



JANAAGRAHA CENTRE FOR CITIZENSHIP & DEMOCRACY

Voter List Management

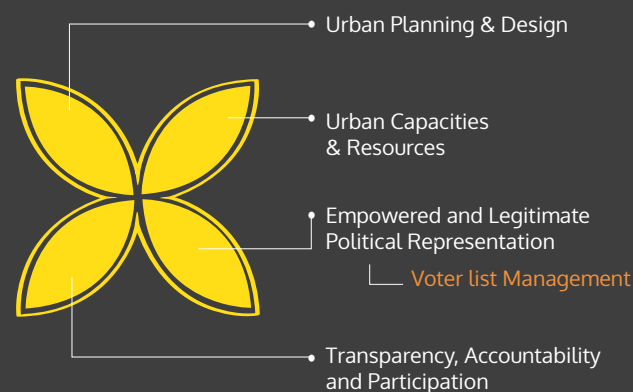
The Role Of The Booth Level Officer

Chennai
May 2016



CITY SYSTEMS FRAMEWORK

With an objective of improving quality of life in India's urban centres, Janaagraha believes in addressing the root-cause of existing issues instead of the symptoms through its city-systems framework. This framework consist of four inter-related dimensions critical to the running of world-class cities.



Janaagraha's Work On Voter List Management

Founded in 2001 as a platform for citizen participation in urban India, the Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy today works with citizens on catalysing active citizenship and with governments to institute reforms to urban governance. Its mission is to transform quality of life in India's cities and towns.

Janaagraha has been involved in efforts to rid urban voter lists of their errors for over a decade. In this time we have led successful grassroots programs to encourage registration on the voter list, such as 'Jaago Re!' in partnership with Tata Tea. We have also worked closely with the Election Commission of India (ECI), through a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), Karnataka which resulted in the creation of a voter-list maintenance process manual, called Proper URban Electoral Lists (PURE), to be implemented across all assembly constituencies in Bangalore. Janaagraha has also undertaken a series of research studies designed to quantify errors on voter lists and examine the causes for such errors across urban centres in India.

The Role Of The Booth Level Officer

Clean voter lists are considered a prerequisite to free and fair elections. However, it is a well-known fact that India's voter lists are riddled with errors such as the presence of deceased citizens, duplications, citizens who do not reside in their listed address anymore and a myriad of others. Moreover, several eligible citizens are also missing from the list. There is evidence to believe that such errors are more profound in urban India, primarily due to rapid urbanization and increased citizen mobility within cities, clubbed with the practice of voter list creation at the 'polling part' level. An earlier study conducted by Janaagraha in Delhi in 2015¹ showed that as many as 21% of listed citizens were no longer residing at their registered address and that about 28% of eligible citizens found to be missing from the list of their polling part claimed to be registered elsewhere in the city.

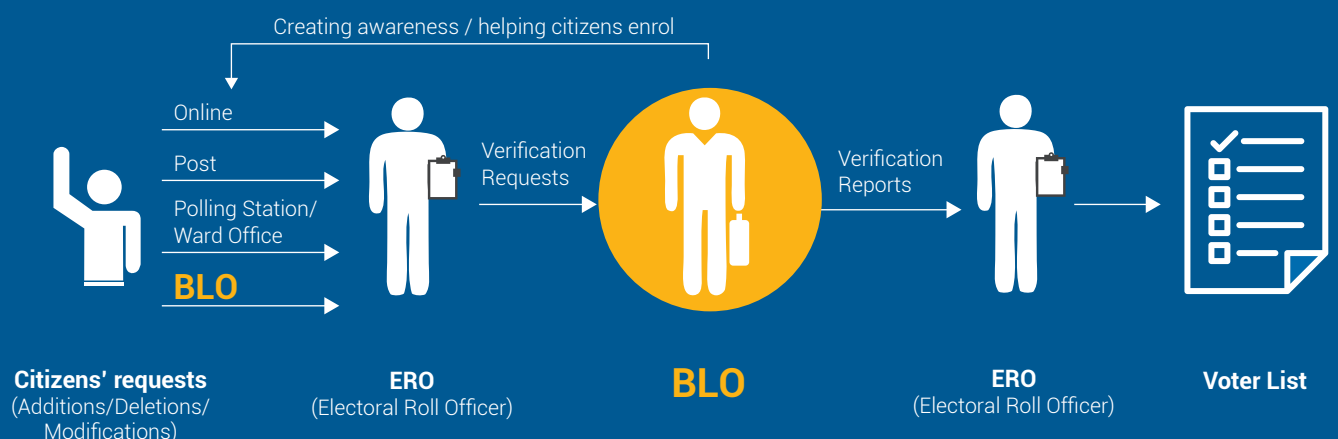
This work is part of a series of research studies undertaken by Janaagraha, designed to quantify errors on voter lists and examine the reasons which feed into such errors; with the ultimate aim of developing solutions and working towards

