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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 problems, such as lack of fair representation for all sections of society, corruption, criminality, cash distribution to voters, populist schemes, minority appeasement, and voter apathy.

We often place our hopes on idealistic changes: that politicians will become less corrupt and more honest, that the nexus between criminality and politics will be eradicated, that politics become free from caste and religious considerations and that voters become wise enough to choose the right candidates. Yet, in reality, we recognize that none of these is going to happen. The few solutions, such as campaign spending limits and reserved constituencies, 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.

In this paper, we will show how a similar transformation can be achieved in the political system by opening it up through two fundamental changes.

1. Opening up all voters to all leaders and all leaders to all voters from acorss the country (state, in the case of state elections) by eliminating the concept of territorial constituencies altogether.

2. Granting multiple votes per voter instead of the current one vote per voter.

We will refer to this new system, incorporating these two changes, as the ‘Open Elections’ system. We will show how it ensures fair representation for people of all identities and interests, bring honest, sincere, and committed politicians back into the system, and curb criminality and corruption at both the local and higher levels, and address many other problems and issues which will discuss in detail.

We will present the discussion 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 overview of the ‘Open Elections’ system. We will then illustrate how modern technologies, such as QR codes and touch screens, can be leveraged to implement this system. Subsequently, we will demonstrate how it addresses many of the current system's problems, benefits voters, leaders, political parties, and the Election Commission in various ways, and paves the way for national progress and a stronger democracy. Finally, we will conclude the paper 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 inherent in the current political and electoral systems.

Issues with the current system

2. **Criminality, Corruption and Demagoguery**: Democracy requires elections, and campaigning is integral to elections. Campaigns demand money—not only to reach the electorate but, in the hands of unscrupulous leaders, to entice and bribe voters. Demagoguery, unfortunately, becomes an essential tool for politicians to sway public emotions in their favor. Candidates engage in fierce competition, outspending and outmaneuvering one another to secure victory. When one crosses moral and ethical boundaries, others are compelled to follow suit to remain competetive, leading to a steady decline in honesty and integrity, and raise of criminality and corruption, with each successive election. Vote-buying, which completely negates the spirit of democracy, has become a widespread and accepted practice in many parts of the country. Honest and principled politicians have been all but driven out of the political arena.

3. **Lack of fair representation**: Only the ‘upper castes’ have the money power and muscle power necessary to enter the electoral fray and win the elections. Consequently, the other sections of the society are not fairly represented in the legislatures in proportion to their numbers, leading to steadily growing discontent among them. There is also increasing discontent among the ‘wealthier but less populous’ states over the higher representation afforded to ‘poorer buy more populous’ states, a situation that has given rise to what are known as delimitation issues.

4. **Generic Politicians**: The electorate in each constituency consists of people from diverse socioeconomic segments, each with distinct interests, needs, issues, and concerns. However, under the current system, they must elect a single leader and expect that individual to represent all segments. As a result, the system favors ‘jack of all, master of none’, generic politicians who excel at pretending to be ‘all things to all people’. Leaders who are passionate about the specific needs of a particular segment of the population—such as farmers, teachers, weavers, or construction workers—and wish to dedicate themselves to addressing their issues and concerns find it impossible to win an election, as any one such segment forms only a minority in any given constituency. Consequently, our political system and legislatures are dominated by politicians adept at playing generic politics, rather than those with expertise in or dedication to advancing specific fields, sectors, or population groups.

5. **Limited choices and dilemmas**: Voters in the current system face limited choices and significant dilemmas: 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 a ‘wasted’ vote. b) Political parties typically present a manifesto before elections, a bundled package of policies and positions on various issues. Voters have no way to selectively support or reject specific elements of the manifestos, and consequently, no matter which party they vote for, they end up endorsing at least some policies and positions that potentially 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, and so on, find themselves caught in a dilemma. Their vote is interpreted as an endorsement of all three, which may not be the case in reality.

6. **Forced Marriages and Perpetual Minority Rule**: The current system forces the entire electorate of a constituency to be represented by the winning candidate, including those who did not vote for them. With typical vote shares of 40% to 50% and voter turnout rates of 60% to 70%, the actual proportion of the total electorate who voted for the winning candidate often falls to just 30% to 35%. This means that 65% to 70% of voters are represented by someone they did not support or trust. Furthermore, even among those who did vote for the winning candidate, many may not genuinely like or trust them. Some voters may have chosen the candidates simply because they liked the party, disliked the alternatives, or saw the candidates as the "lesser of two evils." The proportion of true positive votes—cast out of genuine support for the candidate—may be as low as 10% to 20%. This misalignment creates a situation where up to 80% of the electorate may find themselves in a "forced marriage" with the winning candidate. This scenario benefits neither the voters, nor the winning candidate, nor democracy itself. Honest dialogue between voters and leaders becomes impossible without mutual trust. Leaders are less likely to openly discuss the long-term pros and cons of policies or programs with voters who do not trust them, while voters remain suspicious of their leaders' intentions. Leaders, in turn, are perpetually uncertain about maintaining voter support, further undermining the democratic process.

