**MPGA Issue Brief: Importance of Local Government and the Need for Elections in Urban Local Bodies in Karnataka**

**Introduction**

There is a governance vacuum in the urban areas of Karnataka, especially Bengaluru which is reflected by the delay in conducting elections for the Urban Local Body. The lowest level of government is critical for overseeing everyday needs of citizens like roads, sewers, water, electricity, parks and other essential civic amenities. The last election to Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) was almost 9 years ago and the office of the Mayor of Bengaluru is vacant for 4 years. Across the state, elections for 1,101 wards of 30 zilla panchayats and 3,621 wards of 234 taluk panchayats have been delayed since 2021 due to the state government’s failure to release the reservation matrix. The State Election Commission (SEC) has filed a contempt case against the government to address this delay, further highlighting the urgent need for timely local elections. This policy brief highlights the importance of a local government and provides potential solutions primarily gathered from citizen fora and public demands.

### Issues

* **Governance Vacuum**: Since the conclusion of the last BBMP elections in 2015, the absence of corporators has resulted in a lack of local accountability and delayed civic projects. Without local representatives, Bengaluru’s infrastructure, including waste management, road maintenance, and public services, has deteriorated. Local governance functions have been taken over by bureaucrats and MLAs, reducing the direct engagement between citizens and their local government; there are only 28 MLAs, nearly one-tenth of the 243 BBMP councillors.
* The tabled[**Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill 2024**](https://data.opencity.in/dataset/b55b4051-70a9-40f8-a688-6af90f5c7547/resource/2e6ec894-277f-4671-8c82-1e8ddd2dc23d/download/gba-22.07.2024final.pdf) has been criticised for some important shortcomings that undermine a citizen powered local government.
  + Lack of Transparency and Accountability: The bill does not provide for comprehensive civic data disclosures, internal audits, or an ombudsman for service-related issues.
  + Weak Governance Structure: The bill construes the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) as a super municipality, undermining the powers of the mayor and council. As there is no clarity on the division of powers between local and central authorities, the authority of local councils is seemingly reduced.
  + No Provisions for Planning: The bill lacks provisions for integrated planning for the Greater Bengaluru Area and a three-tiered planning system.
* The failure to release the reservation matrix for 1,101 wards of zilla panchayats and 3,621 wards of taluk panchayats has led to elections being postponed since 2021. This delay impacts rural governance and reduces the efficiency of services like healthcare, education, and rural development.
* The delay in BBMP elections has been attributed to political lobbying by MLAs who benefit from the absence of corporators. In the absence of elected officials, MLAs have exerted increased influence over local administrative decisions, diminishing the role of citizens in governance. This interference weakens the democratic process and undermines the transparency and accountability of local governance structures.

#### What needs to be done?

We urge that the SEC must be empowered to conduct ULB elections without further political or administrative interference. The reservation matrix must be released immediately to facilitate elections for zilla and taluk panchayats. Timely elections will restore local governance and ensure that citizens have direct representation in addressing urban and rural challenges.  
  
The Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill, 2024, must be revised to ensure that it strengthens, rather than diminishes, local democracy. The bill should empower local elected representatives and ensure that the Brand Bengaluru Committee serves a complementary, rather than controlling, role in governance​​. Citizen participation in decision-making should be expanded, not curtailed, by this bill. Feedback and suggestions from the citizens and stakeholders must be an integral part of the drafting process of the updated bill.

Citizen participation in governance should be strengthened by empowering ward committees and area sabhas. These bodies should have a greater role in urban planning, budgeting, and service delivery, ensuring that local concerns are addressed directly.

Amendments should be made to the Karnataka Municipal Corporation Act to ensure that local body elections are conducted every five years without delays. The act should include provisions for timely mayoral elections within 15 days of the conclusion of ULB elections.

**Why would it benefit the People?**

* Timely elections will restore accountability in governance, enabling local representatives to directly address the concerns of citizens. Elected corporators can ensure that public services, infrastructure, and urban planning initiatives are implemented effectively.
* Empowering local bodies through timely elections and implementing the 74th Amendment’s provisions for devolution of power will strengthen local democracy. This will allow citizens to participate more actively in the governance process and ensure that their voices are heard .
* Reforms to ward committees and area sabhas will enhance citizen engagement in local governance, ensuring that their needs and concerns are prioritised in decision-making processes .

The prolonged delay in ULB elections in Karnataka, particularly for BBMP, has weakened local governance, reduced service delivery efficiency, and diminished citizen engagement. Timely elections and legal reforms are crucial to restoring effective governance and empowering local representatives. The Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill, 2024, should be reformed to protect local democracy and enhance citizen participation. Immediate action is needed to ensure the release of the reservation matrix and to conduct elections without further delays.

