Voter List Management

Patna

Report

A study on the quality of voter lists: findings from Booth Level Officer (BLO) Interviews in Patna

February 2016

Introduction

Jana Group was Co-Founded by Ramesh Ramanathan and Swati Ramanathan. It comprises four institutions, all of which are urban-focussed

Janalakshmi, an urban micro finance company serving 2.5 million households across India

Janaadhar, an urban affordable housing company

Jana Urban Space Foundation, a non-profit focussed on spatial planning and design, both policy and practice
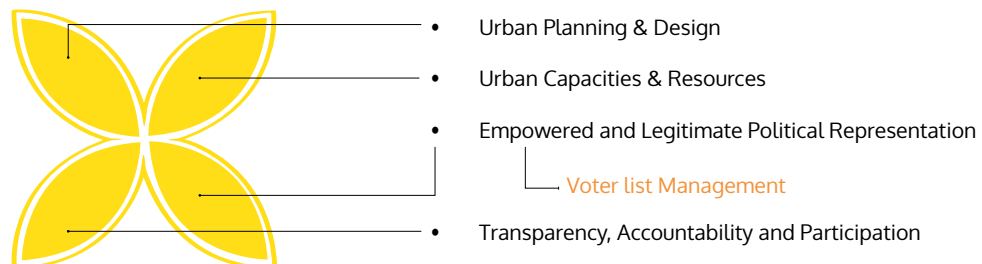
Janaagraha, a non-profit having the objective of transforming quality of life in India's cities and towns

About Janaagraha

Janaagraha was founded in December 2001 as a platform for citizen participation in cities. Today, it works with citizens on catalysing active citizenship in neighbourhoods and with governments to institute reforms to city-systems, generally referred to as urban governance.

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.
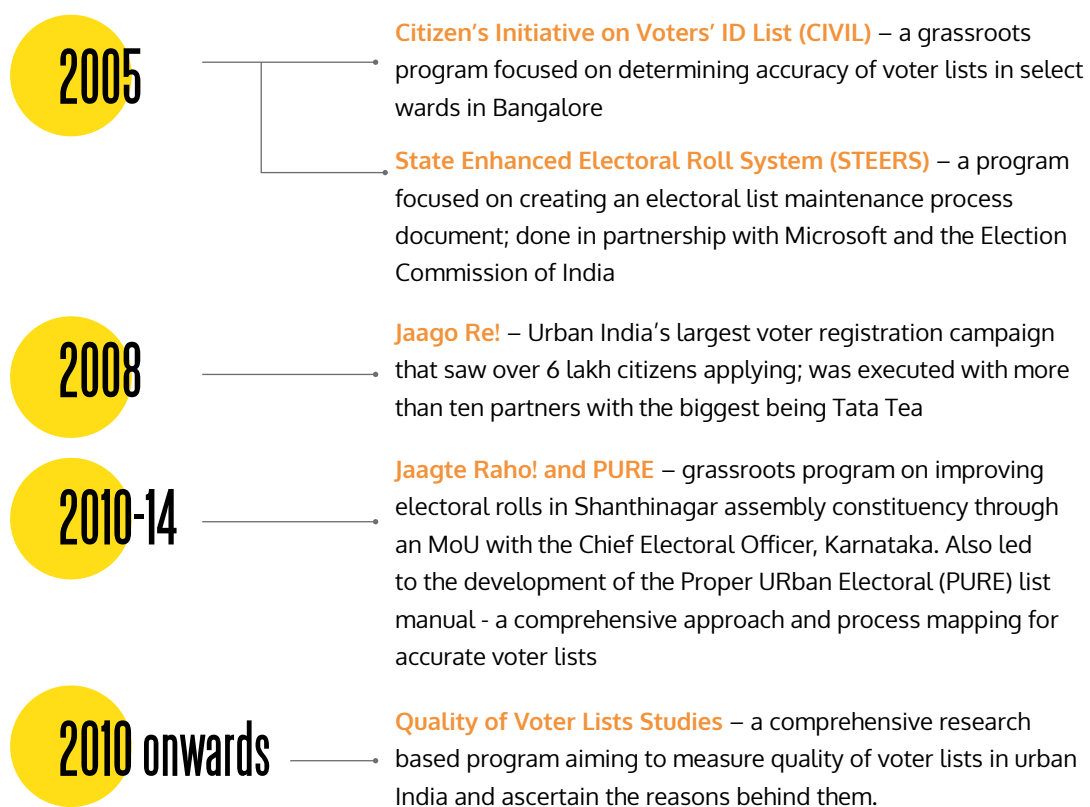
CITY SYSTEMS FRAMEWORK

- Urban Planning & Design
- Urban Capacities & Resources
- Empowered and Legitimate Political Representation
  - Voter list Management
- Transparency, Accountability and Participation

Janaagraha's work on Voter List Management

'Empowered and Legitimate Political Representation' is one of the four components of Janaagraha's city-systems framework. We believe quality of voter lists can potentially influence quality of political leadership in cities in India. The Voter List Management process in cities however has been a much ignored electoral reform agenda. Voter lists form the basis of democracy by codifying a citizen's right to exercise franchise. But errors in these lists, omissions that lead to disenfranchisement and potential deletions which expose the electoral process to phantom voting, are a reality. This applies particularly to urban areas which witness large scale migrations, from villages to cities, between cities and even within cities. For quality political representation and leadership, the voter list should be free of errors. Poor quality voter lists impact electoral participation and outcomes, and thereby the quality of political leadership.

JCCD has been working on the issue of urban voter lists since 2005, highlights of which include the Jaago Re! campaign, India's largest voter registration drive in cities and a 3-year Memorandum of Understanding with the Election Commission of India for a pilot project on voter list management in Shanthinagar Assemby Constituency in Bangalore. The groundwork in Shanthinagar resulted in the Proper Urban Electoral (PURE) List manual, a new and improved process for voter list management in cities.

2005

Citizen's Initiative on Voters' ID List (CIVIL) – a grassroots program focused on determining accuracy of voter lists in select wards in Bangalore

State Enhanced Electoral Roll System (STEERS) – a program focused on creating an electoral list maintenance process document; done in partnership with Microsoft and the Election Commission of India

2008

Jaago Re! – Urban India's largest voter registration campaign that saw over 6 lakh citizens applying; was executed with more than ten partners with the biggest being Tata Tea

2010-14

Jaagte Raho! and PURE – grassroots program on improving electoral rolls in Shanthinagar assembly constituency through an MoU with the Chief Electoral Officer, Karnataka. Also led to the development of the Proper URban Electoral (PURE) list manual - a comprehensive approach and process mapping for accurate voter lists

2010 onwards

Quality of Voter Lists Studies – a comprehensive research based program aiming to measure quality of voter lists in urban India and ascertain the reasons behind them.
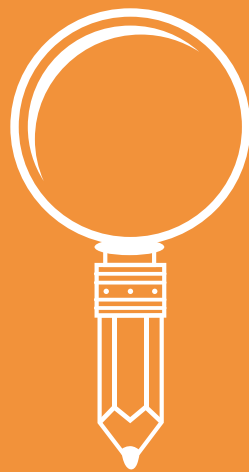
Through research studies such as this, we aim to develop a body of irrefutable data and information that can catalyse reforms to voter list management in cities. We believe that such studies, based on both primary surveys and desktop research, are critical to electoral reforms in India.