reform. This report looks at the urban district of Chennai and highlights aspects around the Booth Level Officer (BLO), a crucial cog in the voter list management machinery as well as issues on the voter list itself.

The BLO is a government/semi-government or retired government employee who is also on deputation to the Election Commission of India (ECI), the constitutional authority in charge of conduct of General and State elections and therefore, maintaining voter lists.

- » BLOs work part-time for the ECI but at the same time, hold other full time jobs i.e. they are required to perform the duties of a BLO while holding a regular full time job with a government/semi government organization.
- » They are a vital part of voter list maintenance as they are the single source/point of on-ground verification of citizen requests (additions, deletions, modifications) as shown in the graphic below.

The BLO - a vital part of the voter list machinery ensuring citizen requests are accurately reflected on the voter list



In essence, BLOs are both the face and the foot-soldiers of the Election Commission of India and this analysis dives into a part of the journey of a citizen depicted above, with the BLO at its centre, to identify issues driven by inefficiencies and explores how they can be tackled systemically.

The analysis of Chennai starts by looking at the availability and quality of BLO information, followed by an examination of access to BLOs and the quality of their assistance, leading to consideration for systemic solutions to issues.

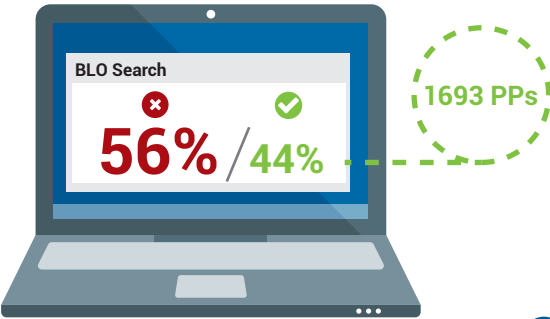
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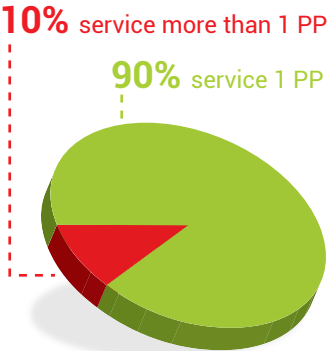
¹ Voter List Management: Survey on the Quality of Voter Lists in Delhi (July 2015)
- <http://www.janaagraha.org/files/publications/Quality-of-Lists-Delhi-2015-MainReport.pdf>

1

No BLO information is available for more than half of Chennai's PPs online. Four out of Chennai's 16 ACs have no BLO information for any of its PPs.



These 1693 PPs are serviced by a total of 1494 BLOs. 148 BLOs out of these service more than 1 PP*.

