The AB Form Fiasco

Why Local Elections Need Process Reform

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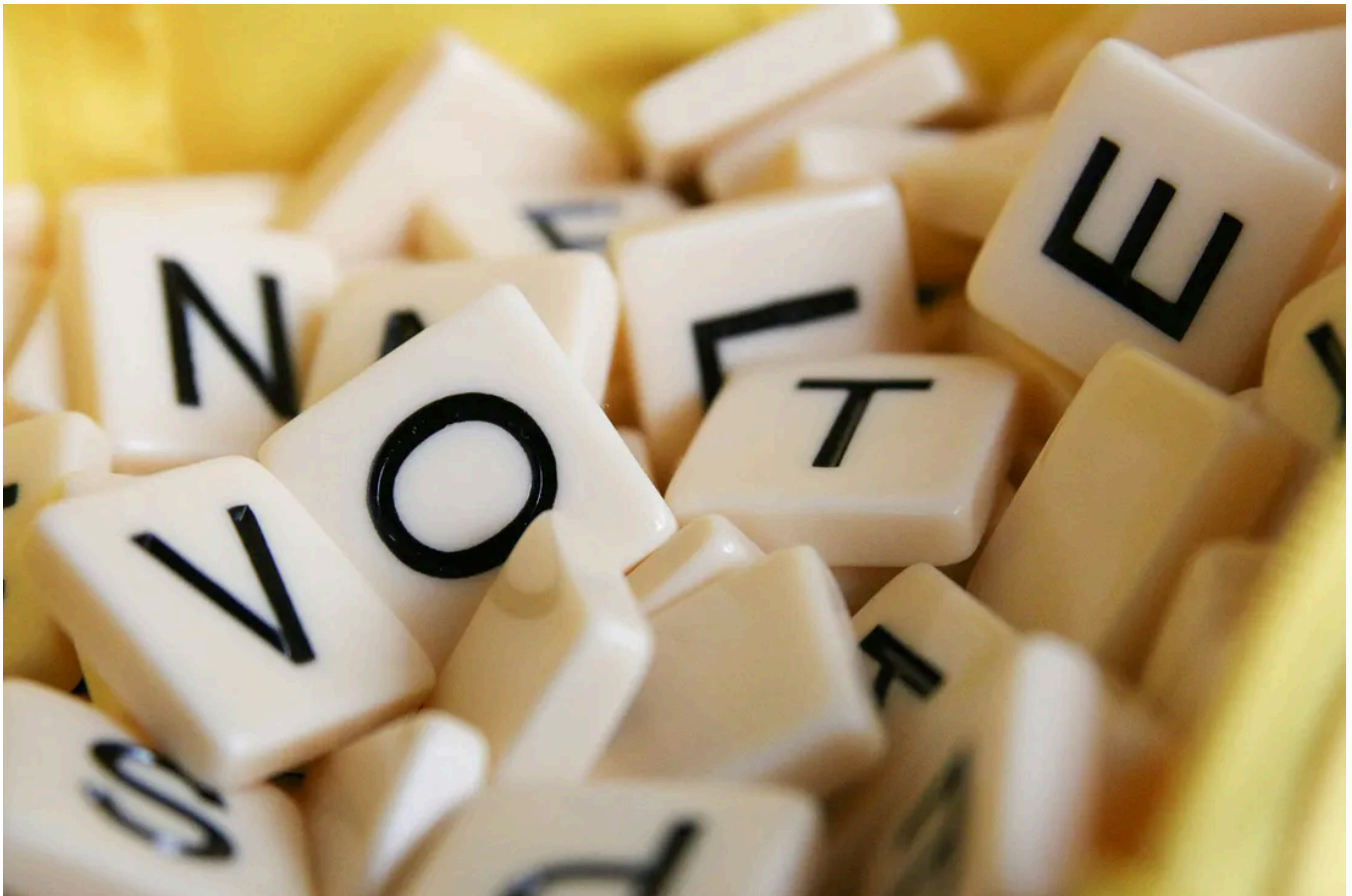

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What's happening now?

