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# Open Elections

FOR A

*better*

DEMOCRACY



KRISHNA SHARMA



# Open Elections

For a Better Democracy

A Concept Paper  
*for the consideration of*  
the People and Leaders of India

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దేశమును ప్రేమించుమన్నా  
మంచి అన్నది పెంచుమన్నా !  
వట్టిమాటలు కట్టిపెట్టోయ్  
గట్టిమేల్ తలపెట్టవోయ్ !

గురజాడ అప్పారావు

Dear brother,  
Love thy country  
And promote goodness!  
Shun empty talk  
And commence good work  
At once!

Gurajada Apparao

# Introduction

The current political and electoral systems are plagued by numerous issues, such as criminality, corruption, cash and other enticements to voters, populist schemes, minority appeasement, caste and religion based politics, lack of fair representation for many sections of society, and voter apathy. The few solutions, such as reserved constituencies and campaign spending limits, that we have put in place to address these issues are clearly not working.

So, what can we do to make things better? For inspiration, let us look back to the 1990s—a time when the economy was in a similarly dire state, with the country teetering on the edge of economic bankruptcy. The solution was to open up the economy and dismantle archaic controls, which led to a remarkable transformation: the economy rebounded, becoming one of the most vibrant in the world, and within just three decades, India rose to become the fifth-largest economy globally.

We envision that a similar transformation can be achieved in the political system by fundamentally reshaping it with two groundbreaking changes:

1. Opening up all voters to all leaders and all leaders to all voters by eliminating the concept of territorial constituencies altogether, and
2. Granting multiple votes per voter instead of the current one vote per voter.

These changes form the cornerstone of a new system we propose, referred to as the ‘Open Elections’ system. This system ensures fair representation for people of all identities and interests, brings honest, sincere, and committed politicians back into the political framework, curbs criminality and corruption at both local and higher levels, and effectively addresses numerous other problems and issues, which we will discuss in detail.

We will present the details of this vision in a structured manner in this paper. We begin with a thorough examination of the problems and issues—both obvious and not so obvious—with the current system. Next, we will review the existing and proposed solutions and explain why they are not effective. Following this, we will provide a comprehensive description of the Open Elections System and its key components.

We will then illustrate how modern technologies, such as QR codes and touch screens, can be leveraged to implement this system. Subsequently, we will describe how it addresses the numerous issues of the current system, benefits voters, leaders, political parties, and the Election Commission in various ways, and paves the way for national progress and a stronger democracy. We conclude by presenting a roadmap for the implementation of the Open Elections System.

\* \* \*

Before we proceed, a few words about myself, the author: My name is Krishna Sharma. I was born and raised in Kavur, Palnadu District, Andhra Pradesh. I am a gold medalist from the University of Hyderabad, where I completed my M.Sc. in Mathematics in 1980. My professional career has been in information technology, where I worked as a software engineer and architect at ECIL, Hyderabad, from 1981 to 1989, and subsequently in various companies in the USA from 1989 to 2018.

My passion, distinct from my educational background and professional career, lies in understanding, in depth, social issues that impact large populations and proposing unconventional solutions involving fundamental changes. I am currently working on two concept papers: one on reforming the electoral system in India (this paper) and another on developing a common lipi and digital code for all Indian languages. Additionally, I am authoring two books: *Time to replace Education System with Growth System* and *Architecture of Homo Sapiens*.

I have no political background or affiliations of any kind whatsoever. The Open Elections solution presented here is completely neutral to all ideologies and interests of political parties and population segments. It is designed to make life better for everyone and to advance democracy and society as a whole.



# Current System

1. We will begin by outlining the problems and issues with the current political and electoral systems.

## Issues with the current system

2. **Criminality, Corruption and Demagoguery:** Elections have become an expensive affair, with candidates vying to outspend one another to remain competitive. Practices like offering cash and other incentives to voters, i.e., ‘vote-buying’, have become embarrassingly common, driving up election expenses and making a mockery of democracy. Only a few politicians can afford such extravagant spending from their personal wealth. The rest rely on extortions before elections and resort to corruption and nepotism afterward to recover their expenses. Politics, in fact, has turned into a lucrative business for those who know how to play the game effectively. And all of this has to be carried out ‘under the radar’ to avoid ‘getting caught,’ necessitating collusion with criminal elements. Furthermore, politics has devolved into a sport of demagoguery—the art of manipulating voters’ emotions through caste-based, religion-based, and ideology-based divisive rhetoric, pitting one section, region, religion or identity group against another. This awkward, embarrassing, and unethical sport of politics has all but driven away honest and sincere leaders—those genuinely interested in serving the people and upholding democratic values—from the political field altogether.

3. **Lack of fair representation:** Only the wealthier and more influential sections of society, often referred to as the ‘upper castes,’ possess the money and muscle power necessary to enter the electoral fray and secure election victories. Political parties, too, prioritize nominating such candidates to maximize their chances of winning seats, leading to ‘upper caste dominance’. Political parties recognize that it is more effective to attract votes from other sections of society through sops, enticements, and cash, rather than finding candidates from those sections who have the muscle and money power to compete and win elections. As a result, the other sections of society remain underrepresented in the legislatures, leading to steadily growing discontent among them.

4. **Delimitation Issues:** The Delimitation Commission is responsible for redrawing constituency boundaries when demographic changes warrant it, ensuring that the size of the electorate is roughly the same across all constituencies. However, this process is slow, resulting in some constituencies remaining twice the size of the others for a long time, undermining the principle of fair representation. Moreover, the Delimitation Commission is currently facing another challenge and is at its wits’ end, unsure of how to proceed. This pertains to the discontent among the ‘wealthier but less populous’ states regarding the higher representation of ‘poorer but more populous’ states in the legislature.

5. **Generic Politicians:** The electorate in each constituency consists of people from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, professions, and identities, each with its own distinct interests, needs, issues, and concerns. As a result, the system favors ‘jack of all, master of none’ politicians who can present themselves as ‘all things to all people.’ Leaders passionate about addressing the specific needs of a particular segment of the population—such as farmers, teachers, weavers, or construction workers—find it impossible to win an election, as any one such segment forms only a minority in a given constituency. Consequently, our

political system and legislatures are dominated by politicians skilled in generic politics, rather than those with expertise and commitment to a specific field, sector, or population segment.

6. **Limited choices and dilemmas:** Voters in the current system face limited choices and significant dilemmas in at least three ways: a) Their options are confined to selecting from two or three candidates fielded by major political parties, as voting for any other candidate is essentially considered a ‘wasted’ vote. b) Political parties typically present a manifesto before elections, which is a bundled package of policies and positions on various issues. Voters have no way to selectively support or reject specific elements of the manifesto, and consequently, no matter which party they vote for, they end up endorsing at least some policies and positions that may conflict with their own interests. c) Voters who like the candidate but not the party or its prime/chief ministerial nominee, or the party but not the candidate, or the prime/chief ministerial nominee but not the party, find themselves in a dilemma. Their vote is interpreted as an endorsement of all three, which is rarely the case.

7. **Imposed Candidates, Forced Marriages and Perpetual Minority Rule:** Democracy is meant to allow people to elect leaders of their choice. However, the choices are determined by political parties that select the nominees, effectively ‘imposing’ them on the voters. Consequently, true ‘positive’ votes—those cast out of genuine support for a candidate—make up only a small fraction of the total votes received by the candidate. For the majority of voters who supported the winning candidates, it is an ‘arranged marriage,’ while for only a small minority, it is a ‘love marriage.’ Furthermore, the current system forces the entire electorate of a constituency to be represented by the winning candidate, including those who did not vote for the candidate and those who abstained from voting, effectively forcing them into an ‘arranged marriage.’

8. As a result, typically only 10% to 20% of voters are in a ‘love marriage,’ while the rest find themselves in either an ‘arranged marriage’ or a ‘forced marriage.’ This means that a vast majority of voters are represented by a candidate acceptable to only a minority. This is, in effect, an indirect ‘minority rule.’ As this pattern repeats across nearly all constituencies in every election, the country is, in a sense, under perpetual minority rule.