Contents

Summary

1. Summary

Patna offers a lot of complexities in terms of the address infrastructure present in the city. This is not just in terms of the physical infrastructure present, but also in terms of how the citizenry has adopted and uses it. This had made it very difficult for Janaagraha's Quality of Voter List (QoL) surveys, conducted in July and August 2015, to locate citizen addresses on ground. Further investigations into the issue of 'address not found' (ANF) resulted in a Pilot study in which 45% of sampled addresses could not be located on field and a large number of sampled addresses were found to be wanting in terms of the completeness of address information in them. This raised further questions on both methodology and the interpretation of such a figure i.e. the 45% 'address not founds'. Interviews with Booth Level Officers (BLOs) from Patna were commissioned to understand better, reasons behind the state of address quality on Patna's voter lists and to also try and answer the questions that findings from the Pilot survey raised on methodology and interpretation.

Since Booth Level Officers (BLOs) are the frontline workers of the Election Commission of India's (ECI's) voter list machinery, Janaagraha conducted a series of interviews to explore the aforementioned issue in detail. Fifteen BLOs spread across four Assembly Constituencies (ACs) within Patna were interviewed to try and understand why the state of information on voter lists was so. The objective of the interviews was to find out the following:

- Familiarity of BLOs with their assigned polling parts (PPs) and the general work procedures that they follow
- Specifics on documentation and information, particularly address information, in the forms they receive and
- Suggestions on improving the state of information on voter lists

These interviews, conducted in the months of September and October 2015, have helped shed light on some reasons behind the current state of affairs, particularly with respect to the address information on Patna's voter lists. However, it would be worth keeping in mind that these observations are only from a section of the entire voter list management machinery and should be read as so. Key findings from this study are as follows:

- **Procedures followed by BLOs with respect to voter list updation, both across and within ACs, are not uniform.**
  BLOs generally appeared to be well aware of the number of people in their PPs which may not be surprising given a large number of them had been taking on this responsibility for three years or more. However, findings suggest that general work procedures followed differ both across and within ACs, perhaps indicating a need to increase the scope and strength of training procedures. These differences were observed in a host of functions such as facilitating voter list updation, making the Nazariya Naksha and maintaining BLO registers.

- **The prescribed method for making the 'Nazariya Naksha' and allotting house numbers, an aspect key to finding addresses, is not being followed.**
  The 'Nazariya Naksha', a hand drawn map of a polling part, has to be created and updated by the BLO in the manner clearly laid out in the ECI's training manuals. However, the way this is being done is not consistent with laid down procedures and also differs both across and within ACs. Inquiries into the state of address information revealed that the address parameter 'house number', an aspect linked to the Nazariya Naksha, also had several complexities around it. Some BLOs stated that these numbers had already been allotted and they had not altered it and the ones who claimed to have updated their PPs mentioned differing ways to do so. The recommended method is not generally being followed. As per the ECI this should involve using the number allotted by competent authorities and if not present, using an alternate numbering method clearly listed out by the ECI. This issue is compounded by the fact that, as several BLOs stated, PPs have no house or lane numbers,

revealing just as the Patna Pilot did, that on ground address infrastructure in the city is weak.

- **While receiving forms from citizens, BLOs know which documents to accept as proof but do not seem to give due attention to completion of forms or the quality of data within.**
  The general lack of uniformity seen in work procedures followed does not seem to extend to BLO's knowledge on documentation requirements. However, when asked about the checks they conduct to ensure completeness of forms, not much was said with indications that what information citizens give is considered more or less complete and accurate. BLOs also stated that the quality of information on forms that they receive from the citizen concerned or their family member is more or less the same. However, since not much was spoken about the specific checks they make, how BLOs assess this 'quality' remains uncertain.

It should be noted that the study found that BLOs usually engaged in voter list updation only when instructed from higher authorities. There are ways in which citizens can get enrolled or request for changes in their status on the voter list without having to go through the BLO during continuous revision. However, the BLO's role in continuous updation or in facilitating it remains unclear. Another aspect that remains unclear is whether the current system of actively engaging BLOs at some times in the year, something we found varied both within and across ACs, can be called 'continuous', especially since BLO's did not see their work as so. This could have a bearing on whether BLOs help citizens enroll, create awareness and perform other requisite duties 'continuously' i.e. as and when approached by citizens or only when instructed by higher authorities.

Apart from the procedural issues mentioned above, BLOs also gave insights into possible flaws in other layers of the voter list management machinery. Continuous updation, around which questions remain, was also affected by the unavailability of forms. Almost all BLOs indicated their concern on back end data entry and printing systems; some by directly saying that data entry operators cause most errors despite citizens providing correct details and some by speaking of it as something to be improved while providing suggestions. There were some other broad suggestions as well, mostly involving incorporating BLOs into data entry and record printing systems to ensure faster error free overall voter lists.

The objective of this study was to understand, from BLOs, how voter lists are maintained and updated, addresses are recorded and the 'Nazariya Naksha'/PP maps are updated.. This was to aide Janaagraha's understanding on why addresses may not be findable on ground and general voter list management practises. The study's findings, summarized above, reveal inconsistencies among BLOs as well as divergences from ECI stated procedures in the way they work, particularly in areas that relate directly to voter list address quality. When seen together with bad on-ground address infrastructure, many addresses listed on voter lists will continue to be difficult to locate on-ground without the help of BLOs. Going forward, field work for the QoL surveys needs to consider if it would be feasible, given resource limitations, for more contact to be made with BLOs in Patna and/or get required support from the Election Commission of India. Additionally, engagement with the ECI and CEOs and their in-house expertise in audit procedures could help enhance overall methodology of verifying voter list accuracy on-ground, an aspect crucial to improving Voter List Management.

Overall in Patna therefore, voter lists struggle with the address infrastructure in the city. This can be attributed to the poor address infrastructure in existence in the city and may be further compounded by inconsistent and unclear practices displayed by BLOs in maintenance of the lists. It is imperative for BLOs to be trained consistently across the city and to investigate and improve list maintenance practices in other layers of the voter list management machinery using improved technology aids. This, with the aim of ensuring that accurate and verifiable addresses are present on the list, leading to improved mechanisms for identifying potential deletions and omissions to the voter list and in turn, ensuring clean voter lists allowing all eligible citizens to cast their votes.

Introduction

2. Introduction

As a part of the effort to rid urban voter lists of errors, Janaagraha has been objectively measuring the hygiene of voter lists in Assembly Constituencies (ACs) in Bangalore as well as at city-level across India over the last two years and now, is involved in conducting studies across major urban pockets to capture the diverse and complex nature of issues that voter list hygiene faces. Called Quality of Lists (QoL) surveys, these studies are an effort to quantify errors that exist in urban voter lists and put forth credible and irrefutable data which can subsequently guide corrective action and further discussion.

The QoL study was most recently expanded to the city of Patna to ascertain the hygiene of voter lists with particular focus on the differences that may arise between areas of high-migration and others. The methodology for QoL surveys evolves with each study and is tweaked to take into consideration specificities that each urban centre possesses. A similar study conducted in Patna in 2013 had faced a major hurdle. Investigators were not able to locate the addresses of around 70% of citizens sampled for the voter list-centric survey. These had been declared 'not found'. Following this, the research team decided to explore the issue in detail. Therefore, to check whether these entries were in fact liable for deletion or that they appeared to be incorrect as the information within them was inadequate to lead investigators to such addresses, another layer of research was added to all subsequent QoL studies. This involved assessing addresses on voter lists for 'findability' i.e. whether these addresses had a minimum amount of information required for them to be found on ground. This process was followed in the Delhi study conducted in early 2015 and was also applied to the QoL Patna study.

In the case of Patna, given the past experience, it was essential to develop a robust address scoring mechanism. Extensive field investigations to do so revealed that address infrastructure in the city, in terms of how these were structured and also how the citizenry had adopted it, was not uniform. It was also weak in terms of the number of parameters present on ground, such as an absence of road and lane names/numbers in several cases. These findings posed questions on both methodology and interpretation of 'addresses not found'. The possibility of a large number of sampled addresses not being found would take away from the primary aim of these surveys i.e. to assess the hygiene of Patna's voter lists. Overall complexities that the city offered in terms of addresses commanded a change in overall methodology and Janaagraha decided to conduct a Pilot to assess the feasibility of a full scale roll out. Forty five percent of addresses sampled for the Pilot, which was designed to closely resemble that of the larger QoL survey, could not be located on ground. This led to the ceasing of all further stages of the study.