**ABOUT US**Make Parliament Great Again (#MPGA) is a citizen’s initiative that aims to raise public issues with representatives & decision makers from across the political spectrum with the objective of reclaiming the Parliament as the House of the People.

**Sources and further reading:**

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* [Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill: Where is Brand Bengaluru vision? And the people's voice? - Citizen Matters](https://citizenmatters.in/greater-bengaluru-bill-2024-brand-bengaluru-committee-greater-bengaluru-authority/)
* [Open letter to Deputy CM: Reconsider BBMP’s proposed restructuring - Citizen Matters](https://citizenmatters.in/open-letter-reconsideration-of-bbmp-proposed-restructuring-greater-bengaluru-authority-bill/)
* [Bengaluru has not had elected corporators for 20 months: Why you should care](https://www.thenewsminute.com/karnataka/bengaluru-has-not-had-elected-corporators-20-months-why-you-should-care-163797)
* [Real reason BBMP polls are delayed: Bengaluru MLAs are lobbying against it](https://www.thenewsminute.com/karnataka/real-reason-bbmp-polls-are-delayed-bengaluru-mlas-are-lobbying-against-it-163804)
* [City corporations in Karnataka do not have full control over 15 of the 18 municipal functions, finds study - The Hindu](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/city-corporations-in-karnataka-do-not-have-full-control-over-15-of-the-18-municipal-functions-finds-study/article68589799.ece)
* [‘Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill 2024 will only take city backwards’, claims study | Bangalore News - The Indian Express](https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/bangalore/greater-governance-bill-2024-take-city-backwards-claims-study-9503293/)
* [New urban governance bill in Bengaluru faces criticism, takes away citizen power says analysis](https://india.mongabay.com/2024/09/new-urban-governance-bill-in-bengaluru-faces-criticism-takes-away-citizen-power-says-analysis/)
* [[Commentary] Timely municipal elections enable local leaders to act locally and mitigate climate impacts](https://india.mongabay.com/2023/06/commentary-timely-municipal-elections-enable-local-leaders-to-act-locally-and-mitigate-climate-impacts/)

**Appendix 1 : Jhatkaa.org petition with 8000+ signatures**

**Conduct BBMP Elections Now!**

**Decision Makers:**

1. D. K. Shivakumar, Deputy Chief Minister of Karnataka

**Demands:**Conduct BBMP elections immediately, with a clear timeline

**Introduction**It has been **nearly nine years** since the BBMP (Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike) **last conducted council elections**. These elections, which are conducted once every five years, were supposed to be held in 2020. However, the posts still remain vacant. The BBMP, which is the second largest municipal corporation after Mumbai, is **responsible for the smooth functioning and maintenance of civic and infrastructural assets** in Bengaluru.   
  
The delay has caused a “governance vacuum,” and has reduced political **accountability and transparency**. For instance, without elected representatives, *decisions about budget allocations and urban development projects lack the scrutiny that elected officials would be accountable for*. Consequently this has resulted in a disconnect between the needs of the citizens and the administration.

**What Is The Issue?**Absence of proper elected officials means that there is a **dysfunction in essential mechanisms** like ward committee meetings which are necessary for addressing issues such as water scarcity, waste and road management. The lack of accountable authorities has **left many issues unresolved and unaddressed.** The main challenges experienced by the citizens include:

1. **Failing Infrastructure:** Lack of management has led to roads being poorly maintained, thereby causing disrepair. In areas like Outer Ring Road and Sarjapur Road, the condition of internal roads is deplorable due to lack of maintenance and repair, making it **dangerous** for both vehicles and pedestrians. Additionally, inadequate street lights have exacerbated the issue as **poorly lit streets lead to a higher risk of night-time accidents**.
2. **Inefficient Essential Services:** Due to improper management of traffic, roads have become very congested. Lack of accountability also means waste management systems have failed. This has caused delays in garbage collection and improper disposal of waste eventually leading to **unsanitary conditions in many areas.**
3. **Safety Risks:** Data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) for 2022 shows that **Bengaluru has the highest number of deaths due to negligence of the civic body.** Broken footpaths, pothole-ridden roads, hanging cables have put lives at risk.There has also been an alarming increase in the number of pedestrian fatalities - between 2021 and 2023, the number has jumped by 77% due to the lack of proper civic infrastructure.

To ensure the safety and well-being, as well as efficient management of Bengaluru, it is critical to **conduct BBMP elections** without further delay. An elected body would be directly accountable to the public, ensuring that urgent issues receive the necessary attention and action they deserve.  
  
Join us in demanding that the BBMP elections be conducted with immediate effect to **restore effective governance** and improve the quality of life in *Namma Bengaluru.*By signing this petition, we can collectively work towards a safer, better-planned, and more livable Bengaluru.

