



Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy

VOTER LIST MANAGEMENT

THE STATE OF BOOTH LEVEL OFFICERS (BLOs) IN BANGALORE; A LOOK AT WHAT'S GOING RIGHT & WHAT'S NOT **Executive Summary**

November 2016



Research Team

Katie Pyle - Research Manager, Janaagraha

Vivek Anandan Nair - Senior Research Associate, Janaagraha

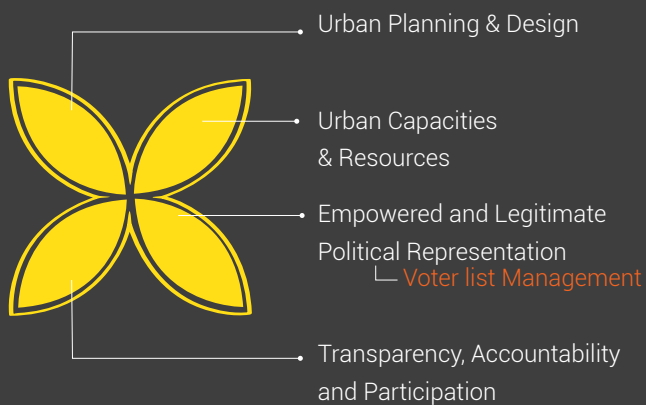
Tarun Arora - Research Associate, Janaagraha

Field work conducted by Hansa Research, India and transcriptions by Crescendo Communications, Hyderabad, India.

Mail: research@janaagraha.org

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 CENTRE FOR CITIZENSHIP & DEMOCRACY

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.

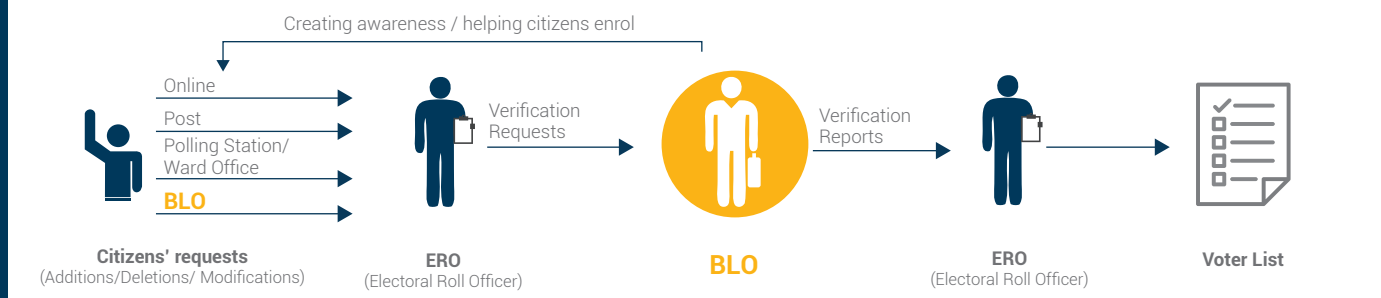
Janaagraha has been involved in efforts to rid urban voter lists of their errors for over a decade. In this time we have led successful grassroots programs to encourage registration on the voter list, such as 'Jaago Re!' in partnership with Tata Tea. We have also worked closely with the Election Commission 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.

Executive Summary : Bangalore's Booth Level Officers

India's voter lists are riddled with errors. There is evidence to believe that voter list errors are more profound in urban India, primarily due to rapid urbanization and a resultant increase in citizen mobility. And while there is evidence of the issues that exist on urban voter lists, more remains to be understood about the layers within VLM in India that lead to such issues. One such layer, is of functionaries known as Booth Level Officers or BLOs. BLOs are one of the most crucial layers in the entire Voter List Management machinery in India. They are the ECI's foot-soldiers, in charge of all on-ground verification of voter claims and requests of the Polling Part (PP) they are allotted. In addition to this, the functions they perform for the maintenance of voter lists also makes them one of the largest sources of data on the electorate.