In order to understand better, reasons behind the state of address quality on voter lists and to also try and answer the questions that findings from the Pilot survey raised on methodology and interpretation, Janaagraha engaged in another study. Interviews were conducted with Booth Level Officers (BLOs), the frontline workers of the ECI/CEO machinery in a manner that aimed to speak with a range of BLOs working within the ACs where the Pilot was conducted. This report documents the methodology and results of doing so in Patna (September-October 2015).

Methodology

3. Methodology

This qualitative study was designed to find out the major reasons behind the poor state of addresses on voter lists in Patna from Booth Level Officers (BLOs). The methodology involved having semi structured telephonic conversations with a range of BLOs spread across ACs in Patna in which the QoL Pilot was conducted.

3.1   Sampling

Sampling for the interviews was kept consistent with that of the larger QoL study, just as was the case with the Pilot. In this case, sampling involved identifying or arriving at PPs and then obtaining contact information for selected PPs from the website of the CEO, Bihar . A total of 15 BLOs spread across the 4 ACs selected for the pilot were to be interviewed. The figure of fifteen interviews was chosen to ensure adequate coverage within each of the four ACs while keeping in mind resource limitations. The spread was also to be consistent with quadrant and migration spread within ACs. Table Q1 below shows the number of interviews that were to be conducted within each AC by geographical quadrants. To arrive at these numbers, proportions of the QoL sampling (including those for quadrants and migration within) were applied to this lower sample size of 15. A detailed split of these can be found in the appendix, section 8.1.

Table-Q1: Interviews to be conducted within each AC by geographical quadrants (Q1 to Q4)

	Bankipur	Kumhrar	Danapur	Phulwari
Q1	1	2	0	3
Q2	1	0	0	1
Q3	1	0	0	0
Q4	1	2	3	0
Total	**4**	**4**	**3**	**4**

Sampling Execution

As the first step, the total number of PPs to be sampled was determined by applying the proportion of PPs that each AC held versus the total PPs of interest (total number of PPs within PMC inside each of these four ACs). Once that was done, PPs were divided within each AC using the proportion of total PPs that each geographic quadrant had. Then, as the last step, PPs were divided within a quadrant based on the proportion of 'High-migration' and 'other' it contained. Once PP allocation was done, PPs within the lowest denominator were chosen randomly. To accommodate refusals and other such possibilities, three sets were sampled based on the described methodology. A fourth, which included all other PPs left from the larger QoL study sample, was kept in case the first three sets got exhausted while trying to contact BLOs to arrange interviews. Once this was done, contact details of BLOs of all four sets of PPs were obtained[1].

3.2   Execution

All interviews were conducted over the telephone in Hindi. The procedure followed was as listed below:

- BLOs from the set of sampled PPs were contacted using a telephone
- Calls were made at varying times of the day ranging from 11:00 AM to 8:00 PM IST to maximize chances of getting a successful interview. In case a call did not get answered, the number was tried at least five more times during different day-parts and different days before accepting it as a failed contact
- Once answered by the BLO of interest, Janaagraha either conducted the interview there and then using a semi structured interview schedule, as described in section 4, or sought an appointment on a different time and day to conduct the interview
- All interviews were recorded on a mobile device
- In case the first set of samples was exhausted, the second and third sets were used and if those got exhausted, the rest of the sampled PPs were used (sampled for the larger QoL surveys)
- Once completed, all interviews were transcribed. Transcription was done in English, translating the words that BLOs spoke from Hindi to English in real-time
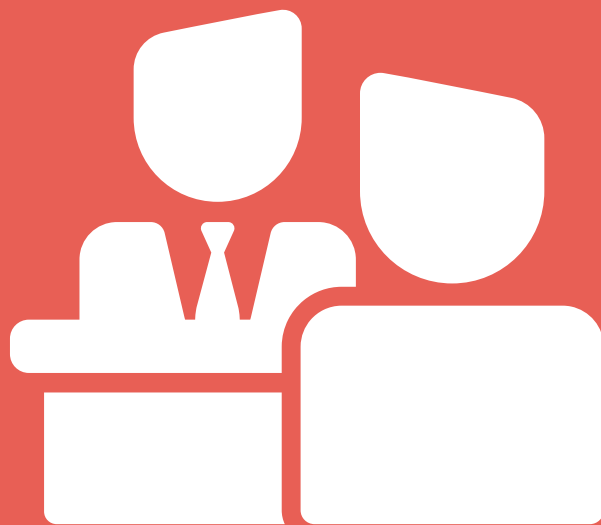
The interview schedule (guide)

4. The Interview Schedule (guide)

As 'addresses not being found' appears to be a main issue in list quality (surveys) in Patna, this was the main focus of the interviews with BLOs to discern the processes being used for list maintenance in Patna by those on the ground. To this end, an interview schedule was created with the intention of finding out specifically about address details given on the list (how these are established and added to the list), the associated map creation (the Nazariya Naksha) and maintenance and by default, basic details such as when and how revisions to the voter list happen in general. It was felt that the interviews should remain short and focused in order to glean the best information on these specific points.

To gather this information, the study relied on a semi structured interview guide. It began with an introduction to Janaagraha and the work it does on voter list management followed with questions on five broad aspects:

- Familiarity of BLOs with their assigned polling parts (PPs)
- The general work procedures that they followed
- Specifics on documentation and information in the forms they received
- Specifics on the address information in the forms they received
- Suggestions on improving the state of information on voter lists

A copy of the full interview schedule can be found in Appendix 8.2.
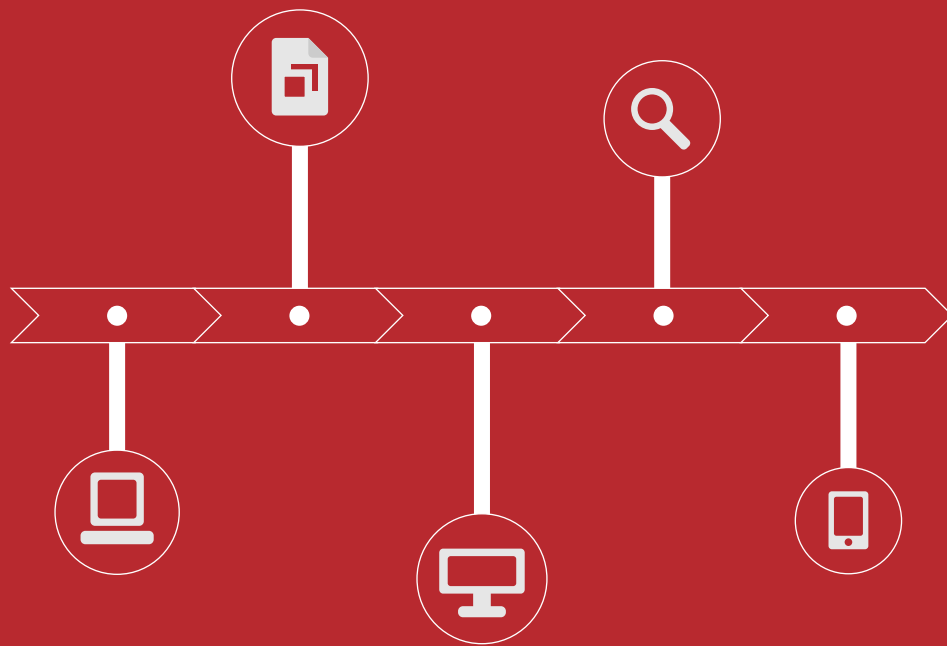
Timeline

5. Timelines

Table Q2 shows the key project milestones for the BLO Interviews.