9. This means only a small percentage of voters have complete faith and trust in any elected leader, while the majority do not. Only a few feel genuine respect for or a connection with their elected representatives. This lack of trust, connection, and relationship between them places both voters and leaders in ethical as well as practical quandaries. How can voters feel comfortable approaching a leader they did not vote for, with any grievance or need? How can elected leaders treat those who voted for them and those who did not with equal fairness and consideration? How can we hope to build a strong democracy on the foundation of such weak relationships between voters and leaders?

10. **Voter Apathy and Cynicism:** Given the reality shaped by the factors outlined above—limited choices, voters’ dilemmas, upper-caste dominance, corruption and criminality, forced marriages, lack of fair representation, and weak relationships—voter disillusionment and cynicism about the system, leading to apathy, should not be surprising. Preaching voting as the sacred duty of citizens in a democracy will do little to alleviate this situation.

11. **Lack of National Outlook and an Unholy Alliance:** A national body like the Lok Sabha should ideally be composed of leaders with a national outlook, vision, and appeal. However, the current system of territorial constituencies reduces elections to this national body into local contests, where factors such as local clout, alignment with local factions, and

control over local businesses often overshadow the national outlook, vision, and appeal of candidates in determining their chances of winning. Consequently, these national bodies are often filled with members whose vision, outlook, interests, and appeal are more local than national. Further, leaders of regional parties, unfortunately, often focus solely on bargaining for state interests, offering little vision, perspective, or leadership needed for national development and integrity.

12. How can a country progress without leaders capable of framing national-level policies, managing large-scale programs, or heading key institutions, agencies, and departments? This leadership vacuum has been one of the significant factors in India's slow progress. Critical sectors such as education, healthcare, sports, tourism, agriculture, and manufacturing have consistently suffered due to a lack of strong, visionary leadership. To compensate for this leadership vacuum at least to some extent, national parties often rely on the Rajya Sabha to bring leaders with national vision and outlook into positions of power.

13. Almost all members of the legislatures, at the national or state level, act as mere extensions of the party high-command in the debates and votings on the floors of legislatures. They never express their own opinions even if they differ from those of the party high-command. In fact, these winners of the 'local leaders' may not even have strong perspective of their own on any issue of importance.

14. Further, bound by their need to prove their loyalty to their party leadership, the members of the ruling party, never question the government on its misdeeds, as a responsible members of the legislatures tasked with overseeing the executive, are supposed to do. Constitution itself is flawed in this context. But why would members of the largest party, who themselves elected the leader of the government (prime minister or chief minister), criticize the leader they elected? What we have is a unholy alliance between the ruling party high-command and the ruling party legislators, each standing by the other regarding their misdeeds. The legislators ignore the high-level misdeeds of their party leadership, and the party leadership ignores the local-level misdeeds of the elected leaders.

15. Furthermore, the concept of constituency-based elections inherently creates a 'conflict of interest' for elected leaders. Are members of a national body like the Lok Sabha supposed to prioritize national interests or the specific interests of their constituency? How should they vote on a bill that benefits the nation as a whole but requires sacrifices from their own constituency?

16. These same patterns, issues, and conflicts of interest can also be seen affecting state legislatures and, consequently, the development and integrity of states, albeit on a smaller scale. This is because territorial constituencies similarly reduce elections to state legislatures into 'local contests'.

17. **Local Bodies Rendered Ineffective:** Under the current system of territorial constituencies, the best of local leadership is often absorbed into national and state legislatures, leaving local bodies with weak and ineffective leaders. While MPs and MLAs possess significant local clout, they lack formal authority over local bodies and local matters. Conversely, leaders of local bodies have the authority but lack the necessary influence to drive change.

18. This imbalance results in MPs and MLAs overshadowing local body leaders, undermining the principles of three-tier governance (national, state, and local) and the

decentralization of power that a vibrant democracy demands and the Constitution intends. Political analysts have observed that local bodies, even in countries like Pakistan and China—nations with weak or no democratic traditions—often enjoy greater autonomy and authority than those in India. The absence of robust local governance structures significantly hampers local development. Citizens frequently turn to state and central governments to address local issues, overburdening these higher levels of government and leading to delays, inefficiencies, and irrelevant solutions to matters of local significance.

**19. Candidate Selection Challenges:** The territorial constituencies system is not easy for political parties to navigate either. Selecting candidates, or “giving tickets,” is both a crucial and highly challenging exercise for parties before every election. They must identify candidates who possess clout, money power, and muscle power while also being acceptable to the electorate, party cadres, and internal factions. The top leadership, often distanced from the ground realities of individual constituencies, finds it especially difficult to ensure the selection of the “right” candidates. Poor candidate selection can be disastrous, potentially resulting in internal dissent, loss of votes, loss of seats, or even a complete election defeat.

**20. Lack of Internal Democracy:** Internal elections within a party enable a broader and more representative pool of leaders to emerge. However, many parties lack the resources, organizational abilities, and discipline to conduct these elections regularly and effectively. Challenges such as maintaining authentic membership rolls, preventing adversarial infiltration, and organizing fair and transparent elections make internal democratization a daunting task. In the absence of internal elections, sycophants and loyalists often rise through the ranks, sidelining capable and strong leaders. This undermines the morale of party cadres and erodes the quality of the party’s leadership and decision-making over time, eventually leading to electoral failures and even the risk of the party’s extinction.

**21. Disproportional Representation:** Another significant challenge for political parties stems from the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system. Under this system, even a small drop in vote share can result in a disproportionately large loss of seats, while a small gain in vote share can lead to a disproportionately large gain in seats. This dynamic leaves some parties underrepresented and others overrepresented. For instance, a party supported by 40% of voters might secure only 30% of the seats, while another party with 41% voter support might capture 70% of the seats. This distortion is unjust not only for the parties but also for the voters themselves, as the skewed seat-to-vote ratio fails to accurately represent their will.

**22. Hostility instead of competition:** Elections under the territorial constituencies system function as a zero-sum game: a vote gained by one party equates to a vote lost by another. This dynamic compels political parties to fiercely compete for every vote, escalating what starts as a competition into rivalry and, eventually, into full-blown hostility. Local factions exacerbate this issues by aligning with rival parties, bringing their pre-existing hostilities into the political arena. Additionally, parties often try to exploit existing social and ideological divisions within society, aligning themselves with specific ideologies and voter segments rather than focusing the broader issues facing the nation (or state, in the case of state elections) as a whole. Over time, such alignments lead to societal polarization, deepening existing divides and creating new social wedges.

**23. Confrontation instead of Collaboration:** As if all this were not enough, the unfortunate label of the “opposition party” given to the minority party further exacerbates the problem. The minority party often takes this label literally, making it its mission to oppose every proposal from the ruling party, regardless of the merits of the proposal.

24. The very concept of an "opposition party" is inherently flawed—why should we elect one party to govern and another to oppose it? All elected representatives, irrespective of party affiliation, are meant to represent the people and work collaboratively for the common good. Instead, this terminology perpetuates and legitimizes the continuation of pre-election hostilities into post-election legislative debates and dynamics. The ruling party frequently abuses state apparatus to target opposition leaders, while opposition parties concentrate on relentless demonization of the ruling party. This antagonistic dynamic fosters a toxic political environment, detracting from constructive policymaking and undermining democratic governance.

25. **No Effective Watchdogs:** The media is often considered the watchdog of governments. However, there are two significant problems with this expectation. First, an independent media requires journalists with a high degree of independence and integrity, as well as a large subscription base to support them financially—both of which are increasingly unrealistic. Second, the fear of 'exposure' by the media has diminished, as governments and political parties can now disseminate their own versions of the truth through social media. Moreover, there are countless ways to spin issues and manipulate statistics to support virtually any narrative.