- BLOs are govt., semi-govt. or retired govt. personnel ideally in charge of 1 PP each and are supposed to be resident in the PP they are in charge of.
- The ECI is required to provide BLOs with adequate training and materials that helps them perform their duties efficiently.
- BLOs are required to conduct exercises such as door to door visits in order to keep the voter list of their PP clean and accurate.

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



This study, on BLOs in Bangalore intended to understand better this layer of VLM and explore how issues within BLO functioning may be contributing to the errors seen on urban voter lists. Conducted in three phases involving both qualitative and quantitative interviews, the key findings of this study are outlined below.

1

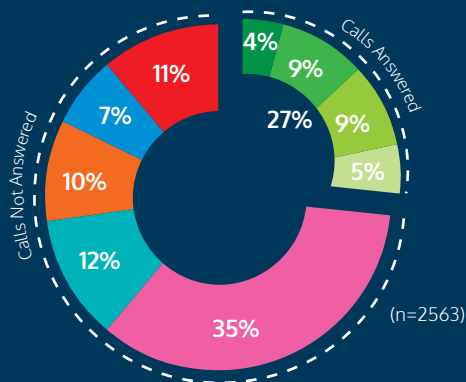
How easy is it to contact BLOs?

Citizens may need to contact the BLO of their PP if they wish to get enrolled on to their PP's voter list or wish to change or correct some of their details mentioned on the list. **However, contacting their BLO may not be very easy.**

Total PPs in the 11 ACs that were a subject of this study	BLO information available for	No information available for
3077 PPs	2996* PPs	81 PPs

**these 2996 PPs share among them, 2751 unique BLO names (the rest are duplications)*

When called, of 2563 BLO numbers attempted, only 27% were answered after 3 attempts. 11% of all numbers were invalid



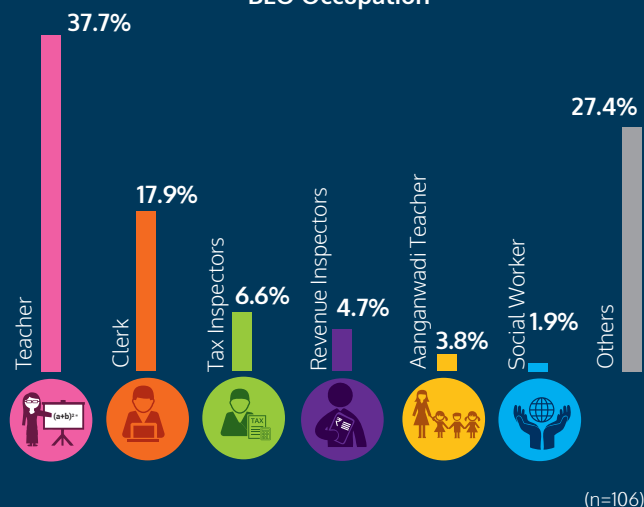
2

Who are Bangalore's BLOs?

A majority are 'Teachers', an occupational class that, as per the ECI's guidelines, should be avoided while appointing BLOs given the crucial nature of their work and the fact that they are overworked. **Some are private sector employees, a category that is not supposed to be made BLOs at all.**

58% of interviewed BLOs were Female and 42%, Male. Two thirds of all BLOs interviewed were between 30 and 59 years old and a large proportion, 43%, of all BLOs said that they had been one for 7 years or more.

BLO Occupation



How long have these BLOs been serving as one



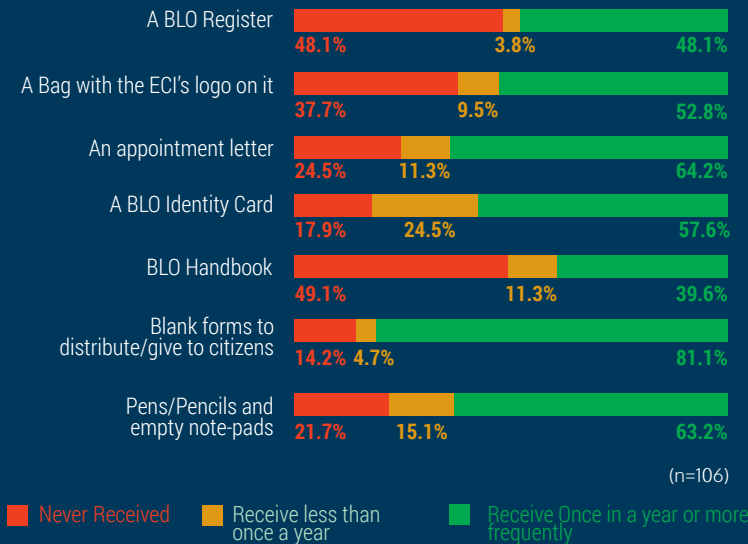
(n=106)