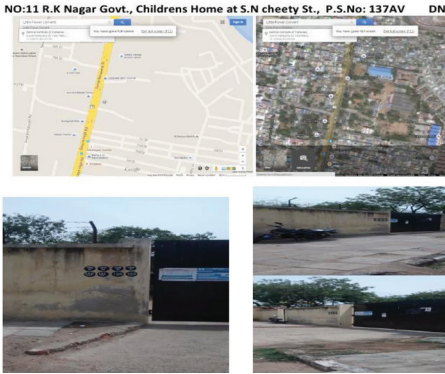


*as determined by duplicate name & phone number

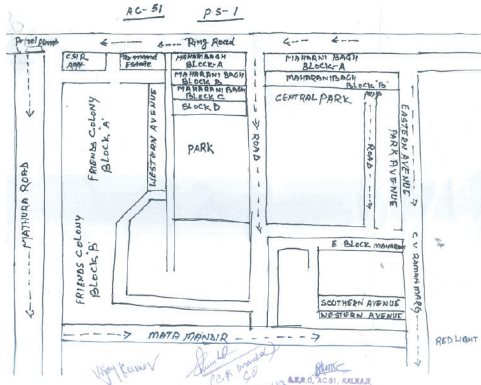
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The Nazariya Naksha (NN) is a map, which as per ECI guidelines is supposed to be made and updated by BLOs to help them perform their duties better. It gives them an idea of their PP's boundaries, layout and of the households within. Geographical boundaries and layout of the PPs are unclear and not systematically recorded on the voter list. Ninety five out of the 112 Nazariya Nakshas sampled showed a map of the polling booth rather than the PP. The rest had identical NNs which did not belong to any of the PPs. In short, there was no NN in any of the sampled PPs.

NN from the CHENNAI voter List (showing the polling booth)

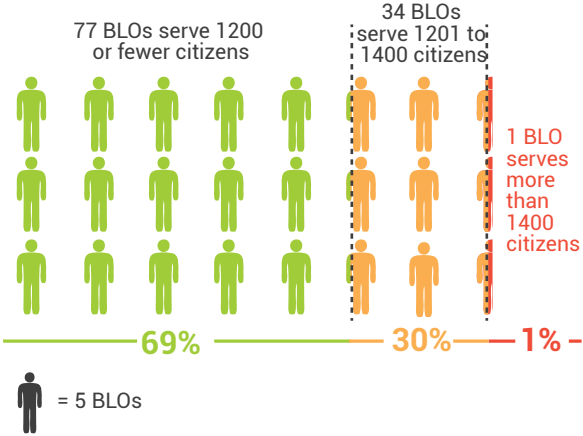


NN as per ECI guidelines



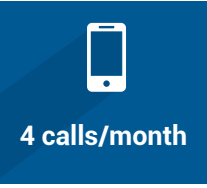
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An analysis of the size of a sample of 112 PPs shows that only 1 BLO has responsibility for more than the guideline 1400 citizens in urban centres. The majority of BLOs sampled service an area with the appropriate number of citizens though as noted, 10% of BLOs service more than one PP.

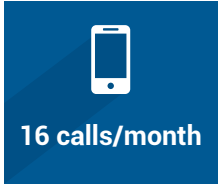


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Average in a year



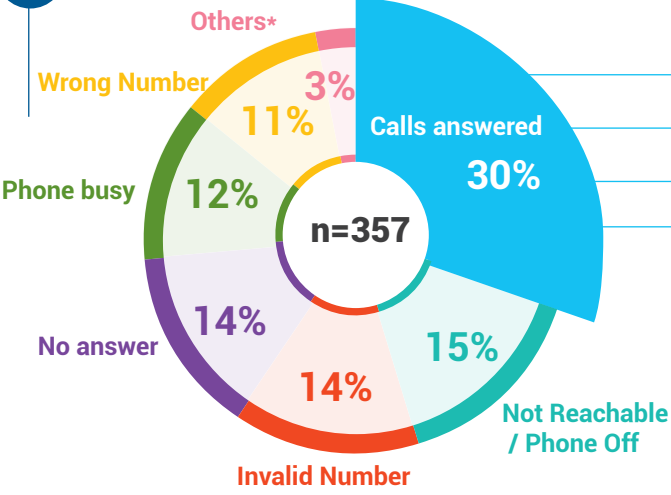
Just before elections/during revisions



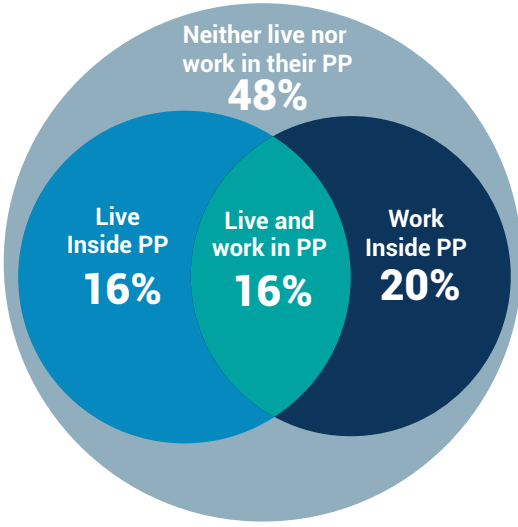
In this time other work like on-ground verification also increases.

