

Deepening Democracy

CITIZEN CENTRIC GOVERNANCE

by

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“A Customer is the most important visitor on our premises.
He is not dependent on us.
We are dependent on him.
He is not an interruption on our work.
He is the purpose of it.
He is not an outsider on our business.
He is a part of it.
We are not doing him a favour by serving him.
He is doing us a favour by giving us an opportunity to do so.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

In a democratic government, the citizen is not only the customer but she also creates, owns and funds the government.

Why do we need a State?

The Principle of Subsidiarity – Citizen and The State

Individual & Family



Community of stakeholders



Local Government



State Government



Federal Government

- Any issue that can be handled locally, at a level **as close to the citizen as possible**, should be done locally.
- **Only when it is not feasible** should it be delegated to a higher level of government.
- **The farther removed state action is from the citizen, the higher are the chances that the state will not function in the best interests of the citizen.**

State power remains a “**delegate**”

Role of the State

To fulfill our **collective needs** that cannot be met at the individual or market level

Rule of Law

Public Order

Justice

Basic Amenities

Infrastructure

Education

Healthcare

**Sustainable
Natural Resource
Development**

Core State Functions – Where does India stand?

Comparison of Various Development Indicators Among 55 Large Economies											
Rank	GDP Per Capita (PPP, 2023)	Life Expectancy (2022)	IMR (2022)	MMR (2020)	Out-of-Pocket-Expenditure on Healthcare (2021)	EYS (Expected Years of Schooling, 2022)	MYS (Mean Years of Schooling, 2022)	HDI (Human Development Index, 2022)	Power Consumption (Kwh Per capita, 2019)	Employment in Agriculture (% of total employment, 2022)	LFPR (Labor Force Participation Rate - Female, 2022)
1	Ireland	Japan	Hong Kong	Norway	South Africa	Australia	Germany	Switzerland	Norway	Singapore	Vietnam
2	Switzerland	Hong Kong	Japan	Poland	France	Greece	Switzerland	Norway	Qatar	Hong Kong	New Zealand
3	Norway	Switzerland	Norway	Australia	Thailand	Turkey	Canada	Hong Kong	Sweden	Israel	Peru
4	Singapore	Australia	Singapore	Spain	Netherlands	New Zealand	United States	Sweden	Canada	Belgium	Qatar
5	United States	Sweden	Finland	Israel	Saudi Arabia	Finland	Israel	Denmark	UAE	United Kingdom	Sweden
6	Denmark	Spain	Sweden	Czechia	UAE	Ireland	United Kingdom	Ireland	Finland	Germany	Netherlands
7	Australia	Ireland	Czechia	Hong Kong	Ireland	Sweden	Poland	Germany	United States	Canada	Singapore
8	Netherlands	Italy	Italy	Netherlands	United States	Argentina	Norway	Singapore	South Korea	UAE	Kazakhstan
9	Austria	Singapore	South Korea	Japan	New Zealand	Belgium	Denmark	Australia	Saudi Arabia	United States	Australia
10	Sweden	New Zealand	Spain	Germany	Japan	Denmark	New Zealand	Netherlands	Australia	Sweden	Norway
11	Finland	Israel	Austria	Ireland	Germany	Norway	Finland	Belgium	Singapore	Netherlands	Switzerland
12	Belgium	South Korea	Portugal	Austria	Denmark	Netherlands	Czechia	Finland	France	Denmark	Canada
13	Canada	Norway	Ireland	Belgium	Czechia	Hong Kong	UAE	United Kingdom	Belgium	Norway	Israel
14	UAE	France	Israel	Italy	Sweden	Spain	Australia	New Zealand	New Zealand	Australia	China
15	Germany	United Kingdom	Germany	Denmark	United Kingdom	United Kingdom	Sweden	UAE	Israel	Switzerland	Thailand
16	Israel	Netherlands	Denmark	Sweden	Colombia	Germany	Japan	Canada	Japan	Czechia	Denmark
17	Hong Kong	Belgium	Belgium	Singapore	Australia	UAE	South Korea	South Korea	Czechia	France	Ireland
18	United Kingdom	Portugal	Australia	Switzerland	Norway	Singapore	Netherlands	United States	Russia	Saudi Arabia	Finland
19	New Zealand	Denmark	Hungary	New Zealand	Canada	Portugal	Belgium	Austria	Austria	Japan	United Kingdom
20	France	Canada	France	South Korea	Austria	Chile	Kazakhstan	Japan	Switzerland	Austria	United States
21	Italy	Finland	Greece	Finland	Finland	Italy	Russia	Israel	Netherlands	Finland	Austria
22	Japan	Austria	Netherlands	France	Turkey	Switzerland	Hong Kong	Spain	Germany	Italy	Germany
23	South Korea	Germany	Switzerland	Greece	Belgium	South Korea	Austria	France	Ireland	Spain	Malaysia
24	Spain	Greece	United Kingdom	UAE	Israel	United States	Hungary	Italy	China	Ireland	Russia
25	Czechia	Thailand	Poland	United Kingdom	Poland	Austria	Singapore	Czechia	Kazakhstan	Hungary	UAE
26	Saudi Arabia	Chile	Russia	Romania	Romania	Czechia	France	Greece	Spain	Portugal	South Korea
27	Portugal	UAE	New Zealand	Canada	Spain	France	Ireland	Poland	Denmark	South Korea	Portugal