What is the kind of support/training that they receive from the ECI to perform their duties efficiently?

To help BLOs perform their duties efficiently and accurately, ECI guidelines state that they be provided with a 'BLO Kit' and be trained adequately. **Lack of adequate materials and low frequency of trainings, found in the study, can adversely affect a BLO's ability to perform their duties.**

Frequency of Receipt of Materials in the BLO kit

A large proportion of BLOs reported that they had never received some of these materials. **18% of BLOs reported that they had never received a BLO ID card, 25% an appointment letter, 48% a BLO register and 49% a BLO handbook.**



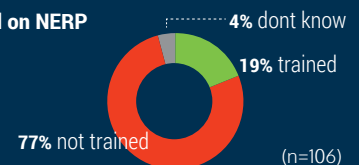
BLO Training:

While a large majority of BLOs reported being satisfied with their training, **47% claimed to have received training less than once a year.**



National Electoral Roll Purification 2016 (NERP)

Have BLOs been trained on NERP as claimed by the ECI ?

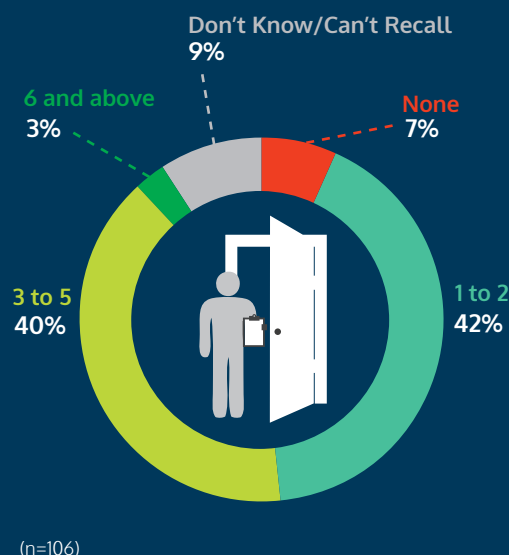


How do Bangalore's BLOs go about doing their job?

BLOs do not perform their duties as mentioned in ECI guidelines; this feeds into inaccuracies in voter lists.

7% of all BLOs interviewed (n=106) said that they conducted no door to door visits, during which they are required to perform critical functions to ensure lists remain clean. On average, BLOs perform only 4 out of the 6 crucial functions they are required to perform in a year; none perform all 6.

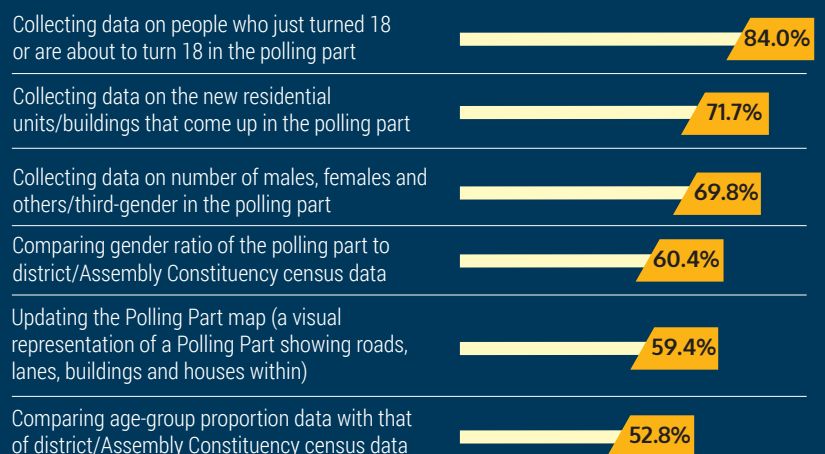
Number of door to door visits conducted (in a year)