7. **Voter Apathy and Cynicism**: While voting is often preached as the sacred duty of citizens in a democracy, the reality shaped by the factors outlined above—limited choices, voters' dilemmas, upper-caste dominance, corruption and criminality, forced marriages, lack of trustworthiness, and lack of fair representation—breeds widespread apathy and cynicism among the electorate. These issues erode voters' faith in the system, leaving many disillusioned and questioning the value of their participation in a process they perceive as fundamentally flawed.

8. **Lack of national outlook**: 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 local contests, where factors such as local clout, influence within local factions, and control over local businesses often overshadow national outlook, vision and appeal of the candidates in determining a candidate's chances of winning. Governments often rely on the Rajya Sabha to bring leaders with national vision and outlook into positions of power. The majority of Lok Sabha members tend to act as mere extensions of the party high-command, following its directives without contributing their own voices to national debates. This arrangement results in a troubling quid pro quo: the high-command overlooks the misdeeds of MPs, and the MPs, in turn, ignore the misdeeds of the high-command. This unfortunate equation places the future of the country in the hands of a few powerful individuals at the top. The legislatures lack leaders capable of framing national-level policies, managing large-scale programs, or heading key institutions, agencies, and departments. This leadership vacuum has been a significant factor in India's slow progress. Critical sectors such as education, healthcare, sports, tourism, agriculture, and manufacturing have suffered consistently due to a lack of strong, visionary leadership. The same pattern replicates itself at the state level too.

9. **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 matters. Conversely, leaders of local bodies have the authority but lack the necessary influence to drive change. 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. Political analysts note that local bodies even in countries like Pakistan and China enjoy greater autonomy and authority than those in India. The lack of strong local governance structures significantly hampers local development. Citizens often turn to state and central governments to address local issues, which not only overburdens these higher levels of government but also results in delays, irrelevancies, and inefficiencies in handling matters of local significance.

10. 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 but requires sacrifices from their own constituency? The same dilemma exists even for the elected members of the state legislatures. Should they prioritize the interests of the state or that of the local constituency?

11. **Challenges Faced by Political Parties**: Selecting candidates, or “giving tickets,” is a highly challenging exercise for political parties before every election. Parties must choose candidates who not only have clout, money power, and muscle power but are also acceptable to the electorate, party cadres, and internal factions. Poor candidate selection can lead to internal dissent, loss of seats, or even an election defeat. The top leadership often lacks detailed insights into the ground realities of all constituencies, making the selection of "right" candidates even more difficult. The absence of internal elections within parties exacerbates this problem. While internal elections could democratize candidate selection, many parties lack the resources, organizational discipline, and safeguards to conduct them effectively. Challenges such as maintaining an authentic membership base, preventing adverse infiltration, and organizing elections make internal democratization a daunting task. Without internal elections, sycophants and loyalists often rise through the ranks, weakening the party's leadership quality and decision-making over time.

12. 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, and small gain in vote share can result in a disproportionaltely large gain of seats, leaving some parties underrepresented and others overrepresented. This distortion is unjust not only for the parties but also for the *voters themselves*. For instance, 40% of voters, who support a particular party might only secure 30% representation in terms of seats, while 41% of voters supporting another party might secure 70% representation in terms of seats. Such distortions undermine the principle of fair representation and create a disconnect between voter intent and legislative composition.

13. **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 competition into rivalry and, eventually, into hostility. Local factions exacerbate this problem by aligning with rival parties, bringing their pre-existing hostilities into the political arena. Furthermore, parties often exploit existing social and ideological divisions within society, aligning themselves with specific ideologies and voter segments rather than addressing the broader issues facing the nation (or state, in the case of state elections) as a

whole. Over time, such alignments lead to the polarization of society, intensifying existing divides and creating new social wedges.

14. As if 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. The very concept of an "opposition party" is flawed—why should we elect one party to govern and another to oppose it? All elected representatives, regardless of their party affiliation, are meant to represent the people and should collaborate for the common good. However, neither the constitution nor the prevailing political culture encourages such collaboration. Instead, this terminology reinforces pre-election hostilities, carrying them into post-election debates and influencing government policies. The ruling party often uses state apparatus to harass opposition leaders, while the opposition party focuses on the constant demonization of the ruling party. This creates a toxic cycle, polluting both the social and political atmosphere, and ultimately hindering productive governance. Instead of fostering collaboration and dialogue, this dynamic perpetuates hostility, division, and gridlock, making it difficult to address the nation's real challenges and move forward in a meaningful way.