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28	Greece	Czechia	UAE	Portugal	Italy	Canada	South Africa	Saudi Arabia	Greece	Russia	Japan
29	Hungary	China	Canada	Kazakhstan	Argentina	Poland	Greece	Portugal	Malaysia	New Zealand	Brazil
30	Poland	Turkey	China	Russia	Singapore	Russia	Romania	Chile	Italy	Chile	Hungary
31	Romania	Saudi Arabia	Chile	Hungary	Brazil	Thailand	Saudi Arabia	Turkey	Portugal	Argentina	Spain
32	Chile	United States	United States	Chile	Switzerland	Brazil	Argentina	Hungary	Hong Kong	Poland	Hong Kong
33	Mexico	Poland	Romania	Saudi Arabia	Hungary	Algeria	Chile	Argentina	Poland	Iraq	France
34	Russia	Algeria	Saudi Arabia	Egypt	Kazakhstan	Japan	Malaysia	Romania	United Kingdom	Brazil	Indonesia
35	Argentina	Malaysia	Malaysia	Turkey	Peru	China	Italy	Russia	Chile	Algeria	Czechia
36	Kazakhstan	Argentina	Thailand	United States	Russia	Saudi Arabia	Spain	Malaysia	Turkey	Malaysia	Argentina
37	Turkey	Hungary	Turkey	Malaysia	Indonesia	Hungary	Peru	Thailand	Iran	Greece	Nigeria
38	China	Romania	Argentina	Iran	Portugal	Israel	Egypt	Iran	South Africa	Mexico	Colombia
39	Malaysia	Mexico	Kazakhstan	China	South Korea	Kazakhstan	Iran	Kazakhstan	Argentina	Kazakhstan	South Africa
40	Brazil	Vietnam	Iran	Thailand	Hong Kong	Peru	Portugal	China	Brazil	Colombia	Belgium
41	Peru	Iran	Colombia	Argentina	Chile	Iran	Mexico	Mexico	Romania	Iran	Poland
42	Thailand	Kazakhstan	Mexico	Mexico	Malaysia	Romania	Philippines	Peru	Mexico	Turkey	Philippines
43	Colombia	Bangladesh	Peru	Peru	Greece	Mexico	Colombia	Brazil	Thailand	Romania	Chile
44	South Africa	Colombia	Brazil	Brazil	China	Colombia	Thailand	Colombia	Vietnam	Egypt	Italy
45	Iraq	Brazil	Egypt	Colombia	Iran	South Africa	Turkey	Algeria	Iraq	South Africa	Mexico
46	Algeria	Peru	Vietnam	Iraq	Algeria	Indonesia	Indonesia	Egypt	Egypt	China	Greece
47	Indonesia	Russia	Indonesia	Philippines	Vietnam	Vietnam	Vietnam	Vietnam	Cuba	Philippines	Romania
48	Iran	Philippines	Algeria	Algeria	Mexico	Malaysia	Brazil	South Africa	Peru	Peru	Turkey
49	Vietnam	Iraq	Iraq	India	Philippines	Egypt	China	Indonesia	Colombia	Indonesia	Saudi Arabia
50	Philippines	Egypt	Philippines	Bangladesh	India	Philippines	Nigeria	Philippines	India	Thailand	India
51	Egypt	Indonesia	Bangladesh	Vietnam	Iraq	India	Bangladesh	Iraq	Indonesia	Vietnam	Bangladesh
52	Bangladesh	India	India	South Africa	Egypt	Iraq	Algeria	Bangladesh	Philippines	Pakistan	Pakistan
53	India	Pakistan	South Africa	Pakistan	Pakistan	Bangladesh	Iraq	India	Pakistan	Bangladesh	Egypt
54	Nigeria	South Africa	Pakistan	Indonesia	Bangladesh	Nigeria	India	Nigeria	Bangladesh	Nigeria	Iran
55	Pakistan	Nigeria	Nigeria	Nigeria	Nigeria	Pakistan	Pakistan	Pakistan	Nigeria	India	Iraq

