughly two-thirds of participants. No identifiable or location-based data was gathered, a deliberate decision to avoid regional biases linked to varying municipal laws or cultural nuances.

In order to analyze and corroborate the findings, we reviewed relevant resources, including the municipal legislation of various States, scholarly research on governance practices, public reports on compliance with reforms under recent Centrally Sponsored Schemes, and financial statements from municipal bodies.

Collectively, these findings along with observation from the secondary references provide insights as regards:



Perception on role of elected representatives, their importance or relevance in day-to-day matters.



Structural or other factors that may have led to the situation/shift



Revisiting time-tested practices to enhance trust



New practices that hold potential in rebuilding trust and accountability of the municipal body as to citizens



The general interest or disinterest of the public at large in civic affairs other than consumer interests.

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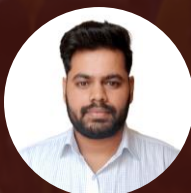


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