15. **Leadership leak**: Many good leaders, who are already rare, unfortunately never get the opportunity to serve the public or offer their valuable leadership due to systemic flaws. This phenomenon can be described as "leadership leak," which occurs in at least two ways within the current system. The first type of leadership leak occurs within political parties. Talented leaders who may disagree with the top party leadership are often sidelined or suppressed. Despite their abilities, these leaders are not able to rise through the ranks within their party or secure the party's nomination during elections. The second leadership leak stems from the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) electoral system. Political parties often field strong candidates against other strong candidates and average candidates against average ones. No matter who wins, only half of the strong candidates gain power, and the other half are left on the wayside by the system. History bears witness to many good parliamentarians being kept out of power becasue of the loss of a few percentage points of votes.

16. **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

17. **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 purge the corrupt elements already entrenched in it. But this is easier said than done. Why would any political party, which often relies on criminal elements and corrupt practices for its survival, tie its own hands down by enacting strict laws? Moreover, political leaders are savvy enough to circumvent any laws that might 'catch' them. They know better than anyone else how to exploit the cracks in the system.

18. **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 idea we seem to have is to impose limits on the donations collected and the money spent in political campaigns. 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 pick leaders who are good at raising and spending huge sums of money without getting caught.

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

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

21. There are at least four problems with this compromise. Firstly, it negates the ideals of representative democracy by compelling voters of all castes in the 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 the elected representatives: should they represent the interests of the SC and ST communities exclusively, or those of all the 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 behind the scenes, rendering 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 about the 'upper castes' within the SC classification garnering most of the nominations and, consequently, the seats. They are demanding SC sub-classification to ensure fair representation for them.

22. **Caste-based census**: This solution has gained traction recently as a means to ensure fair representation for all sections of society. However, conducting a caste-based census by itself will not resolve the representation issue; we would need to either create more 'reserved constituencies' for more sections of society or establish separate electorates for each caste, akin to the 'communal award' discussed earlier. Either of these solutions would, however, make castes live forever, negating the ideal of realizing caste-free politics and a even caste-free society, some day. Further, this solution forces 'caste-free' voters—a rapidly growing segment, thanks to urbanization and intercaste marriages—to think and vote along caste boundaries, curtailing their choices.

23. **Other issues**: We lack even hypothetical solutions, let alone effective ones, for all the other problems discussed above. In the next section, we propose a comprehensive solution aimed at addressing all of these issues.

Open Elections

24. 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.

25. 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 thier own pan-India ‘voter bases’.

26. 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 woukd 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.

27. We also *suggest*, though not necessarily *propose*, renaming the Lok Sabha as ‘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. Many members also 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 and respond to emergencies—roles that go far beyond drafting and passing laws. In fact, the average voter perceives MPs and MLAs as part of the ‘government’ and is often unaware of the distinction between the legislature and the executive. The term ‘Leadership Council’ highlights the broader leadership role that these elected representatives play and are expected to fulfill. It should be noted that this change in terminology is merely a suggestion and entirely optional. It is not integral to the concept of ‘Open Elections’.

Enhancing Representative democracy

28. 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 ‘represenative 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.

Innovative methods

29. There are a few operational issues that need to be sorted out in order to implement the Open Elections system, which we will address through various innovative methods outlined below.

30. **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.

31. **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.

32. **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).

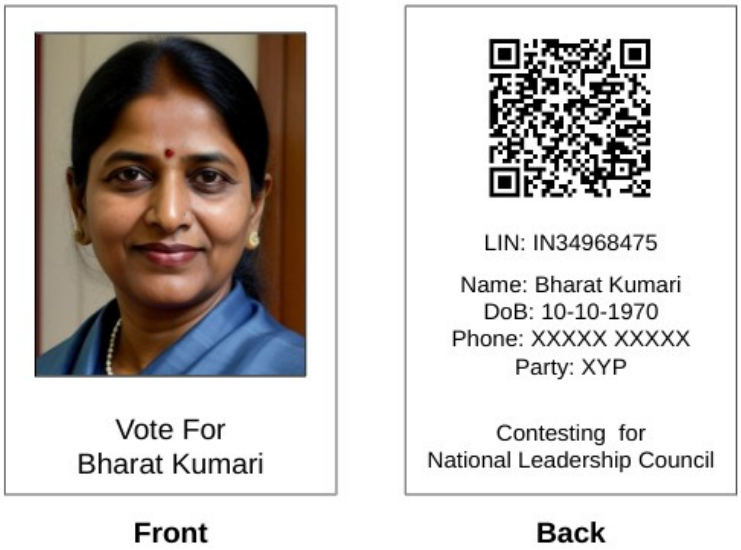
33. **Love Marriages**: In the Open Elections system, elected leaders represent only the voters who voted for them, unlike in the current system, where leaders are required to represent all voters in their constituency, including those who did not vote for them. In the Open Elections system, no leader 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

34. 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.