26. We also consider 'opposition' parties as playing the role of the watchdog. However, there are two problems with this expectation as well. First, the opposition is just another political entity with its own interests—how can it be trusted any more than the ruling party? Second, even when the opposition is correct, it lacks sufficient legislative power to block any proposal, policy, or bill. It can bark but cannot bite.

27. We also sometimes consider activists as playing the role of watchdogs. However, activists are often driven by ideologies and funded by agenda-driven, sometimes external, agencies. They lack any mandate from the people and are therefore not accountable to anyone. Why, then, would governments or the public take them seriously?

28. **Leadership leak:** Many capable leaders, who are already a rare commodity, unfortunately never gain power or have the opportunity to provide their valuable leadership due to several factors. This phenomenon, which we will call "leadership leak," occurs in three ways: due to contextual flaws, human flaws, and systemic flaws.

29. The first type of leadership leak involves the loss of honest and principled leaders who stay away from politics, unwilling to compromise their values by offering enticements to voters, arousing their emotions, engaging in divisive politics, and the like.

30. The second type of leadership leak occurs within political parties, where talented leaders who disagree with the top leadership are often sidelined or suppressed. Despite their abilities and potential, these leaders are unable to rise through the ranks or secure their party's nomination for elections, as loyalty frequently takes precedence over merit.

31. The third type of leadership leak arises from the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) method used in the current system. Political parties often field their strongest candidates against the strongest candidates of rival parties (and average candidates against average ones). Regardless of the outcome, only half of the strong candidates succeed in the elections, while the other half lose and must remain out of power for five years. History bears witness to many capable and visionary parliamentarians being excluded from power simply because they lost the election by a narrow margin of votes to another candidate.

32. **Other issues:** We tried to capture here the major issues that stare at us in face. There could be others that political pundits, politicians and voters are aware of. Unfortunately, there is no initiative or mechanism in place to tackle these problems in a comprehensive and structured manner. Instead, the responses are typically reactionary and, therefore, ineffective, attempting to address only a select few issues. In the next section, we will delve into these partial solutions and examine their shortcomings.

## Current Solutions and their shortcomings

33. **Curbing Criminality and Corruption:** The rise of criminality and corruption tops the list of concerns about the current system. Naturally, we hope for the enactment and enforcement of strict laws to prevent individuals with criminal backgrounds from entering politics and to cleanse the system of entrenched corrupt elements. But this is easier said than done. Why would any political party, which often relies on the same criminal elements and corrupt practices for its survival, tie its own hands by enacting strict laws? Aren't political leaders savvy enough to circumvent even the few laws that are enacted and to exploit the cracks in the system?

34. **Level playing Field:** We often discuss creating a level playing field to ensure that anyone with ideas and leadership skills can enter the fray and win elections, regardless of how much money they can raise or spend during campaigns. But how do we achieve this? The only solution we seem to have is to impose limits on donations and campaign spending. But does this work? We all know the answer. Political parties and leaders know how to operate 'under the radar' and circumvent those limits. Political parties specifically choose leaders who excel at raising and spending large sums of money without getting caught.

35. **NOTA:** This is one of the interesting 'solutions' in our election system. NOTA (None of the Above) serves only as a vent for voters to express their frustration and disenchantment with the leaders in the fray. It serves no practical purpose. It can neither prevent 'bad politicians' from entering the race, nor attract 'good politicians' into the political field.

36. **Reserved constituencies:** The concept of reserved constituencies originates from the Communal Award proposed by British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald and the compromise between Gandhi and Ambedkar called 'Poona Pact' in the early 1930s. The Communal Award proposed separate electorates for various demographics, which Ambedkar supported, believing it would empower the socially and economically weaker sections, particularly the Dalits. However, Gandhi and many others opposed it, arguing that it could exacerbate communal divisions. Reserved constituencies emerged as a compromise between these differing perspectives.

37. There are at least four problems with this compromise. Firstly, it negates the ideals of representative democracy by compelling voters in reserved constituencies to choose a leader from the SC or ST communities. This restriction undermines the freedom of voters in these constituencies to elect a leader of their choice. Secondly, it creates a conflict of interest for elected representatives: should they represent the interests of the SC and ST communities exclusively, or those of all constituents who voted for them, regardless of caste? Thirdly, in many reserved constituencies, the candidates fielded are often 'dummy' candidates, backed by influential sections of society who wield the actual power from behind the scenes, making the concept of 'reserved constituencies' a farce. Fourthly, it is not a satisfactory solution even for some castes within the SC classification, as they complain that the 'upper castes' within the

SC classification garner most of the nominations and, consequently, the seats. They are demanding SC sub-classification to ensure fair representation for them.

38. **Caste-based census:** Caste-based census has been gaining traction recently as a means to ensure fair representation for all sections of society. However, it is not as straightforward as it appears. People may not provide accurate information about their caste for various reasons, and many communities may feel their numbers are undercounted and raise complaints. Moreover, conducting a caste-based census alone will not resolve the representation issue. It would necessitate either creating more 'reserved constituencies' for additional sections of society or establishing separate electorates for each caste, akin to the 'communal award' discussed earlier. Both options, however, would entrench caste divisions permanently, undermining the ideal of achieving caste-free politics and, ultimately, a caste-free society. Furthermore, this approach compels 'caste-free' voters—a rapidly growing demographic due to urbanization and inter-caste marriages—to think and vote along caste lines, thereby limiting their choices.

39. **Other issues:** We lack even hypothetical solutions, let alone effective ones, for the many other problems of the current system discussed in the previous section. In the next chapter, we propose a comprehensive solution designed to address all of these issues.

# Open Elections

40. To address the many issues discussed in a previous section, we propose a solution termed ‘Open Elections,’ inspired by the economic reforms of the 1990s. Back then, opening up the economy and removing existing constraints transformed a deteriorating and nearly bankrupt economy into a vibrant and prosperous one, propelling India to become the fifth-largest economy in the world in just three decades. We believe a similar transformation can occur in the political field by opening up the electoral system.

41. By ‘Open’ Elections, we mean opening up *all the leaders to all the voters, and all the voters to all the leaders*, dismantling the territorial constituencies. Under this system, voters can vote for any leader from anywhere in the country (or state in the case of state elections) and leaders can compete to attract voters from across the nation (or state in the case of state elections), building their own pan-India ‘voter bases’.

42. We also propose that each voter be given multiple votes—say twelve—which they can distribute, in any proportion, among multiple leaders they trust to represent their various interests (full detail in later sections). This means each voter is represented by multiple leaders, and each voter would decide the fate of multiple leaders in the elections. Leaders would have to ‘share the voter’ with other leaders, and parties have to ‘share the voter’ with other parties, as voters could choose leaders from across multiple parties.

43. We also suggest, though not necessarily propose, renaming the Lok Sabha as the ‘National Leadership Council’ and the Vidhan Sabhas as ‘State Leadership Councils.’ The rationale for this suggestion is as follows: The responsibilities of members of legislatures extend well beyond mere lawmaking, both officially and unofficially. Officially, these members are responsible for electing the executive and ensuring its accountability. Additionally, they often serve as part of the executive, such as ministers or members of statutory bodies, committees, and councils. Unofficially, the public expects them to provide general leadership to the community and respond to emergencies. In fact, the average voter perceives MPs and MLAs as part of the ‘government,’ often unaware of the constitutional distinction between the branches of government. The term ‘Leadership Council’ emphasizes the broader leadership role these elected representatives play and are expected to fulfill. It should be noted, however, that this change in terminology is merely a suggestion and is not integral to the concept of ‘Open Elections.’