BLOs are on duty throughout the year, ensuring the citizens in their area are serviced and the voter list remains clean. However, the bulk of the work is centred around elections. Most BLOs say they do not receive any calls from citizens asking for their help, perhaps reflecting poor availability of BLO information not just online, but elsewhere too. However, while no BLO said they received 30 or more calls on average in a year, four said they did just before elections. This large concentration of work over and above full time employment, makes it harder for BLOs to exercise their duties.

2



3



n=25*

To ensure that BLOs can service their area effectively the ECI mandates that only those residing in a PP can be the BLO for that PP. However, the majority of BLOs (n=12 out of 25) who answered this question in the survey do not live in the PP for which they are a BLO. These BLOs noted they have to travel anywhere up to an hour to reach the PP for which they are a BLO, making it harder to execute their duties.

* 13 correct BLOs were interviewed as well as 13 BLOs who were not listed against the correct PP. One of the latter is retired and therefore, did not answer this question.

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The Way Ahead

In Chennai, acquiring information on BLOs online is very difficult. No information is available for BLOs in 4 ACs. Furthermore, efforts to call and speak with 357 BLOs listed online resulted in only reaching 19 correct BLOs. 48% of BLOs surveyed live and work outside the area they service with some having to travel close to an hour to reach their allotted area. While the majority of PPs have less than 1400 citizens, 10% of BLOs listed service more than one PP. **All of this falls short of ECI guidelines and has a direct impact on the quality of voter lists. Issues such as these lead to errors on the list such as incorrect details, eligible citizens missing altogether and the presence of citizens who should not be there.** Adding to this is the fact that a bulk of the BLO work happens in a few months as opposed to evenly throughout the year.

The solution is to leverage technology effectively:

- » Review BLO role and workflows (using ICT) – use hand-held devices to collect citizen data and service requests; shift responsibility of conducting statistical analyses to EROs
- » Create GIS based PP maps which allow BLOs to track households and citizens using hand-held devices
- » Explore Automatic Voter Registration and database linkages which allows the ECI to track citizen movement and account for it effectively on the voter list

Methodology

The Chennai district in Tamil Nadu is made up of 16 Assembly Constituencies (ACs). The entire district is urban and is administered by the Chennai Municipal Corporation (CMC). Chennai is home to a population of approximately 71 Lakh citizens².

The Tamil Nadu CEO's website³ allows for a BLO search using EPIC numbers. However, searches made do not return BLO contact details consistently nor for every polling part. As a result, BLO data was obtained from the ECI's website⁴. Here, information is listed for 1643 BLOs spread across all ACs except for ACs 13, 16 and 17 while only 5 numbers are mentioned for AC 18 out of a total of 3699 PPs in Chennai. An analysis of the BLO information that was available was done, looking for any duplications, missing information and analysis of the validity of the phone numbers.

A random sample of 357 telephonic interviews were attempted (approximately 30 in each of the 12 ACs where information was available). Calls were made to establish actuality of BLOs and

their details listed online as well as to discuss proximity of their home and office to the PP they have been allotted. Furthermore, the frequency of interaction BLOs have with citizens was also discussed. The aim was to achieve a total of 50 BLO interviews, spread more or less evenly across the 12 ACs for which BLO information was available. Telephonic interviews were conducted between 21/04/2016 and 10/05/2016. A total of 26 interviews was achieved, between 0 to 7 in each of the 12 ACs. A BLO contact was called 4 times, at different times of day before it was classified as 'not answered'. Thirteen were correct BLOs and 13 were BLOs not of the PPs sampled.

Conversion of the voter lists in the Chennai district from PDFs to Excel was not possible with an acceptable degree of quality. Instead, 112 PPs were sampled (7 PPs from each AC). PDFs of the sampled PP voter lists were downloaded from the Tamil Nadu CEO's website⁵. Analysis was done on PP size and the quality of the Nazariya Naksha.

²Census 2011 data – for Chennai

³TN CEO's BLO search link - <http://electoralservicespolling.azurewebsites.net/KnowyourBlo.aspx>

⁴ECI's BLO search link - <http://eci-citizenservicesforofficers.nic.in/officerscontact/>

⁵PDFs downloaded from - http://www.elections.tn.gov.in/PDF/acwise_pdf.aspx [accessed and PDFs downloaded on 18/04/2016]



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