Total no of days on which BLOs conduct door to door visits each year



Proportion of BLOs performing each critical function annually

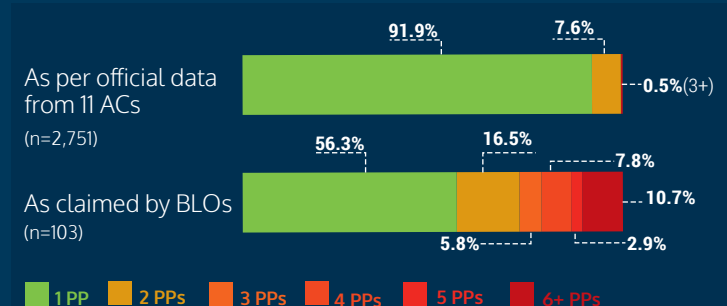


Average number of tasks performed (out of 6) = 4

The long duration of time it takes BLOs to get to their PP, not having ID cards or proper house numbering in their PPs adversely affects BLO performance.

The number of PPs a BLO is in charge of and the time it takes them to reach their allotted PPs has a direct bearing on the quality of a BLO's work. **27% of BLOs interviewed claimed to be in charge of 3 or more PPs while official data showed that less than 0.5% were in charge of 3 or more PPs.** 16% of BLOs reported that it takes them more than 45 minutes to reach their PP.

No of PPs served by BLOs



The time it takes to reach their allotted PPs



Not having a BLO identity card, poor on-ground address infrastructure and a lack of citizen cooperation were cited by BLOs as the three most important issues that affect their work adversely.

Most important issues in executing work on-ground	Proportion of BLOs
A lack of a valid BLO Identity Card (ID)	20.8%
A lack of proper house numbering in the polling part	20.8%
A lack of cooperation from the people/citizens in the polling part	13.2%
The time it takes to reach the Polling Part area	5.7%
Your concerns on safety and security while in the polling part	5.7%
A lack of motivation and support from seniors/superiors	5.7%
Frequent changing of the polling parts allotted to you	2.8%
A lack of proper road/lane signage in the polling part	2.8%
A lack of supervision from seniors	2.8%
Concentration of work in just a few months i.e. uneven spread of work over a year	1.9%
A lack of blank forms to be handed to the citizens	1.9%
A lack of a proper Poling Part (PP) map or 'Nazari Naksha'	0.9%

(n=106)

BLOs are often not given recognition, paid their honorarium or paid in full; this affects their satisfaction levels and in turn, how well they do their job.

78% of BLOs stated that they were either satisfied or extremely satisfied. 18% said that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 4%, that they were dissatisfied or extremely dissatisfied.

16% of BLOs felt they are not adequately recognized by their superiors for the hard work they put in.

Honorariums

Only 63% of BLOs reported receiving an honorarium every year as ordered by ECI. Of the 37% who did not:

Frequency of receipt of honorarium for BLOs who reported receiving it less than once a year:

Less than once in 4 years	10.7%
Once in 4 years to less than once in 3	14.3%
Once in 3 years to less than once in 2	28.6%
Once in 2 years to less than once a year	46.4%

(n=28)

Amount Received Last

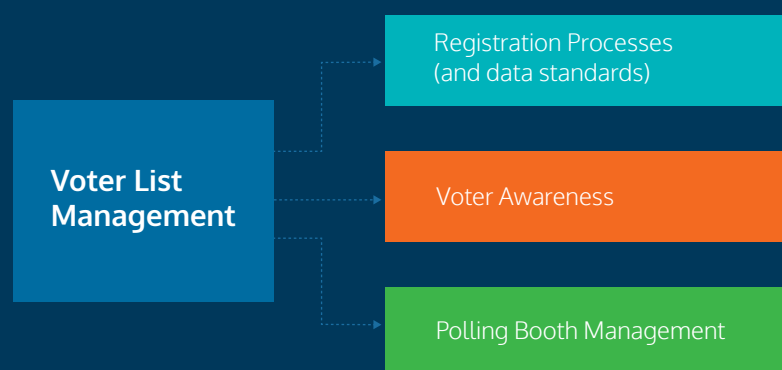
49% of BLOs reported receiving less than INR 4000 the last time they were given their honorarium