Table-Q2: Key project milestones

Activity	Time
Sampling (sets of BLO contacts)	25th September 2015
Finalization of interview instrument	12th September 2015
Field work duration	25th September to 7th October 2015
Interview transcription	8th October 2015
Analysis and report writing	22nd December 2015
Draft report for design	11th January 2016
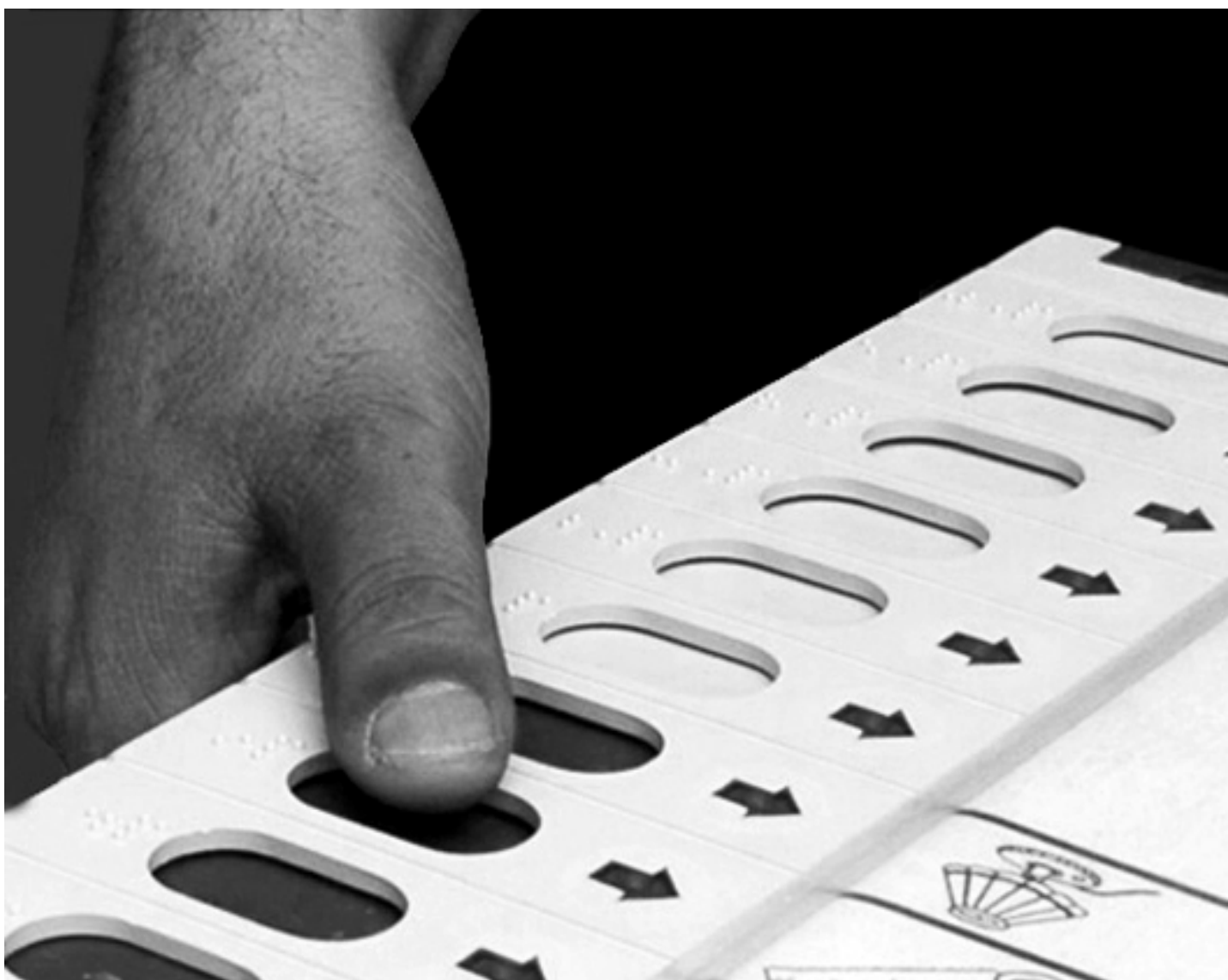
Results

6. Results

The results section will begin with a description of the achieved sample composition, followed by findings from the interviews.

6.1   Sample Composition

Telephonic Interviews were conducted in the months of September and October 2015 using multiple sets of sampled PPs, four in total. Table Q2 shows the number of interviews conducted in each AC by quadrants and the migration classification within. The figure in brackets shows deviations of actual achieved interviews from sample design figures.

Table-Q2: Interviews conducted within each AC by geographical quadrants (Q1 to Q4 on an X-Y plane) and deviations from design (in brackets)

	Bankipur		Kumhrar		Danapur		Phulwari	
	HM	OTH	HM	OTH	HM	OTH	HM	OTH
Q1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	3
Q2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1*	0
Q3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Q4	1	0	1	0 (-1)	2	1	0	0
Total	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	3

Interview with the BLO of PP 75 in Phulwari was left incomplete after the BLO disconnected the call midway and did not answer later.

The number of interviews achieved, as shown in table Q2 were achieved after making several attempts to contact BLOs from the three sets of predetermined samples. While the achieved number fell short of by one interview, the spread of interviews remained largely true to design. In Bankipur, three of the four interviews were conducted successfully using the first sample but not before several attempts went unanswered. One interview was conducted using the second sample as all attempts to contact the BLO from the first sample were unsuccessful. It must be noted that one interview with a BLO from Phulwari did not get beyond halfway. The BLO disconnected the call (unclear if it was deliberate or otherwise) and the interviewer was unable to get hold of them again. Their part responses have been included in this analysis.

In Kumhrar, none of the interviews were conducted using the first set of sampled BLOs. Overall across all ACs, five interviews were conducted using the first set of sampled BLOs, two using the third set and three using the rest of the PPs sampled for the larger QoL study. While the plan was to call up each BLO contact number at least five times, in reality, the team contacted BLOs any number of times as felt necessary to get through. Quite a few interviews were conducted after asking for repeated appointments. The average interview duration was 17 minutes and 20 seconds with the shortest being only 4 minutes and 37 seconds and the longest, 34 minutes and 28 seconds.

Half of the BLOs spoken to were females and half, males. Five BLOs were teachers, two 'Anganwadi Sevikas[2]' and one, a museum keeper. Information on professions of the rest of the sample i.e. six BLOs, could not be identified.

6.2   Results

The majority of the BLOs interviewed had been a BLO for at least three years, with the exception of three (two whom were in Phulwari and one in Bankipur). Four had been in their role for more than eight years. Ten of the BLOs had never been a BLO elsewhere whereas three had been and one other had been involved in election work for nearly 20 years.

The BLOs were mostly very aware of the number of voters in their PPs and indicated that they had between approximately 700 and 1380 voters in the PPs, though one BLO was unsure. A mix of smaller and larger PPs are reflected in each of the ACs though the three BLOs interviewed in Danapur had smaller constituencies (786 to 838 voters). The BLOs from Phulwari suggested the highest amount of migration in their PPs compared with those in other ACs. One BLO from Phulwari suggested as much as 80% of the population is from outside the area. Bankipur was mixed with two BLOs suggesting high rates of migration (30% and 50%) while one BLO was unsure and another indicated most in his PP were local. These responses on migration in Bankipur were more or less in line with the sampling classification within the AC which had an equal number of high migration areas and those not classified as so. Phulwari, however, had a much larger proportion of areas not marked as high migration and observations from BLOs there showed a divergence with respect to it.