## Enhancing Representative democracy

44. Having been accustomed to territorial constituencies for a long time, might assume their elimination would undermine ‘representative democracy’. On the contrary, it actually enhances the ‘representative democracy’ as we shall explain shortly. Representative democracy, by definition, is about people governing themselves through their elected representatives. How people elect their representatives is simply a question of methodology and can be implemented in multiple ways. The territorial constituencies system is just one such method, valued for its merit in ensuring physical proximity between voters and their elected leaders. While physical proximity was important in the bygone era, it is no longer as relevant in this age of electronic media, social media, mobile phones, and expanding air travel. In fact, non-proximity-based relationships between voters and leaders are not new and already exist within the current system. For example, the electorates of virtual constituencies



like ‘teachers constituencies’ and ‘graduate constituencies’ in the Vidhana Parishads at the state level are spread across the entire state. The Open Elections system builds upon this concept, taking it a step further. By allowing voters to choose any leader of their choice from anywhere, it enables not only teachers and graduates but also voters from every profession—such as farmers, weavers, carpenters, construction workers, and others—to elect leaders committed to their specific interests, all without the complexity of maintaining any form of virtual constituencies.

## Supplemental Changes

45. We need to make a few supplemental changes as outlined below, to implement the Open Elections system.

46. **Top Rankers Method:** One of the key questions in implementing the Open Elections system is how to decide the winners when there is no direct competition between candidates. To address this, we propose the ‘Top Rankers Method’. In this method, candidates are ranked based on the total number of votes they receive, referred to as their ‘vote-count’, and the top 543 candidates, corresponding to the current number of seats in the Lok Sabha, are declared as elected. Similarly, for state elections, the appropriate number of top rankers will be declared as elected based on the number of seats in the Vidhan Sabhas of the respective states.

47. **Weighted-Voting Method:** The second issue pertains to the voting power of elected members on the floors of legislatures. In this system, the vote-counts of candidates may vary significantly. Leaders at the top of the top-rankers list could have vote-counts ten or twenty times higher than those at the bottom of the list, reflecting that they represent substantially larger voter bases. To ensure fairness to both leaders and their voter bases, and to account for this variance in vote-counts, we propose the *Weighted-Voting Method*. Under this method, voting power on legislative floors will be proportional to the vote-counts of the elected leaders. Instead of a simple headcount, the Speaker will aggregate the vote-counts of leaders in favor of or against any given bill, resolution, or motion, ensuring that their influence in the legislative process corresponds to the number of voters they represent.

48. **Endorsed Lists:** The third issue pertains to the nomination of candidates by political parties. In the current system, parties field one candidate per constituency. However, since the Open Elections system eliminates constituencies, a new approach is required. We propose that parties release a nationwide (or statewide, in the case of state elections) list of candidates they wish to field, which we will refer to as the ‘Endorsed List.’ Voters who wish to support a particular party can then cast their votes for any candidate included in that party’s endorsed list. This dramatically expands the choices available to party-loyal voters, increasing their options from a single candidate under the current system to potentially hundreds of candidates nationwide (or statewide, in the case of state elections).

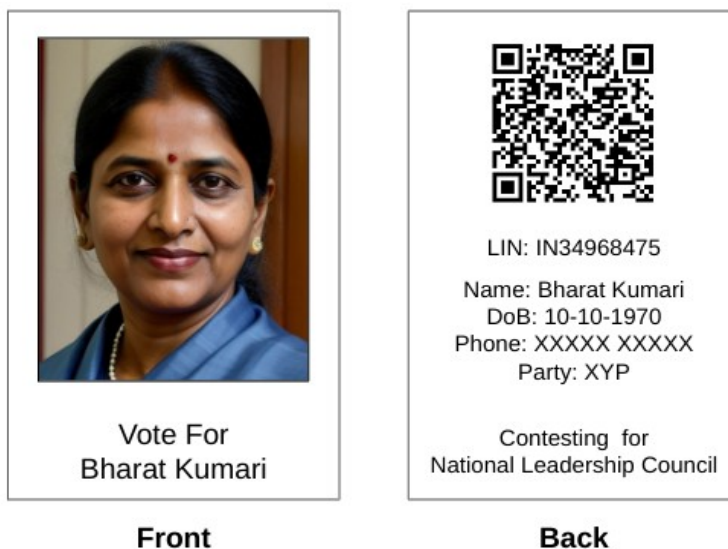
49. **Love Marriages:** In the Open Elections system, elected leaders represent only the voters who voted for them, unlike in the current system, where leaders are required to represent all voters in their constituency, including those who did not vote for them. In the Open Elections system, no leader represents a voter who did not vote for him or her, and no voter is represented by a leader he or she did not vote for. In other words, there are no ‘forced marriages’, but only ‘love marriages’ in this system, bringing us closer to the true spirit of ‘representative democracy’.

## Election Mechanics

50. The election mechanics of the current system consist primarily of two key elements: election symbols and EVMs (Electronic Voting Machines). However, both are inadequate for implementing the Open Elections system, which involves opening up all candidates—potentially running into thousands—to the voters. Assigning thousands of distinct and unique election symbols is impractical, if not impossible, given the limits of differentiation. Additionally, EVMs, as they are currently designed, can handle a maximum of only 384 candidates, which is insufficient for accommodating thousands. Even if these limitations could somehow be addressed, expecting voters to browse through thousands of candidates to select their preferred ones would be highly impractical and overwhelming.

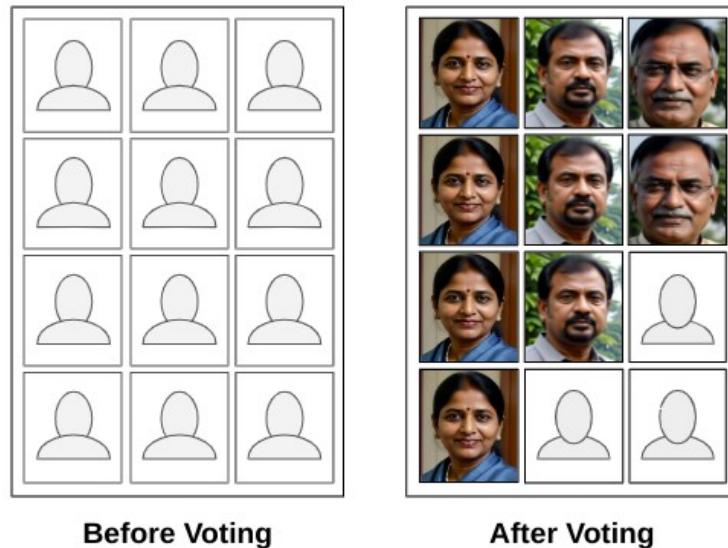
51. To overcome these limitations, we propose leveraging modern technologies, specifically QR codes and touchscreens. Instead of traditional election symbols, we introduce the concept of ‘Leader Cards’ with QR codes that uniquely identify each candidate. In place of the EVMs, we introduce AVMs (Advanced Voting Machines) equipped with touchscreens. Using these elements, we create a new process as follows, to implement the Open Elections System.

52. Instead of assigning election symbols, the Election Commission would assign a unique LIN (Leader Identification Number) to each candidate. Candidates would then create their own ‘leader cards’ with their respective pictures, names, dates of birth, LIN, party affiliation, and other details along with a QR code. These cards would look somewhat like the example shown in the image below:



53. Candidates would distribute their leader cards to their potential voters in paper form at political events and in electronic form through social media and on websites. Voters could also obtain Leader Cards by sending an SMS or making a phone call to the candidates, or getting them printed for free at any e-Seva center.

54. Voters would collect the Leader Cards of their preferred leaders in the days and weeks leading up to the election day and bring them to the polling stations on the election day. Polling booths would be equipped with Advanced Voting Machines (AVMs) featuring a touchscreen displaying a 3x4 grid of blank faces, each representing one of the twelve votes a voter can cast, as shown on the left side of the image below:



55. To begin voting, the voter would touch one of the boxes on the AVM screen, which would then be highlighted with a border indicating that it has been activated. The voter would then scan the QR code from a leader card into the AVM. The face of the corresponding candidate would then appear in the activated box, confirming that the vote has been assigned to that particular candidate. AVM would also provide an option for the technically savvy voters to search for their preferred candidates by name, date of birth, and phone number, instead of scanning the QR code. Voters would repeat this process by touching each box on the screen in turn and scanning the QR codes of the same or different leaders until all twelve votes are cast. If a mistake is made during the process, voters can easily correct it by reactivating the respective box or boxes and scanning the intended Leader Cards again.