Municipal elections rarely make national headlines, yet they decide who controls our roads, water, schools, and local budgets. Ironically, these elections are also where some of the most avoidable procedural failures occur. One of the most common is what candidates and party workers loosely call the "AB form fiasco."

In Maharashtra's municipal elections, political parties officially nominate candidates using party authorization forms, known informally as AB forms. While the term is popular, the reality is more technical: parties issue Form A to authorize

a signatory, and Form B to declare a party's official candidate for a ward. These forms are not filled by the candidate, yet candidates often suffer the consequences when something goes wrong.

What goes wrong is not trivial. Forms are submitted late, duplicated, signed by the wrong authority, or quietly replaced due to internal party disputes. In some cases, candidates discover at the last moment that their party symbol has been denied. In others, rival claims within the same party lead to confusion that the Returning Officer must resolve under intense time pressure. The entire process remains paper-heavy, opaque, and vulnerable to manipulation.

This is not merely an administrative inconvenience. Losing a party symbol can decisively alter an election outcome. For voters, the process is even more opaque. They rarely know why a candidate lost a symbol, whether a rejection was technical or political, or whether internal party democracy played any role at all.

The solution does not require reinventing elections. It requires fixing the workflow.

A more rational system would begin after elections are formally notified. Any individual who intends to contest would create a candidate profile on the State Election Commission's portal. This profile would include all statutory information that is already required today: identity proofs, ward eligibility, affidavits on assets, liabilities, education, and criminal antecedents. The system would not "approve" candidates in advance, since eligibility is legally decided only during nomination scrutiny, but it would validate completeness and consistency. Each prospective candidate would receive a unique Candidate ID.

Political parties would then do what they are supposed to do: choose candidates. Instead of physically submitting paper authorization forms, authorized party officials would log in to the same system, select a ward, and map the party's nomination to a Candidate ID using a digitally signed declaration. The system would automatically prevent duplicate nominations from the same party in the same ward and create a permanent audit trail.

For the public, the change would be transformative. Candidate profiles, party authorizations, and symbol status would be visible in one place, in near real time. Disputes would not disappear, but they would be easier to understand, easier to adjudicate, and harder to manipulate quietly.

This is not about making elections "high-tech." It is about making them predictable, transparent, and fair, especially at the local level, where democratic trust is built or broken.

From Idea to Implementation: A Practical Reform Blueprint

If such a reform sounds ambitious, it helps to look at what already exists elsewhere.

In India itself, parts of this ecosystem are already familiar. Candidate affidavits are mandatory and publicly disclosed. Several states allow partial online nomination filing. Civil society platforms aggregate candidate data across elections. What is missing is not information, but integration and official ownership of the process.
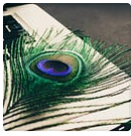
For Maharashtra's State Election Commission, the path forward does not require constitutional overreach. Rule amendments under existing municipal election frameworks can explicitly recognize digitally signed party authorization, introduce Candidate IDs for nomination tracking, and mandate timely public disclosure of nomination and authorization data. Returning Officers would retain their statutory powers, but with better tools and clearer records.

The gains would be immediate. Fewer last-minute rejections. Fewer symbol disputes. Clear accountability within political parties. And for voters, something even more valuable: the ability to see who is contesting, under whose banner, and with what background, without relying on rumors or last-day newspaper notices.

Local elections are often dismissed as messy, informal, or unimportant. That belief becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when processes remain outdated and opaque. Cleaning up the so-called AB form problem is not a narrow technical fix. It is a statement that local democracy deserves the same seriousness, transparency, and institutional care as state and national elections.

This reform will not solve every problem in municipal politics. But it will remove one of the most avoidable sources of confusion and mistrust and that alone would be a meaningful step forward.

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