Revisions to the list

The Handbook for Booth Level Officers, released by the Election Commission of India in 2011 states that there are in all, four types of voter list revisions. These are, intensive, summary, part intensive - part summary and the last, special revision. While intensive revisions take place once in several years (usually only once in ten or more years), part intensive and summary as well as the special revision can be ordered at any time felt necessary. Summary revisions, however, take place once every year. Apart from these revisions, voter lists are also to be in a state of 'continuous updation' i.e. at any time when no other type of revision is underway. This essentially means that voter list updation is to be facilitated by BLOs at all times subject to other revisions and qualifying dates where there are restrictions on processing applications.

All except two of the BLOs indicated that revisions to the list were done at particular times of the year as indicated to them by the government. One BLO in Danapur said the revisions happen year round though the busiest times are 3-4 times a year associated with elections. Another BLO in Phulwari said they do updations all year round though only receive back updated lists 5 or 6 times a year for confirmation. The BLOs generally did not see their work as a continuous process of updation, perhaps since their role in 'continuous updation' is not defined that way. However, how exactly continuous updation is to be done remains unclear. At the directed times of the year, the BLOs either go door-to-door or station themselves at their polling booth to take forms (there is no consistency between BLOs on which they do even within an AC). One BLO mentioned that citizens are asking for the forms all-year round but the BLO indicated they cannot start their work without a directive from higher up (i.e. in phases across the year). In one PP in Bankipur, the BLOs were going door to door taking forms but now can only distribute the forms but not take them in (i.e. citizen has to do that themselves) but a BLO in Kumhrar said they earlier sat in their offices but have now been told to go door-to-door. Another BLO from Kumhrar said they used to go door-to-door all year round but now they go only when specifically directed.

There also appears to be a discrepancy in how many times a year revisions are done even within ACs with one BLO in Bankipur for example, indicating this was done four times a year while two said it was done about twice, and the last, 8-10 times. There is quite clearly a huge variation in what BLOs do/are asked to do, between and even within ACs.

The BLO register

As per the ECI, a BLO register comprises two parts. The first one consists of present entries of voters in the list and corrections thereof if any, are to be done in the relevant column of the format present. The second part of the BLO register has to be maintained by the BLOs. Here, they are to update information on aspects such as newly developed areas/apartments/societies etc. in their PP and also update information regarding newly arrived voters and newly eligible voters who are yet to be included on the voter list in their PP. The second part also needs to have updated statistical information such as gender ratio, voter to population ratio, comparisons of these with their Assembly Constituency (AC) and Parliamentary Constituency (PC) etc. and voters by age cohorts. According to the ECI, the BLO register is a very important tool as it helps them prepare an error free and pure voter list.

The number of times BLOs have to update this register has not been mentioned clearly on the ECIs documents and training material and ranges from 'frequently' to 'as and when directed'. Broadly, it appears that, given the demands that the register places on a BLO, it would be ideal to update it as and when applications are received and on other information areas, as frequently as possible or whenever information flows in. This would also mean physically visiting different parts of their PP frequently although it is not certain if it is mandatory to do so to verify the applicant's claims unless instructed. The one thing documentation clearly states is that the BLO register has to be completed every year before summary revisions.

Seven BLOs interviewed, spread across all four ACs stated that they updated the register whenever applications were received. In some cases, this was restricted by the availability of forms which they mentioned, come in periodically. In Phulwari, a BLO who has only been a BLO for the last one year stated that they had updated it only once. In Danapur, a BLO stated that they updated it whenever notified, coinciding with when they were asked to do a revision. Broadly, it appeared that there was no single method that BLOs followed. This was true for BLOs within an AC as well; in Bankipur, this ranged from a vague 'sometimes a year' to 'updates are made the entire year as and when we get the required forms and details'. Some BLOs who said that they update forms whenever they received applications proceeded to mention that this was usually after when they are notified by higher ups and when forms are made available to them.

On updating the second part of the BLO register i.e. on new electors coming to their area and new housing structures/ colonies coming up, not a lot of information could be obtained. A BLO in Phulwari, who has been appointed as such for the last four years, stated that no new such structure had come up in their PP as it was 'rural'. The same was echoed by another BLO in the same AC who had been one for over five years. A BLO in Danapur stated that since their PP is predominantly a market area, there was 'no question of new apartments coming up'. Only one BLO, in Kumhrar, specifically stated that they recorded this information, of new housing and structures coming up, when applications come in from higher ups. Actual physical verification of the addresses and voters on ground was directly stated as being done by only three BLOs.

Supporting documentation for applications and checks conducted

The BLO handbook clearly lists out procedures to be followed while accepting forms for new applications as well as any claims, objections and corrections. These include preliminary checks to see if the form is filled up correctly and to a specified standard, the kind of supporting documentation required to validate claims and if not available, procedures to undertake that can verify an applicant's claims.

In our interview schedule, interviewers were asked to respond on the documentation they checked or requested when receiving applications, the completeness of these applications and on whether they enquired if the applicant was registered elsewhere on the voter list. All BLOs appeared to be asking for basic documentation on age and residence/ address while accepting forms. All but two, both in Kumhrar, clearly mentioned the names of some documents that they

ask while accepting forms. It was found that all documents named are a part of the exhaustive document list allowed by the Election Commission of India as valid ones. While knowledge of the exhaustive set could not be evaluated using the given answers, there were indications that BLOs possess a good deal of knowledge on the documents to be accepted with an application. A BLO in Phulwari stated that in case no documentation for age proof was available, they would ask the concerned citizen to get it written by their ward member or 'Mukhiya' and then submit forms. The ECI allows documents where age is mentioned attested by either a Sarpanch or a member of the municipal corporation/committee. Others mentioned accepting affidavits in case no other certificate was available. Overall, it appeared that BLOs knew quite well, the documentation required while accepting forms. However, from the conversations, nothing about verifying the documents accepted came out. However, from the ECI's documents, ultimate responsibility of that does not appear to lie with the BLOs but with the ERO.

On the errors BLOs check in received forms with regards to completing fields of information, the ECI rule says that any field not known and not mandatory should be necessarily filled as 'not known'. During the interviews, despite probing, there was only one mention of checking for completion of field details. This was stated by a BLO in Bankipur.

All BLOs, except one in Bankipur, said that they asked applicants to furnish information on whether they were on the voter list in a different PP. Another BLO in Bankipur said that 'We ask them whether they have removed their names from the list in that area before applying here. *This is because the name of one person should not be on the lists of two areas.*' In Phulwari, one of the BLOs interviewed stated that they cautioned applicants against not revealing information on earlier registrations and that it could invite FIRs against them. According to the ECI, collecting information on earlier registrations by BLOs is very important as it helps avoid registration of citizens in multiple areas but verification rests on the Electoral Roll Officer and higher-ups. While BLOs appeared to be aware of the importance of doing so, one in Danapur also stated that many people did not accept that they were registered elsewhere and kept saying that they had applied but had not received a voter ID.

Who submits the documentation and are there any differences in the quality of information contained within?

The BLO handbook lists out dos and don'ts in terms of receiving claims and objections. The rule says that applications in bulk shall not be received and entertained during a summary revision or a special summary revision. This essentially means that all forms must be submitted in person to the BLO unless in certain cases e.g. claims of all members of one family can be received for registration of names in electoral roll from any one member of the family. The handbook also specifically states that BLOs should not accept applications in bulk by any individual/organization or political party.