56. The right side of the above image shows an example of AVM screen after voting. In this example, the voter gave four votes to one leader, three to another leader, two to yet another leader and left three boxes blank, i.e., ‘un-voted’, which is also a legitimate option. The voter would finally press a ‘SUBMIT’ button on the screen to confirm one’s choices.

57. Polling stations would be equipped with ‘dummy AVMs’ on which voters can practice casting the multiple votes before heading to the polling booth. Additionally, the election commission could also release a mobile app on which voters can ‘practice’ casting their multiple votes ahead of the actual election. This would help voters familiarize themselves with the process and ensure that they feel confident when it's time to vote.

58. The Election Commission could enable voters to cast their votes at any polling station across the country, as every AVM would have information on all candidates from across the country (or state, in the case of state elections). Voters could be identified at any polling station without the need for electoral rolls, using the same ‘voter identification methods’ that are already developed for RVMs (Remote Voting Machines). Once AVMs are implemented, RVMs would no longer be necessary, as AVMs would replace both EVMs and RVMs.

# Benefits

59. Now that we have described the Open Elections system in full and outlined how it can be implemented using modern technologies, we will turn our attention to how it addresses the various problems and issues of the current system, and how it advances the ideal of representative democracy. We will structure this discussion in terms of the benefits it brings to each stakeholder in the political system: the voters, the leaders, the political parties, the government of India, the Election Commission, and to the nation and states as a whole.

## Benefits for the voters

60. **Huge increase in voter choices:** The first and foremost benefit of the Open Elections system is the massive expansion of choices available to voters. No longer restricted to selecting from just two or three candidates fielded by major political parties election after election, voters can now choose from hundreds of candidates listed on the Endorsed Lists of various political parties, as well as from strong independent candidates.

61. **Only love marriages:** The second significant benefit of the Open Elections system is that elected leaders represent only those who voted for them. No leader represents a voter who did not vote for him or her, and no voter is represented by a leader he or she did not choose, unlike in the current system, where voters who did not vote for the winning candidate are also represented by that candidate. In other words, there are only 'love marriages' in the Open Elections system, but not 'forced marriages', creating a high degree of trust between voters and their chosen leaders, an essential element of a vibrant democracy.

62. **Leaders of choice in power:** In the current system, voters who did not vote for the winning candidates often find themselves in an awkward position when they need to approach those leaders with grievances or requests for help. In the Open Elections system, while not every leader a voter chooses may make it to the top 543, at least one or two likely will. This ensures that there are always leaders of the voter's choice in power, whom the voter can rightfully approach for assistance. By carefully selecting candidates who are more likely to win, voters can further maximize the number of leaders of their choice in power whom they can approach in times of need.

63. **Fewer wasted votes:** In the current system, voters have only one vote, and it would be unfortunate if that vote goes 'wasted.' In the Open Elections system, however, voters can always find, from among the hundreds of choices, candidates they trust who are likely to win. At most, only a couple of their votes may go wasted, but not all.

64. **Not all eggs in one basket:** Voters, in general, understand that no party or candidate is entirely noble or virtuous. However, the current system forces them to choose only one candidate or party, and that choice is often interpreted as a full endorsement of the selected candidate and a complete rejection of others, which is rarely the case. The Open Elections system, with its provision for multiple votes, allows voters to distribute their support among multiple parties or candidates. Voters can allocate some of their votes to one party and some to another, avoiding the need to "put all their eggs in one basket," so to speak. In fact, even under the current system, many voters attempt to balance their support for multiple parties by voting for one party in national elections and another in state elections. The multiple-vote system takes this a step further, allowing voters to support multiple parties within both national and state elections, independently of each other.

65. **More power with multiple votes:** In the Open Elections system, voters can use their votes creatively to foster balance within the political system. They can retain established and experienced leaders while encouraging emerging and promising leaders by distributing their votes between both. This contrasts with the current system, where political parties choose the candidates and may sideline senior leaders for various reasons or deny tickets to inexperienced, young leaders to avoid risk. Voters can also promote balance by casting some of their votes for independent candidates while still supporting the party of their choice.

66. **Voters of common interest come together:** Another significant benefit of the Open Elections system is that it allows voters with common interests to come together. In the current system, voters with shared concerns or identities are fragmented into small chunks within each constituency. For example, Divyangs (people with disabilities), when united from across the nation (or state, in the case of state elections), could form a sizable voting bloc to elect their own leader. The current system renders such groups ineffective by fragmenting them into small segments within each constituency. The same issue applies to people of various castes, religions, professions, and interests, all of whom are split into small chunks by the territorial constituency system. In the Open Elections system, however, these groups can unite across the nation (or state for state elections) to elect leaders who represent their specific interests.

67. **Multiple leaders to serve multiple interests:** Just as people hire a housemaid, a driver, a lawyer, a doctor, and other professionals to serve their varied needs, they should also have the ability to elect multiple leaders who represent their diverse interests. The Open Elections system enables them to do the same with the provision of multiple votes. People's interests typically fall into three broad categories: professional interests (related to their business, profession, job, or field of work), special interests (linked to their identity, such as caste, religion, gender, or special needs like that of Divyangs and nomads), and general interests (such as infrastructure, environment, taxes, water, power, and law and order). In the Open Elections system, voters can elect multiple leaders who represent each of these interests. For example, a woman from an agricultural family might choose one leader focused on farmers' issues, another dedicated to women's issues, and a third committed to the concerns of her caste or community. Similarly, a teacher who is also a Divyang might elect one leader focused on education, another on Divyangs' issues, yet another on the betterment of his caste, and another on the concerns of his religion. Additionally, voters can distribute their votes in unequal proportions among the leaders of their choice, thereby indicating the relative importance they assign to each interest and each leader.

68. **Beyond caste-based voting:** Castes are an integral part of Indian society, whether we like it or not, and many voters choose to vote along caste lines. However, there is also a significant percentage of voters who prefer not to mix caste with politics. Additionally, many voters are becoming "casteless" nowadays, thanks to urbanization and intercaste marriages. Measures like caste censuses and reserved constituencies, intended to ensure fair representation, unfortunately lock the political system into a caste framework, forcing even caste-free voters to conform to this structure. The Open Elections system elegantly balances the need for fair representation with the progression towards a casteless society, by allowing caste-oriented voters to vote along caste lines and caste-free voters based on other criteria of their choice. It also has the inherent flexibility to adapt to demographic shifts caused by urbanization and intercaste marriages. Moreover, with multiple votes, even caste-oriented

voters are likely to cast at least a few of their votes based on their professional and general interests, helping them get used to thinking beyond caste.

69. **‘Anywhere voting’:** In the current system, voters can only vote at the polling station where they are enrolled. The Open Elections system removes this constraint, offering a significant tactical advantage to voters who are away from home for business, leisure, family, work, or other reasons. It is especially beneficial for nomadic tribes, who often face challenges in exercising their democratic right to vote. The Open Elections system allows voters to cast their vote at any polling station of their choice, anywhere in the country (or state, in the case of state elections), without the need to travel back to their hometown on election day. This is possible because AVMs are identical across all polling stations, and voters can be authenticated anywhere using the ‘voter identification methods’ developed for RVMs. This ‘anywhere voting’ feature also enhances the privacy of voting. Voters can cast their vote at a polling station away from their place of residence, where they are not known, minimizing the risk of external pressure or prying eyes influencing their vote.

## **Benefits for Leaders**

70. **Honest Leaders Can Return to the Political Scene:** Honest and principled leaders often refrain from entering politics today, as winning an election without money, muscle power, and demagoguery seems nearly impossible. However, there is no shortage of principled voters eager to support and elect such leaders, but they are scattered across the country (or state, in the case of state elections), forming only a small minority in each territorial constituency. They have no choice in the current system but to vote for a candidate fielded by major political parties, overlooking their character and background, or support an independent candidate with slim chances of winning, thereby risking their vote being wasted. In the Open Elections system, principled voters from across the country (or state, in the case of state elections) can unite to form a substantial voting block capable of electing honest leaders. Additionally, even general voters, driven by their conscience, might allocate at least one or two of their votes to honest leaders, further enhancing their chances of being elected.