(n=84)

Addressing issues systemically

There are three principal systems underlying the VLM machinery in India. Together, these three help a citizen take their journey to the voting booth:



The BLO layer of functioning is core to the first two systems and any issues in it is bound to adversely affect the overall efficiency and accuracy of the VLM machinery.

The questions shown in the executive summary help highlight that issues exist at each stage, right from BLO appointment and PP allocation explored in question one to the payment of BLO honorariums, explored in the last question. These issues fall across both 1) Registration Processes (and data standards) and 2) Voter Awareness:

VLM System	Key Issue(s) in BLO functioning Identified that affects the VLM System
Registration Processes (& data standards)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recruitment/Appointment of adequate numbers of BLOs is not being done and as a result multiple PPs are being allocated to one BLO (or there is no allocation), in violation of the ECI's guidelines 2. Despite the ECI's guidelines suggesting 'Teachers' be left out as much as possible from being appointed as BLOs, a majority in Bangalore are teachers 3. Materials required by BLOs to perform their duties, such as IDs and BLO registers are not being adequately provided to them 4. BLOs do not perform all crucial functions required of them to maintain clean voter lists, especially 'Health Analysis' and updating Polling Part (PP) Maps 5. BLOs have to bear the brunt of the anger of citizens arising out of back-end data entry errors, on which they have limited or no control 6. BLO Honorariums are either not paid, not paid on time or not paid in full 7. Issues around the recognition of their work and honorarium appears to affect their motivation levels negatively
Registration Processes (& data standards) + Plus Voter Awareness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. The frequency with which BLOs are being trained is quite low 9. BLOs spend a large amount of time outside their regular work hours to maintain voter lists. This affects not just their role as a BLO, but also potentially their full time jobs 10. Several BLOs are allocated PPs far away from both their residence and office making access, and therefore performing their duties, difficult 11. A lack of a BLO ID card, cooperation from citizens and house numbering affects adversely their work most.

These issues plaguing BLOs and therefore VLM in Bangalore, need to be addressed in order to make the existing system perform to its potential. Towards both these ends, technology offers solutions. Creating smart technology enabled workflows for BLOs involving hand held devices for servicing voter requests, GIS mapping of PP boundaries, improved MIS systems for performance management etc. can help improve the BLO system greatly. Additionally, technology driven reforms such as Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) and Database Linkages that can help identify voter movement can also help the system in reducing BLO workload by targeting their intervention better.



Methodology :

This study was conducted in three phases:

- 1) Desktop Research Phase : Analysing BLO information available on the CEO, Karnataka's website from 11 ACs in the city
- 2) Qualitative Interview Phase : 10 Qualitative Depth Interviews from BLOs across 7 ACs in the city
- 3) Quantitative Telephonic Interview Phase : 106 Computer Aided Telephonic Interviews with BLOs across 10 ACs in the city

Each phase was designed to feed into the next one. Data from desktop research phase was used to sample BLOs to interview in the qualitative stage and themes that emerged from these interviews fed into the creation of a telephonic survey instrument.

For the main report on this study, visit www.janaagraha.org/publications/ or contact Research & Insights at any of the mail IDs mentioned on the first page.



JANAAGRAHA CENTRE FOR CITIZENSHIP & DEMOCRACY

Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy
4th Floor, UNI Building, Thimmaiah Road, Vasanth Nagar, Bangalore-560052
Phone: 080-40790400, Fax: 080-41277104
Email: info@janaagraha.org

www.janaagraha.org | www.ipaidabribe.com | www.ichangemycity.com | www.janausp.org