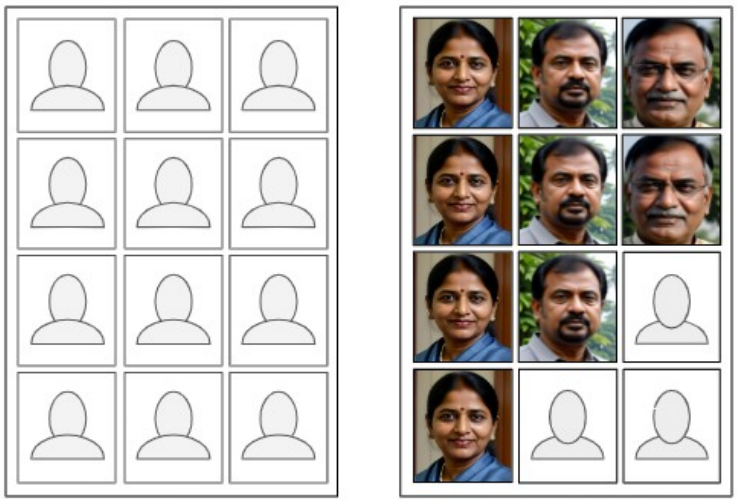
35. To overcome these limitations, we propose leveraging modern technologies, specifically QR codes and touchscreens. Instead of traditional election symbols, we introduce the concept of 'Leader Cards' with QR codes that uniquely identify each candidate. In place of the EVMs, we introduce AVMs (Advanced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

36. 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:



37. 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.

38. 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:



Before Voting After Voting

39. 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.

40. 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.

41. 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.

42. 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

43. 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 fot the voters

44. **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.

45. **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.

46. **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.

47. **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.

48. **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.

49. **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.

50. **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.

51. **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.

52. **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.

53. **‘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

54. **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.

55. **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.

56. **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.

57. **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.

58. **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

59. **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.

60. **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.

61. **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.

62. 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.

63. **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.

64. **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.

65. **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.

66. **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.

67. **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.

68. 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

69. **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.

70. **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.

71. **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.

72. 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.

73. **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.

74. **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.

75. 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.

76. **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.

77. **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.

78. **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.

79. **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

80. **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 address adequaately address lack of fair represenation. Further, they have the negative affect of locking the society into a 'communal framework'.

81. 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, comiong 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 leaderto 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 guranteed that they will be represented exactly in proportion to their numbers.

82. **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 voter 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 no where 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 famililer 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 aand open with the voters about their positions and policies. Voters too can count on the longevity of a leader in power, unlike in hte 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.

83. **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 compeltely, as no voter is represented by a leader whom one did not choose.

84. The only scenario in which minorty 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’ condidates on their Endorsed Lists.

85. **Responsive Governments**: In a democracy, ideally, only those parties which has intimate understanding of people needs, interests and sensibililties 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-incumbancy sentiments, and charismatic leaders catching on the fancies and pressing grievances of the people. Once in power, the governments expend the publilc money and their efforts in pursuing their own ideologies, or the whims and fanicies of the top leadership. The Open Elections system, with its interest-based voter-leader alignment, closes the gap between the voters’ true expectaction 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.

86. **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 accenate 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.

87. **Towards Honesty and Sincerity**: During the election season, leaders and parties are driven by demagogury, 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, becasue 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 criticket stars and movie stars enjoy a close and long lasting relationship with the public than political stars. This is not only bad for the leaderss, 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.

88. **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 relavant. Local strongmen are the backbone of the parties and elections today becasue 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 an 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.

89. **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 comedown 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 represenation in the legislatures than the ruling party. They are essentially a teethless watchdog. Both media and opposition can bark all they want but cannot bite.

90. 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 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 questionble 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 legilation 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.

91. **Cardial Relationships among Political Parties**: We elect leaders of all parties, though in different numbers, and expect all of them to collaboraate as our representatives. But, as discussed earlier, the competition among them leads to rivarly, 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 attitutde 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, esssentially, 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.

92. **No Leadership Leak**: We discussed about two types of ‘leadership leak’ in the currrent 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.

93. **Enhanced Voter Participation**: The multiple choices, interest and identity based alignment in the Open Elections will create enthusiam among the voters in participating in the election process, as no more their choices are tied down to choosing bettween ‘two evils’. No more voters in general, urban voters – a rising demographic – in particualr 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

94. 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.

95. 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.

96. 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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