71. **Leaders Can Dedicate to a Field of Interest and Passion:** As discussed earlier, territorial constituencies are mixed-segment constituencies, favoring only “generic” politicians who attempt to appear as “all things to all people.” Leaders passionate about a specific interest, cause, identity, sector, or field stand little chance of winning under this system, as voters who share their passion are typically a minority in each constituency. The Open Elections system opens up the entire country (or state, in the case of state elections) for such leaders to find and attract enough voters who share the same interest or cause or identity, allowing them to secure a place in the top 543 candidates.

72. **Deeper and Lasting Connection With Voters:** Genuine and firm commitment to the interests, needs, and concerns of a specific population segment enables leaders to build a deeper and lasting connection with that segment. When leaders and voters share common interests, there is no need for emotional manipulation or demagoguery. Money and muscle power matter less, as practices like vote-buying and enticements become less feasible due to the thin distribution of potential voters across a large area. Campaigns can be run on smaller budgets, making effective use of electronic and social media. Also, low campaign costs make it easier for more leaders to enter the political arena.

73. **Direct Relationship with Voters:** In the current system, parties hold the upper hand over the leaders, as candidates often need to align with party ideologies and secure party

nominations to stand a chance in winning the elections. In contrast, the Open Elections system allows leaders to independently build strong voter bases based on their genuine commitment to the interests, needs, and concerns of specific population segments. Parties themselves would seek out leaders with large enough voter bases, and include them in their Endorsed Lists. This fosters a healthy equilibrium of mutual dependency between leaders and parties, where both rely on each other for success.

**74. Immune to Small Changes in the Percentage of Votes:** One of the highly painful political risks leaders face in the current system is losing an election by a small margin to a rival or having their chances of winning spoiled by an unlikely-to-win third candidate, who could be a 'rebel candidate' from their own party. There is no such risk in the Open Elections system as there are no direct or triangular contests. Two leaders with similar vote counts will either both secure a spot in the 'top 543' list or both be excluded. A few percentage points' difference in their vote counts will not matter. Any leader with a sufficiently large vote count will secure a spot in the 'top 543' list, regardless of how many other leaders have similar vote counts. Only those leaders whose vote count places them at the bottom of the 'top 543' list need to worry about losing or gaining a few extra votes to secure their position.

## **Benefits for Political Parties**

**75. No 'Wrong Candidates' Risk:** A major challenge for political parties in the current system is selecting the most likely candidate to win in each constituency. Mistakes due to limited ground knowledge or incorrect judgment can lead to nominating the 'wrong candidates', potentially costing the party not just a few seats, but even power altogether. The Open Elections system eliminates this risk with its 'Endorsed List' concept. Parties no longer need to navigate complex local political equations, or worry about the local dynamics in every constituency. Instead, they can endorse leaders with visibility and appeal across the country (or state, for state elections). This system allows parties to include even "doubtful" candidates and "rebel" leaders on the Endorsed Lists, giving them an opportunity to prove their true worth in the elections, without jeopardizing the chances of other "sure to win" candidates.

**76. Retain party-loyal voters:** By fielding "wrong" candidates, parties risk losing the votes of some loyal supporters, who may abstain from voting in protest against the candidate selection. This challenge is eliminated in the Open Elections system, as party-loyal voters have hundreds of options on the Endorsed List to choose from. Parties would retain the votes of all their loyal supporters, regardless of which candidate from the Endorsed List they choose to vote for.

**77. No need for internal party elections:** Internal party elections provide party workers with an opportunity to rise through the ranks and help curb nepotism as well as the dominance of influential leaders and political dynasties. However, internal elections are not a foolproof mechanism for identifying genuinely capable leaders crucial for the long-term health and survival of the party. This is because appealing to core party members who actively participate in internal elections is often quite different from appealing to the broader party support base and the general electorate.

**78.** The Open Elections system empowers the parties to put *all reasonable aspirants* through the ultimate litmus test of political leadership—the ability to attract votes from the general electorate—by including them on the Endorsed Lists, without having to deal with the expense, complexity, and limitations of internal elections. Moreover, even the leaders who are

not able to please the party leadership enough to get a spot on the Endorsed Lists, can try their luck with the general electorate on their own, retaining their party affiliation, if they so choose. They would only help, and not hurt, the overall party position in the legislatures and its standing among the public.

**79. Parties survive even when they lack strong leadership at the top:** In the current system, parties struggle to survive without strong, charismatic leaders and risk extinction. However, in the Open Elections system, parties are safeguarded from this fate, as leaders can independently sustain their voter bases without relying solely on the charisma of a central figure.

**80. Easy to Diversify Candidates:** Political parties face significant challenges in diversifying their nominated candidates under the current system, even when they intend to. Two key types of diversification are often needed: representation from all sections of society and inclusion of candidates with diverse skills, expertise, and interests. In the current system, political parties are often compelled to select candidates exclusively from wealthy and powerful sections of society, as they are the ones with the necessary local clout, money, and muscle power to run effective campaigns. Open Elections system frees the parties from this constraint, by eliminating the territorial constituencies and reliance on local power bases. This enables parties to nominate candidates from all sections of society, thereby attracting voters from all those sections and ensuring fair representation for each one of them. Similarly, constrained by the need to select ‘generic’ politicians who can pretend to be ‘all things to all people,’ political parties are unable to nominate leaders with specific skills, expertise, and interests under the current system, even when they want to. The Open Elections system helps parties overcome this challenge, as they can, in this system, include leaders with every kind of skills, expertise, and interests on their Endorsed Lists, and thereby attract voters who look for those specific skills, expertise and interests in the candidates.

**81. No need for ‘manifestos’:** In addition to the challenge of selecting the ‘right’ and diversified candidates, political parties also struggle with crafting manifestos. They often aim to appeal to everyone, which results in vague, ineffective promises, or lean heavily towards a particular ideology or the whims of a party leader, making them potentially dangerous. Sometimes, parties bury controversial or divisive policies in small print to gain voter approval. In the Open Elections system, manifestos become irrelevant and unnecessary, as the identities, skills, expertise, interests, values, and commitments of the candidates on the Endorsed List clearly reflect the party’s stance on various issues. Because of the interest and identity-based alignment between leaders and voters, the electorate can accurately predict what the elected leaders will or will not do once in power, leaving no room for hidden or small-print agendas.

**82. Campaigning is relatively easy:** The Open Elections system significantly simplifies election campaigns for political parties. By eliminating territorial constituencies, it frees parties from the intricacies of local factors, equations, and dynamics integral to traditional contests. Moreover, candidates with their own voter bases take on the primary responsibility of attracting voters, easing the burden on the party. This system shifts voter focus from the party to individual leaders who align with their specific interests. It embodies the true spirit of parliamentary representative democracy, where citizens are meant to choose leaders directly rather than giving a blanket mandate to a party to determine who will wield power.

**83. Guaranteed proportional representation:** A major advantage of the Open Elections system for political parties is guaranteed proportional representation. Unlike the current



system, where a small percentage drop in votes can lead to a significant loss of seats, this system ensures that no strong candidate who secures enough votes loses the election due to factors like small margins or triangular contests. In the current system, these factors can cause even strong candidates to lose, rendering their votes as 'dead votes' that don't contribute to the party's representation in the legislature.

84. The only scenario where a party might fail to achieve proportional representation is if it includes too many candidates on its Endorsed List, causing votes to be spread too thinly for any candidate to make it to the 'top 543' list. However, this is unlikely, as parties would strategically field an optimal number of candidates to ensure votes are concentrated around a reasonable number of viable leaders.