Citizen Centric Governance

Democracy is incomplete if citizens have no right to **articulate their views**, and **organise, persuade & presurise governments** to pursue a course of action according to their beliefs. The state's role is to **facilitate a constructive role** for various interest groups.

Pursuit of reforms through **systematic & constructive engagement** to persuade elected governments

Recognition that policy choices are legitimate areas of political contention, to be decided by the **people's mandate** as far as practicable

Obstructive methods of civic engagement & paralysis should be given up

Strict **regulation** – registration, monitoring & transparency – for groups representing specific economic interests

No denigration of the **political process** or undermining the **democratic legitimacy** of elected governments

Institutional checks & balances to be preserved at all times, in every organ of the state

Means to Citizen-Centric Governance

What Could They Look Like?

- **Empowered Local Governments**
- **Convergence of Service Delivery**
- **Instruments of Accountability**

Current local governments



Over-structured

Underpowered

- Highly centralised system of governance – **colonial legacy** and the traumatic experience of **the partition**.
- **Accountability has been eroded** leading to inefficiency and corruption in almost every sphere of government.
- **Constitution envisages transfer of 29 subjects** ranging from education and healthcare to agriculture to local governments.
- In reality, **states are reluctant to let go of any of their powers**.

73rd & 74th Amendments to the Constitution

- Together, the amendments are **about 7,700 words long**, which is more than the entire American Constitution (4,700 words).
- **Article 28 of the German Basic Law** mandates powerful, democratic, autonomous and self-reliant local governments in just over 100 words.
- Key provisions regarding powers & functions are **vague and feeble** (Articles 243G & 243W).
- Most States took full advantage and created **local governments devoid of any substance**.

Consequences of Over-Centralisation

No link between:

Vote



Public Good

Taxes



Services

Authority



Accountability

Inefficient & corrupt service delivery

Vote becomes a **purchasable commodity** and **populism** becomes endemic

Shri R.S. Bharathi's work in Alandur Municipality provides an example of how effective local governments can be if these links are clearly established.

- **Single point of contact** for the citizen for multiple service delivery needs enhances the ease of engagement with the government.
- Convergence, to the extent possible, is required **both vertically and horizontally**.
 - Vertical – across various tiers of government
 - Horizontal – across various departments & agencies of a single tier of government

Stakeholder Groups

Parent-Teacher Associations	Comprehensive progress of the child, fee regulation, emphasis on school infrastructure
Co-operatives	Access to low-interest credit, affordable healthcare, education, housing etc.
Farmer Producer Organisations	Economies of scale, access to market, value addition and export
Ward Committees	Training of members in core governance functions, transparency in allocation of resources, fuses authority with responsibility

Tools of Accountability

Citizen's Charter	Timely & predictable service delivery, reduces corruption, fuses authority with responsibility.
Right to Information	Transparency & accountability of government.
Competent anti-corruption bodies	Reduces corruption while also ensuring that corrective measures are in place for instances of corruption.