When asked about the different sources from where they get forms, most BLOs said that they got it from the citizen concerned or from a family member. A BLO in Bankipur said that if a family member brought them an application, they match applicant details to other family members before accepting the form. Though most BLOs said that forms were submitted only by family members or citizens concerned, one in Phulwari did say that political agents brought them forms. The BLO said '*In the case of applications made by political agents, the correct accepted forms' citizens are called and asked if they're registered elsewhere. If not, we take the forms. The agents try to make us add the names to make their vote banks*'. Asking citizens if they were registered elsewhere is crucial to remove duplications on the voter list. Here, again, the BLO displayed knowledge of this step's importance as it helps EROs and higher ups in the ECI ladder verify duplications/repeats. Another BLO in the same AC alluded to there being pressure to accept forms from agents but that they did not buckle under it. Whatever the source of the form, it appeared that quality of information within in terms of errors was similar.

Address information

Since this study had its focus on the quality of address information on voter lists, BLOs were specifically asked how they accepted address information and whether there was some minimum standard they followed. The BLO handbook, while clearly listing down documents accepted as proof of address, does not state any mandatory minimums in terms of the address parameters that are required. While the application form does have fields such as house/door number, mohalla/road, town/village, Post Office, Tehsil/Taluka/Mandal/Thana, District name and PIN code, it is not certain if these are mandatory or if an address matching the proof submitted along with the form without all these fields would suffice. While the ECI does specify the kind of errors that exist on the voter list database, it does not for the ones that BLOs may encounter on forms. Even here, only a missing house number is defined as an error and not other fields such as a missing road number or lane number.

When asked about this, only one BLO answered to some extent. The BLO in Phulwari said that '*I look at the signatures and whether the documents are complete or not. There is no particular document we insist on having. We just look at whether the addresses on the forms are complete or not*'. Most other BLOs stated that they check the address proof provided but it is not clear whether they meant matching documents with the form or just checking the documents provided for their authenticity.

The 'Nazariya Naksha' or the Polling Part area map

The boundary of each polling part is demarcated during rationalization of polling stations. To know the extent and extremities of their polling part and to do their work more efficiently, BLOs are required to make and update their PP's Nazariya Naksha frequently. These are maps of their PP and they are required to make these maps by free-hand. The use of GIS maps is recommended but not mandatory.

When asked about the Nazariya Naksha, seven BLOs across all ACs but Bankipur said they had made it. In Bankipur, two BLOs reported having updated an existing map and the other two said it had been there since they took charge of their PPs. A BLO in Bankipur stated that before updation by them, the map had been prepared by the District Magistrate. In all, four BLOs said that the map had been made before they became BLOs.

Investigations into address quality in Patna had revealed a mismatch between house numbers on voter lists and actual ones. To investigate this, the interviewer asked BLOs how they allotted house numbers while making the Nazariya Naksha. One BLO in Bankipur, who had not made or updated the map, said that they did not allot any house number and that whatever was given by the citizen is what went for printing to the office. Another in Danapur stated '*whatever numbers come to my mind I keep allotting*'.

Among BLOs who reported having made the maps, the methodology of allotting house numbers varied. One BLO in Danapur said that since house numbers existed before creation of PP maps, they did not allot any and since the area was predominantly a market area, no new houses came up. Echoing this, a BLO in Kumhrar said '*The house number is not allotted by us. It is already given. Whatever is the number that people get, is added. Whatever number is allotted by the government is present. When voter ID cards have to be made the people themselves come and give all the information. From there everything is added*'.

One BLO in Phulwari described a very clear method of allotting house numbers saying '*The counting of houses starts from Bhandarkhana (the name of a locality). The first house there is where the counting starts. We start from the north-west corner and proceed leftwards*'. For new houses, he said '*we start from the number after the number allotted to the last house. Almost zero chance of a house coming in between two existing houses*'. This is in line with what the ECI guidelines state. Another BLO in Phulwari said that they allotted house numbers after asking residents for it and that they confirmed this by asking the concerned citizen's neighbours.

Overall, the method of allotting house numbers appeared to vary both across and within ACs. A BLO in Bankipur even said that matching house numbers and allotting missing ones happened at the office where data entry was done. The recommended method, as per the ECI suggests that wherever available, a BLO should use the house number provided by competent authorities such as the panchayat or municipal corporations. If not available, serialization of the houses should be done in ascending order beginning from North-West to South-East in zigzag manner. Every household should be assigned a number. But the current state of affairs also observed through the address scoring mechanism used in the larger QoL study, suggests a large divergence from this method. This was exemplified by the answer given by a BLO in Phulwari, '*Yes I have made the Nazariya Naksha. In one street there are four very old houses. Those are numbered. Some plots between are empty. If new houses come up in those plots, sometimes it happens that houses are missed. So when the situation is corrected, we start numbering from the beginning. The numbering begins from the very beginning and then the houses are numbered which changes the ordering of the houses. Their numbers change after that. Sometimes we make mistakes. However, since this has been going on for a long time, changing this will take a lot of work and effort from the government*'.

Allotment of house numbers and address details

As a follow up on the question on 'nazariya naksha' and allotting of house numbers, BLOs were asked whether they knew the authorities responsible for doing so. Except for two BLOs, one in Kumhrar and another in Danapur, none was able to answer. These two said that the 'corporation' was responsible for doing so, most probably referring to the Patna Municipal Corporation.

BLO's opinion on address infrastructure in the list and their PP

A total of six BLOs, three in Bankipur, two in Kumhrar and one in Danapur, stated when asked about their opinion on the quality of address infrastructure in their PP and on their PP list, that it is 'fine'. Even out of these, one each in Bankipur and Phulwari went on to say that house numbers were missing on ground. The said BLO in Bankipur stated that while house numbers are mentioned on the voter list, the same house (on the ground) does not have a number allotted to its address. It appeared that these BLOs did not think having house numbers on ground was necessary to help facilitate their work. Indicating perhaps the same, another BLO in Phulwari said '*The houses are very compact so everyone knows other people living on the street. The village name, police station, post office, head post office and street name are enough to find an address*'.

Three BLOs, two in Kumhrar and one in Danapur, said that addresses had all the required details such as the house number and other parameters but it appeared that they were speaking of the information on their PP lists and not on ground. It appeared that quality of address infrastructure varied both within and across ACs and the issue of missing house numbers on ground was the most prevalent one. This is in line with the findings of the Pilot study conducted in the city.

Quality of voter lists in their PP inherited upon becoming a BLO and suggestions on overall process improvement

When asked about the quality of the list that they inherited, all but four BLOs indicated that they had numerous errors. One BLO each in all ACs said that the lists were fine or had only minor errors. Other BLOs referred to all kinds of errors in the voter list, such as incorrect ages, names, genders, photographs etc. One BLO, in Bankipur told the interviewer that their own age was wrong on the voter list and blamed the back end data operator for these errors saying those '*preparing the ID cards do not even pay the minimum attention required to distinguish the photos of a 60 year old from an 18 year old. The person entering the details does it all wrong. We've said before we want to do it but we're not allowed. Yet the citizens complain to us the BLO.*' It was not clear, however, if the BLO was referring to the voter ID or the voter list whilst talking about the error. Another BLO in Danapur said that while addresses on voter lists were

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correct, several voter IDs 'might' have wrong addresses. Indicating that errors may have much to do with data entry, a BLO in Phulwari said that there were some differences in the voter list compared to the information that the voters had provided. All but the ones who said that voter lists were more or less fine stated that things had improved once they took over.