## **Benefits for the Nation as a whole**

85. **Promotes Leaders with National Vision and Appeal:** As discussed earlier, the current system, by reducing Lok Sabha elections to local contests, prioritizes leaders entrenched in local politics over those with national vision, spirit, and appeal. In contrast, the Open Elections system requires every candidate to appeal to voters across the nation to remain competitive, and thus inherently favoring leaders with national vision, spirit, and appeal—precisely the kind of leaders who should serve in a national body like the Lok Sabha.. The Open Elections system similarly promotes leaders with state-wide vision, spirit, and appeal in state elections.

86. **Creates a sense of oneness among the voters:** The Open Elections system allows individuals with shared interests or identities across the nation to form pan-India voter bases. Voters will look to leaders of national stature to address their concerns, rather than relying on local 'generic' politicians with limited vision and scope. This approach fosters a sense of oneness among voters who are “separated by geography, but united by interests.” A similar sense of unity will emerge among voters with shared interests at the state level too, in the context of state elections.

87. **Makes the Three-tier Structure Effective:** The Constitution of India envisions a three-tier structure of administration—national, state, and local—to ensure the decentralization of power. However, the current territorial constituencies system undermines this principle. Strong local leaders, instead of focusing on serving in local bodies where their influence would be most beneficial, often aspire to positions in national and state legislatures, driven by the prestige and dominance associated with those roles. This tendency results in triple damage. Such leaders cannot address local issues due to a lack of authority, cannot tackle national issues effectively because they lack the necessary breadth of vision, and undermine the effectiveness of local leadership, which genuinely cares about local issues, by overshadowing it.

88. The Constitution and statutes do provide clarity regarding the separation of powers among the three tiers of government, but this often does not translate well in practice. By eliminating the territorial constituencies, the Open Elections system enables the leaders interested in addressing national level issues to serve in the national legislature, and those interested in addressing state-level issues serve on the state legislatures, and those interested in addressing local issues serve on local bodies.

89. **Adapts to Demographic Shifts Inherently:** We can expect significant demographic shifts in the coming decades due to urbanization, the merging and extinction of castes, and the

rise of new professions while old ones fade. These changes will occur faster than census data can keep up with. Creating more 'reserved constituencies' to ensure fair representation for all demographics will not work, as the ground itself is shifting. Such attempts would only make the problem worse by freezing the political system into a 'caste framework'. The Open Elections system renders these concerns moot. It lets voters elect leaders based on their evolving interests, professions, and needs. Every interest, profession, and identity would automatically be represented in proportion to its occurrence, without the need for any special measures to ensure fair representation.

**90. No 'delimitation' issues:** The Delimitation Commission is responsible for redrawing constituency boundaries to ensure that all constituencies are approximately equal in population size. However, this is easier said than done, and the process is slow; some constituencies have continued to have populations double those of others for a long time. The Open Elections system renders this issue moot by eliminating territorial constituencies altogether.

91. Even the ideal of 'equal population size' has recently become a source of discontent. Less populous but wealthier states have raised concerns about the disproportionate representation of more populous but poorer states in the Lok Sabha. Over time, this discontent could take a serious turn, potentially threatening national integrity. The Delimitation Commission is at its wits' end trying to address this challenge. However, this issue becomes moot under the Open Elections system, as there are no territorial constituencies tied to specific states or otherwise. All members of the Lok Sabha would have voter bases spread across the entire country. Leaders from wealthier states could attract voters from poorer states by promising to implement successful policies from their own states on a national scale. In fact, once the Open Elections system is implemented, the Delimitation Commission itself could be retired.

**92. No 'Overlapping Boundaries':** In the current system, leaders face numerous operational challenges both while contesting elections and after winning them, as constituency boundaries often cut across multiple police, revenue, judicial and administrative jurisdictions. By eliminating territorial boundaries, the Open Elections system renders this issue moot.

**93. No more 'Contesting from Multiple Constituencies':** One of the peculiar provisions of our electoral system allows candidates to contest elections in multiple constituencies. However, such candidates cannot represent more than one constituency even if they win in all. They are required to resign from all but one, necessitating by-elections in the other constituencies. By eliminating territorial constituencies, the Open Elections system renders this issue moot. Leaders with support from voters across various regions can build a pan-India voter base under this system, and represent voters from all those regions.

**94. No more 'by-elections':** For that matter, the Open Elections system eliminates the need for by-elections altogether. If a member of the Lok Sabha resigns, is disqualified, becomes incapacitated, or passes away, the next candidate in line—ranked 544th—can simply be declared elected. The same method can be applied at the state level when members of state legislatures resign, are disqualified, become incapacitated, or pass away.

**95. Changing the size of legislatures becomes easier:** The size of the Lok Sabha, fixed at 543 seats, was established back in the early 1970s. Since then, the population has nearly tripled, yet the number of seats in the Lok Sabha has not been adjusted accordingly. Recently,

there have been explicit calls to increase the number of seats from 543 to at least 1,000. However, this would be a huge administrative challenge in the current system. In contrast, making such a change would be extremely simple in the Open Elections system. It would merely involve declaring the top 1,000 candidates with the highest vote-counts as elected, rather than just 543. Similarly, the sizes of state legislatures could be increased in the same way if needed, without the need to redraw boundaries or create new constituencies.

## **Better Democracy**

**96. Fair Representation:** Achieving fair representation of all sections of the society, which is fundamental to democracy, has been a challenge in the current system as it favors leaders from wealthy and influential sections of the society with clout, money and muscle power. As we have already discussed, measures like ‘reserved constituencies’ and ‘caste based census’ cannot adequately address lack of fair representation. Further, they have the negative affect of locking the society into a ‘communal framework’.

97. The Open Election system, on the other hand, ensure fair representation for people of all identities and interests with the flexible ‘voter bases’. For instance, we have hardly seen leaders from the weavers community in the legislatures since independence, under the current system. Whereas, coming together from across the nation (or state in the case of state elections), the weavers can elect their own leader in this Open Elections system. The same would be true for every section of the society. Furthermore, the voters of any interest or identity can elect more than one leader to represent their interests so that there are multiple of them working on their interests. Regardless of whether they elect one leader or three leaders or five leaders, the weighted voting method guaranteed that they will be represented exactly in proportion to their numbers.

**98. Better Leader-Voter Relationships:** A vibrant democracy is possible only when there are better leader-voter relationships. Leaders should know the needs, interests and concerns of the voters intimately. And voters should be able to keep their full faith in them. No voter should have to vote for a leader one does not fully trust, and no voter should be represented by a leader whom one did not choose. The voter-leader relationships in the current system are nowhere close to this ideal. As has been discussed already, the number of ‘positive votes’ an average candidate gets in this system could be as low as 20% to 30%. This means only 20% to 30% of the voters actually put faith in the leader. The Open Elections system changes this entirely. Voters choices are vastly improved, and every voter should be able to find a leader one can trust. There are only love marriages and no forced marriages. A voter is never represented by a leader who one did not vote for. Leaders, by committing to an identity or interest from the get go, would be intimately familiar with their needs and concerns. Leaders, as discussed earlier, can develop deeper, stronger and lasting relationships with their voter bases, allowing them to be honest and open with the voters about their positions and policies. Voters too can count on the longevity of a leader in power, unlike in the current system, in which the leader’s career can get cut short or hit rough road, depending on the standing of the leader within the party and the standing of the party among the public, even if the leader oneself has good standing among voters.

**99. No Minority rule:** The current system results in perpetual minority rule, as discussed earlier, with the typical winning candidate getting only about 40% of the vote of the 65% to 70% of the votes polled. The rest of the electorate, a majority, are forced to be represented by

the 'winning' candidate without any regard to their will. The Open Elections system changes this completely, as no voter is represented by a leader whom one did not choose.

100. The only scenario in which minority rule can happen in this system is if the aggregate vote-counts of the 'top 543' fall below the aggregate vote-counts of the rest. This would be an unlikely scenario, as both parties and voters are likely to concentrate around only the 'likely to win' candidates. Voters would only choose established and matured leaders or emerging and promising leaders. They will not 'waste' their votes around the 'unlikely to win' candidates, just as they do now. Parties too would field only 'likely to win' candidates on their Endorsed Lists.