*Sources*

1. [BBMP restructuring bill an excuse to delay Council elections: Citizens forum](https://www.deccanherald.com/india/karnataka/bengaluru/bbmp-restructuring-bill-an-excuse-to-delay-council-elections-citizens-forum-3105490)
2. [Delay in BBMP polls causing much angst](https://bangaloremirror.indiatimes.com/bangalore/others/delay-in-bbmp-polls-causing-much-angst/articleshow/111216585.cms)
3. [Pedestrian deaths in Bengaluru jumped by 77% in last 3 years](https://www.deccanherald.com/india/karnataka/bengaluru/pedestrian-deaths-in-bengaluru-jumped-by-77-in-last-3-years-2968202)
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5. [Governance paralysis: The impact of no BBMP election on Bengaluru civic life](https://thesouthfirst.com/karnataka/governance-paralysis-the-impact-of-no-bbmp-election-on-bengaluru-civic-life/)
6. [Citizens tired of grimy situations, await fixes](https://bangaloremirror.indiatimes.com/bangalore/others/citizens-tired-of-grimy-situations-await-fixes/articleshow/109112148.cms)
7. [*https://x.com/search?q=BBMP%20election&src=typed\_query*](https://x.com/search?q=BBMP%20election&src=typed_query)

**Appendix 2 : Open Letter from Citizens’ Action Forum’s President**

Dear Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar,

We write to you to express some concerns that Citizens’ Action Forum (CAF) and a significant section of the citizenry have regarding the proposed restructuring of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP). At the outset, we do believe that there are positives in the concept.

However, there are concerns with the process, a few assumptions made, and the lack of details regarding the implementation of such a major decision.

Our concerns are listed as follows:

There is an assumption that the principal problem plaguing BBMP’s functioning is its size. This is clearly not the case as brought out even by the Restructuring Report of the Patil committee. The division of the BBMP is perhaps a last step in a series of more systemic measures.

The BBMP, even currently, has a dearth of resources and skilled manpower. The division of the civic body will need an increased quantum of these resources to make it work. With no solution to the resources problem, the division will create more problems than solutions.

An exercise of this magnitude will have significant implications for the exchequer. Not even the briefest of a white paper has been published on the impact and who will shoulder the same.

We request a concrete rollout plan discussed in the public domain before taking the steps required to transform this proposal into an Act. Such a rollout plan could possibly list the various steps and crucial prerequisites that need to be in place before any final step is taken.

The objective of bringing all parastatals into a coordinated Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) is certainly laudable. However, this will only be an exercise in futility without actually amending the individual Parastatal Acts to acknowledge their reporting structure to the GBA. This was attempted with the introduction of the Bangalore Metropolitan Region Development Authority (BMRDA) a long time ago. The effort failed miserably. Without an appraisal of why the earlier attempt did not succeed it is unlikely that the present proposal will work this time around either.

Of real concern is the imminent disempowering of the councillor and the city coming under state control. The citizens of Bengaluru desperately need a full time Mayor and empowered councillors to run the city on a daily basis and at a detailed level.

The Chief Minister has the onerous task of leading our state. It is unfair to all concerned to expect a Chief Minister to devote adequate time and be involved in the day-to-day running of the city. The state government anyway has oversight powers on municipalities and we believe that the relation between the municipality and state should be maintained. There is a very real possibility, as it stands, for the city to be run by MLAs, MPs and the state government.

citizens discussing issues at WCM

Bengaluru needs a dedicated full-time mayor and empowered councillors

We already have the Nagarpalika Act or the 74th Amendment in our Constitution. We believe in many areas the GBA proposal will be hard pressed to stand up against this constitutional provision. Further, we have not even tried to implement the Constitution in spirit and law. The first step needs to be a close adherence to these constitutional provisions.

For the past four years, the city administration has not had an elected council, making the BBMP just a partial body. First delimitation, and then seat reservations were the reasons given to courts. Then we were assured that after the 2024 Lok Sabha elections we would have an elected council. Now, we would appear to have a new reason to justify postponement based on a 2016 report, which itself did not find favour with large segments of society. This gives some credence to the fear among many citizens that the GBA proposal is, in essence, another way of postponing elections indefinitely.

We ask that the right thing be done – to adhere to the Constitution, hold elections to the BBMP council and have a BBMP council, which is representative. The GBA proposal must be thought of as just that – an initial proposal. It needs to go through a standing committee, public discourses and discussions and a much stronger detailing for implementation and cost.

Meanwhile, there are a host of remedial actions that need to be taken within the BBMP, some of which the Restructuring Report itself identifies.

Further, the various individual Acts of the parastatals have to be changed to reflect their reporting to the BBMP or its successors.

We request for more public discussions and debates on this matter before enactment of the same. We also look forward to a confirmed date for the BBMP council elections so that we have a powerful Mayor with empowered councillors, who are directly answerable to the citizenry.

Thank you,

Yours sincerely,  
Vijayan Menon  
President, CAF