When BLOs were asked how the entire process could be improved, six BLOs, spread across all the four ACs in concern either had no suggestions to offer with one in Bankipur even stating that nothing would be better than the process they currently followed. However, the other six BLOs who answered the question had several good suggestions to make which, in addition to being a good source of ideas, gave further insights into what may be causing errors in the first place. All of these BLOs suggested improvements in the back end data entry and 'printing' system and also put forth their views on what ails these systems. Two BLOs in Bankipur indicated that data entry operators were much at fault for the errors that their PP lists had. One of them said '*People who work in the office where the ID cards and voter lists are being printed should do their work properly. All the information reaching them is correct. However, when the lists and voter IDs come back, the details are all mixed up. They do not enter the details correctly*'. Another BLO in Phulwari said '*The people at the printing office are sometimes brought on contract from outside. This creates a language problem for them. If the people working on the computers are comfortable with the language of the region then the spelling errors which appear in the names of the electors will not be there. For people who fill in English, the translation to Hindi is not coming out to be correct*'.

Another key problem faced by Janaagraha, on which the Patna pilot study also shed light, found voice in a BLO from Danapur. The BLO said '*The serial number allotment of houses is messed up. If serial number 1 is found to be one house, then 2 will be found after say, house 25. This has been going on since many years. Since the situation can only be sorted out by sorting the 'makaan' (house) numbers. We cannot play a role in this unless the government does something about it*'.

Discussion

7. Discussion

Introduced into the voter list management system towards the end of 2006, Booth Level Officers (BLOs), over the years, have been acknowledged in documents within the ECI as a major reason behind the improved (and improving) state of voter lists today. However, being frontline workers, they also shoulder responsibility for the errors within and are perhaps a very good source to insights behind them.

Broadly, the BLOs do not think that there are a lot of issues with what they are doing. Even when asked for suggestions to improve the whole process, they spoke of improvements required in data entry and printing systems, rather than with processes they, as BLOs, are currently following. Other suggestions had to do with availability of forms and centers that facilitate voter list updation as well as suggestions on continuous updation. None of the BLOs spoke about any need for enhanced training or an increased frequency of the same. Neither was there any mention of a need for more specific rules or procedures. In a sense, it appears that the BLO's sense of 'not many things being wrong' with what they do, has to do with the fact that they are not aware of some key procedures to follow and do not see the inconsistencies with what they are doing and what their neighbouring BLO is. Procedural deviations were seen across a host of functions that the BLOs are required to perform. The status of continuous updation, the state in which voter lists should be unless other revisions are ongoing, appeared unclear given variances when and how frequently BLOs went about doing updations.

BLOs across ACs were reportedly using different techniques for creating the 'Nazariya Naksha' or the PP area map and there were indications that most were not even aware of what the ECI rules say in this regard. This issue, with creation of the Nazariya Naksha in which house numbering is a crucial aspect, has direct bearing on the larger issue under investigation. This study was designed to identify the reasons behind the current state of information on voter lists in Patna, more specifically address information. More specifically, it was designed to explore the issue of large numbers of addresses as listed on the voter lists, not being found on the field. Findings from the Patna pilot, which included field visits, had pointed out that address infrastructure in the city was complex and adding to that was how the citizenry had adopted it in different areas. Interviews with BLOs suggested the same.

One key parameter which helps an investigator get to the concerned citizen's address is the house number. Findings reveal a host of issues with this ranging from BLOs allotting numbers in a manner not consistent with the ECI's procedures to a lack of house numbers in actual addresses allotted by competent authorities. All BLOs, including those who created their PP's map, said that house numbers existed even before they became BLOs. Clubbed with the fact that most of these house numbers did not even exist on ground, it remains unclear how earlier numbers had been allotted and how or if these had been aligned with the ECI's methodology of allotting house addresses in case there weren't any.

Given this, it is not clear how much effort would be required to clean up address information on Patna's voter lists. As one BLO put it, "*the numbering begins from the very beginning and then the houses are numbered which changes the ordering of the houses. Their numbers change after that. Sometimes we make mistakes. However, since this has been going on for a long time, changing this will take a lot of work and effort from the government*".

This study was initiated as an add-on to the Patna pilot study which returned a figure of 45% 'addresses not found'. Clubbed with findings from the address scoring layer within the Patna QoL study, it put forth questions on why these addresses cannot be found and consequently, how they should be interpreted in terms of analyzing the quality of the voter list.
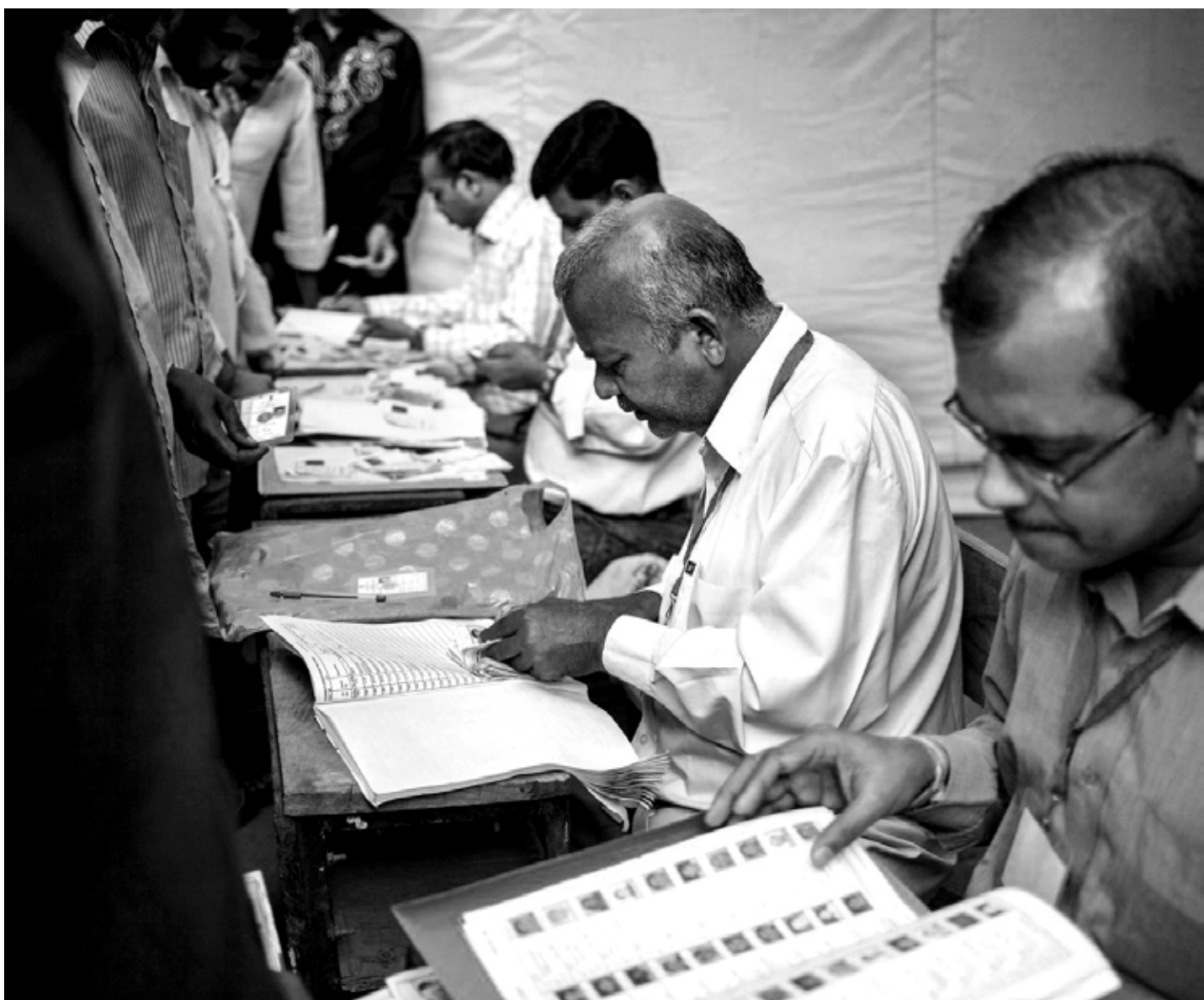
Findings from the BLO interviews have shown how procedural lapses by BLOs themselves and alleged issues with back end systems, such as printing of forms and data entry of filled forms, may be feeding into the poor quality of address information on voter lists in Patna. These in themselves are issues of concern regarding the hygiene and maintenance of Patna's voter lists. Furthermore, broadly speaking, Janaagraha's QoL surveys look at hygiene of voter lists in terms of required deletions and potential additions. When an address is not findable, it becomes impossible to ascertain if citizens listed against this address are genuine or ought to be deleted. If BLOs are the only mechanism for finding addresses in some PPs (in Patna), this would require their input into QoL surveys. Given the large number of PPs covered in any one QoL survey, this may not be feasible or cost-effective. This issue however, may be a feature of just Patna and will need to be analysed in other cities.