101. **Responsive Governments:** In a democracy, ideally, only those parties which has intimate understanding of people needs, interests and sensibilities should come to power. But in reality, parties come into power for various other reasons, such as to fill a political void, because of anti-incumbency sentiments, and charismatic leaders catching on the fancies and pressing grievances of the people. Once in power, the governments expend the public money and their efforts in pursuing their own ideologies, or the whims and fancies of the top leadership. The Open Elections system, with its interest-based voter-leader alignment, closes the gap between the voters' true expectation and needs, and the leaders' perception of those needs and expectations. Governments have a clear idea of what the people want, based on the vote-counts of the leaders who are committed to various interests and identities. Furthermore, the trusted relationship with the leaders allows voters to constantly hold down the leaders and hence the governments to the ground realities.

102. **Enhanced Democratic Spirit:** One of the fault lines of a democratic system is that it can easily lead to binary-thinking and polarization in the society, as people gather around opposing ideologies and opposing factions. The design of the electoral system can accentuate this problem and that is what is happening in the current system, with its one-vote-per-voter feature. Many voters think it is a personal virtue to be loyal to stay a party election after election. Even voters who do not favor one particular party specifically are forced to choose one over the other. Open Elections system breaks this thinking pattern with multiple votes. Multiple votes inherently make the people think in terms of multiple interests, multiple leaders and multiple parties. Plurality is the essence of democracy. Open Elections system establishes it right at the root, the behavior of voters.

103. **Towards Honesty and Sincerity:** During the election season, leaders and parties are driven by demagoguery, and after the elections, they are driven by their agendas, ideologies, interests and burning topics of the day. No one is honest and can be honest about anything, in the legislatures or outside, beset with parochial, existential, ideological, etc., constraints. The Open Elections system changes all of this in at least three ways. First, it rewards leaders who commit honestly to a particular interest or cause or identity, because that is the only way for them to build and sustain pan-India voter bases. Second, it enables leaders to speak their mind even if it differs with party agenda, because they can rely on their own voter bases for their political survival. Third, it helps more honest leaders to come to power, as discussed earlier. In the current system, parties are the mega entities. Voters have the power only to change the actors, but not the dynamics. Leaders are cogs in the machine, and hardly able to build their own standing with the public. Even cricketer stars and movie stars enjoy a close and long lasting relationship with the public than political stars. This is not only bad for the leaders, but also for the voters, who do not know whom to hold accountable for what. This

will all change with interest-based voter bases. Voters cannot hold 'imposed' leaders accountable, but certainly can 'elected' leaders.

**104. Less Reliance on Corruption and Criminal Elements:** Corruption and criminality exists at two levels, at the local or ground level, and at the high levels. The Open Elections addresses both. By eliminating local contests and by promoting pan-India voter bases. It makes practices like enticements, vote-buying etc., unviable, making the 'money factor' in the elections that much less relevant. Local strongmen are the backbone of the parties and elections today because of local contests. All those will be driven out of politics, as their local influence will be of no use in attracting pan-India or pan-state voter bases. At the most, they can use their clout and influence in local body elections. And national governments and state governments which do not have to rely on them for their own survival will be able to punish them for their misdeeds easily.

**105. Better Watchdogs at National / State level:** One of the major problems we face in the current political system is lack of effective and sincere watchdogs. We expect media and opposition to play this role. But neither of them is effective or sincere. Most of the media leans to one political party or ideology or the other. Furthermore the internet has exacerbated the problem. The subscription revenue of the media has come down drastically. They rely on advertisements and vested interests for their survival, making them highly susceptible for every kind of influence. They support whomever they want and expose whomever they do not. Media has become a part of the problem than solution. The opposition, which we expect to perform as a watchdog, at the end of the day, is just another political party, which was in power in the past or can be in power in the future. Their interest is in defaming and hence bringing down the government than offering a genuine criticism. Furthermore, they cannot change any policy or legislation, with less representation in the legislatures than the ruling party. They are essentially a toothless watchdog. Both media and opposition can bark all they want but cannot bite.

**106.** The Open Elections system offers a much more effective watchdog system in the form of honest leaders. As explained earlier with the votes of principled voters and 'out of conscience' votes from the general voters, we can see honest leaders forming some 10% to 20% of the membership of the legislatures. Even with such small percentage, they can play a very effective role for at least three reasons. Firstly, with the backing of principled voters and no reliance on political parties, without risking their own political existence, they will be able to call out the questionable policies or actions of the government. Secondly, the presence of honest, principled and respectable leaders in the house makes the others to watch their words on the floor of the legislatures. Thirdly, their vote could become the deciding vote on any issue, as they are free to side with the ruling party or opposition party, based strictly on the merits and issues of the legislation or policy or action under consideration. Only a principled watchdog like this can and will put a check on corruption and criminality at the high levels.

**107. Cardial Relationships among Political Parties:** We elect leaders of all parties, though in different numbers, and expect all of them to collaborate as our representatives. But, as discussed earlier, the competition among them leads to rivalry, which in turn results in hostilities before the elections, which they bring along on to the legislative floors. They fight with each other rather than collaborate. We change this attitude with the multiple votes feature in the Open Elections system. In this system, no party can expect to get all of the votes of any voter. Majority of the voters are party-neutral and are likely to distribute their votes

among multiple parties, and independents. Parties, essentially, have to ‘share the voters’ with other parties. Any party which demonizes the other parties would risk angering the voters who support the other parties. Much like banks live with customers who also may have accounts in other banks, parties will learn to live with voters who also support other parties. Just as banks won’t bad-mouth or demonize the other banks, parties would not bad-mouth the other parties with ‘voter sharing’. Parties would try to distinguish themselves with their services, approachability, character and capabilities of their leaders, rather than indulging in negative banter about the other parties.

**108. No Leadership Leak:** We discussed about two types of ‘leadership leak’ in the current system, one due to party leadership sidelining good leaders who differ with them on one count or the other, and the second due to the FPTP mechanism, where a contest between two good leaders results in electing only one of the. The Open Elections system plugs both these types of leaks. Leaders with strong voter bases who differ with party leadership can still win, even if they are not included in the Endorsed Lists. They can also come out of the party altogether and contest as independents and win the election. In the open elections system, two good candidates, who have about equal voter base, will never lose to each other. They both will get elected. This means all the strong and good leaders produced by nature will be in power and will not be sidelined because of systemic issues. Having every strong and good leader in power is essential for vibrant democracy.

**109. Enhanced Voter Participation:** The multiple choices, interest and identity based alignment in the Open Elections will create enthusiasm among the voters in participating in the election process, as no more their choices are tied down to choosing between ‘two evils’. No more voters in general, urban voters – a rising demographic – in particular have to feel helpless about sending honest leaders into power. Everyone can find one or more leaders who represent their multiple interests. They do not have to vote for an entire manifesto that has policies and positions they do not agree with.

# Road Map for Implementation

110. A change of this magnitude—with its substantial benefits—cannot, obviously, be implemented without broad consensus among the public and all political parties. Therefore, the Government of India and the Election Commission of India should convene an all-party forum to examine the proposal for the Open Elections system. Ideally, this forum should be composed of leaders from various political parties who are retired from active politics and, thus, free from vested political interests. To further enrich the discussions, retired judges and political scientists from diverse universities should be invited to facilitate the forum's deliberations.

111. This forum should be accorded the same importance as the Constituent Assembly, given that the proposed changes would necessitate significant amendments to the Constitution. Such an approach ensures that the system is rigorously debated and thoughtfully designed, with the best interests of democracy and the nation at its core.

112. The Open Elections System should initially be implemented in three or four states from different parts of the country, which vary in size, and are ruled by different political parties. The system should be then refined based on the experience before it is implemented in every state and finally at the national level.

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