Appendices

8. Appendices

8.1   Sampled PPs (and sets) for the Interviews

Sampling for the interviews was kept consistent with that of the larger QoL study. Table B1 shows the PPs (exact PP numbers masked) where BLO interviews were conducted along with information on which quadrant it lied in and its migration classification. The last column shows which set of sample was used to make the call; a total of 4 sets were sampled and kept so that in case a BLO from the first was not successfully interviewed, the next one(s) could be used.

Table-B1: Detailed break up of PPs with whose BLOs interviews were conducted

AC name	PP Number*	Quadrant	HM/OTH	Sample set using which call was made
Bankipur	XX	Q1	HM	Set-1
	XX	Q2	OTH	Set-1
	XX	Q3	OTH	Set-2
	XX	Q4	HM	Set-1
Danapur	XX	Q4	HM	Set-1
	XX	Q4	OTH	Set-3
	XX	Q4	HM	Set-4
Kumhrar	XX	Q1	OTH	Set-2
	XX	Q1	HM	Set-4
	XX	Q4	HM	Set-2
Phulwari	XX	Q1	OTH	Set-3
	XX	Q1	OTH	Set-1
	XX	Q1	OTH	Set-2
	XX	Q2	HM	Set-4

* PP numbers removed to preserve anonymity.

8.2   The Instrument (semi structured interview guide)

QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED TO THE BOOTH LEVEL OFFICERS

[INTERVIEWER TO SAY: Hello, I am calling from _____. We are conducting a study on behalf of Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy (JCCD) on the quality of voter lists in Patna. A non-profit founded in 2001, Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy works with both citizens and governments to transform quality of life in India's cities and towns. As one of the ways to do this, the organization has been involved in work around voter list management for over a decade. In this time, we have worked very closely with former Chief Election Commissioners and also with the Chief Electoral Officer, Karnataka.

We recently concluded a survey on the quality of voter lists in Patna and now plan to understand the process of voter list management from the perspective of the BLOs. To this end, we are conducting interviews with several BLOs such as you. Can you spare us 20 minutes of your time for this purpose?

INTERVIEWER INSTRUCTION: If the BLO is busy at that time then ask him for an appointment at a later date, note that down and call him/her later according to the time given.

Appointment Time:
Appointment Date:

Before starting, we would like to tell you that the interview is divided into sections such as familiarity with the place, work and procedures followed etc.]

ICE BREAKER

Interviewer to say: "Let's begin by talking about the elections and the current political scenario. What are your views on that?"

Familiarity with the place:

Question 1:

Since when have you been assigned the responsibilities of a BLO?

(INSTRUCTION TO THE INTERVIEWER: Note down the span of time mentioned by the BLO and then ask him/her the following question.)

How much of that time have you spent as the BLO of this Polling Part?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Question 2:

How familiar are you with the place? By familiar I mean please provide us with some details about this polling part.

[INSTRUCTION TO THE INTERVIEWER: Wait for the BLO to respond and cover the following points mentioned. If they finish their answer but do not cover any or all of the following points, prompt him to provide some insights on that point/those points.]

    a)   Number of people in this Polling Part
    b)   Physical size of the Polling Part
    c)   Composition of the population in terms of migrants and permanent settlers

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Work and procedures followed:

(INSTRUCTION TO THE INTERVIEWER: Interviewer to say "We would now like to ask a few questions around the work you do.")

Question 3:

Tell us about the activities you engage in as a part of your work. By activities I mean the kinds of revisions you undertake or have undertaken and your work on the applications received.

(INSTRUCTION TO THE INTERVIEWER: Wait for the BLO's response on this, notice how many of the following points he is covering and if his answer doesn't cover all the following mentioned points then prompt him to say something on those points.)

    a)   Kinds of revision undertaken (intensive, summary, partly intensive- partly summary and special)
    b)   Creating awareness among the people in your polling part regarding the electoral process
    c)   Updating forms on the applications received
    d)   Updating the maps of the polling parts

Recording information and documents:

Question 4:

We would now like to talk to you about the BLO register that you maintain. Tell us about the work you undertake for the maintenance of your register i.e. the BLO's register.

(INSTRUCTION TO THE INTERVIEWER: Wait for him to respond and cover the following points. If he doesn't, then then prompt him to say something on the below points.)

a) Statistical information as per last revision, gender analysis of the population etc.
b) Annexure 1 (consists of present entries of electors in the rolls, and corrections thereof if any, in the relevant column)
c) Annexure 2 (which mentions and updates the information pertaining to the newly developed areas / societies / Apartments, immigrant electors, voter-population ratio, voter population in various age groups etc. in the part allotted to the BLO)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Question 5:

We would like to ask you about some details on the activities you undertake while recording information from documents provided. By activities I mean how you check the documents received and make enquiries on earlier registrations of the elector.

(INSTRUCTION TO THE INTERVIEWER: Wait for the BLO's response on this, notice how many of the following points he is covering and if his answer doesn't cover all the following mentioned points then prompt him to say something on those points.)

a) Accepting and processing of the documents received in support of the requests made
b) Rules followed while accepting and filling up forms i.e. requirements for names and addresses in correct format, photographs, signatures etc.
c) Enquiries on earlier registrations i.e. whether their names are mentioned in any other polling part

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Question 6:

What are the sources from where you usually get applications of claims and objections? By sources I mean citizens themselves, agents of political entities or any other sources from which applications are received.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Question 7:

Can you tell us something about the quality of applications you receive from each of these sources? By this I mean whether there is a difference in the quality of applications received from these sources.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Address information:

(INSTRUCTION TO THE INTERVIEWER: Interviewer to say "We would now like to ask a few questions on the address information in your polling part.")

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Question 8:

How do you record/ accept address information? By this I mean please provide us with information on the documents you rely on and what are the minimum standards you expect those to fulfill for being recorded/accepted.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Question 9:

Did you make the 'Nazariya Naksha' of this polling part? If yes, how did you allot numbers to the houses?

Question 10:

How do you go about allotting addresses to the new houses that come up in your polling part for inclusion in the voter list?

Question 11:

Who allots the house numbers and other address details of the houses of the polling part i.e. census office, other government authorities etc.?

Question 12:

What is your opinion on the current infrastructure of addresses in your polling part or the polling parts which were earlier under your jurisdiction?

Question 13:

What is your opinion on the quality of the electoral rolls which you got when you took over the charge of this polling part?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Suggestions:

(INSTRUCTION TO THE INTERVIEWER: Interviewer to say "We would now like to ask for a few suggestions from you.")

Question 14:

What, according to you, can be done in order to improve the quality of the information you get better?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Question 15:

What, according to you, can be done in order to make the entire process of maintenance of electoral rolls more efficient?

(INSTRUCTION TO THE INTERVIEWER: Make sure he gives one suggestion on gathering of information on the electoral rolls with a view on making addresses better.)

(INSTRUCTION TO THE INTERVIEWER: After checking whether all the details have been recorded, thank the BLO and end the interview.)

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____