**Global Examples - Zegou (China), East Belgium,
Cupertino (U.S.A.)**

Deliberative Democracy in Zegou



- The ideal according to which **citizens, on the basis of equal status and mutual respect, discuss** current political issues and **decide on the policies** that will then affect their lives.
- **Deliberative Polling** is one of the ways in which the ideal of deliberative democracy is materialised.

This method involves **polling a random, representative sample** on key issues, followed by a **discussion** with balanced briefing materials and expert dialogue, after which participants are **re-polled to gauge changes** in opinion reflecting a more informed public perspective.

The Chinese Example

- Since the **mid-1990s**, villages in China have established **representative meetings** for discussing local affairs, which **have since expanded to urban areas**.
- **Wenling City** has been a leader in consultative practices, conducting over 1,190 meetings at various levels from 1996 to 2000, earning a national award for governance in 2004.

Zeguo Deliberative Polling : The Context



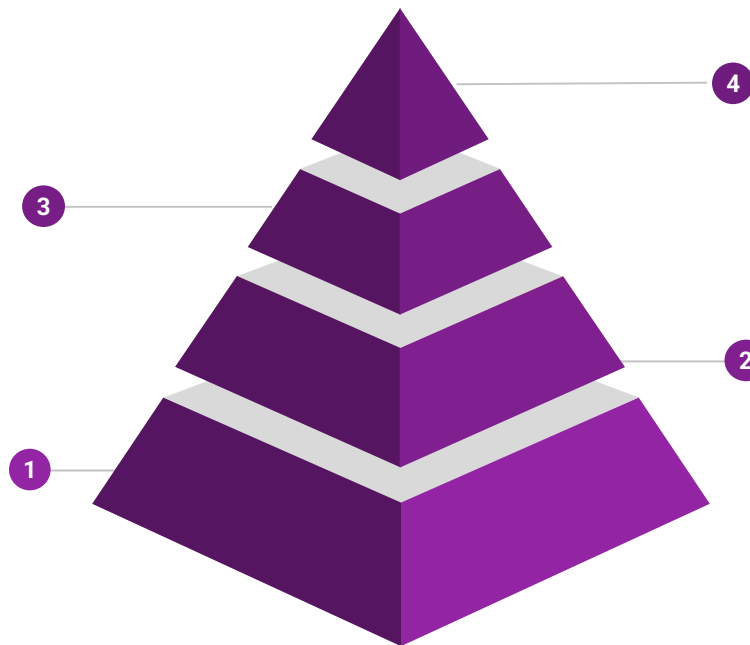
- The Deliberative Polling project in Zeguo, China, was a part of ongoing participatory efforts in the city.
- Zeguo Township government sought a **solution to determine which 10 out of 30 proposed projects to fund**, as the total cost of RMB 137,000,000 exceeded their budget of RMB 40,000,000, making the public's input crucial for prioritizing funding.
- A working committee and an expert panel were formed in **December 2004** to undertake the launch of the Deliberative Poll and work on preliminary reports of the projects in question, respectively.
- Out of a permanent population of about 119,200 and an estimated 120,000 migrants, **275 individuals were randomly selected** from a household registration list to participate in a Deliberative Poll.

Plenary Sessions and Rating

Participants examined **project merits**, posed questions to **expert panels**, and concluded by completing a **second questionnaire** to rank the projects after the discussion.

Project Rating (Sample Size : 269)

A **pre-deliberation questionnaire** to rate 30 proposed infrastructure projects on a scale of 0 to 10 and 04 questions assessing their general knowledge of Zeguo Township policies.



Initial Sample Size : 275

Implementation

The results were **presented to Zeguo's local People's Congress** in April 2005, leading to a majority vote in favor of the top 12 projects, which the **town government subsequently implemented**.

Discussion Groups (Sample Size : 235)

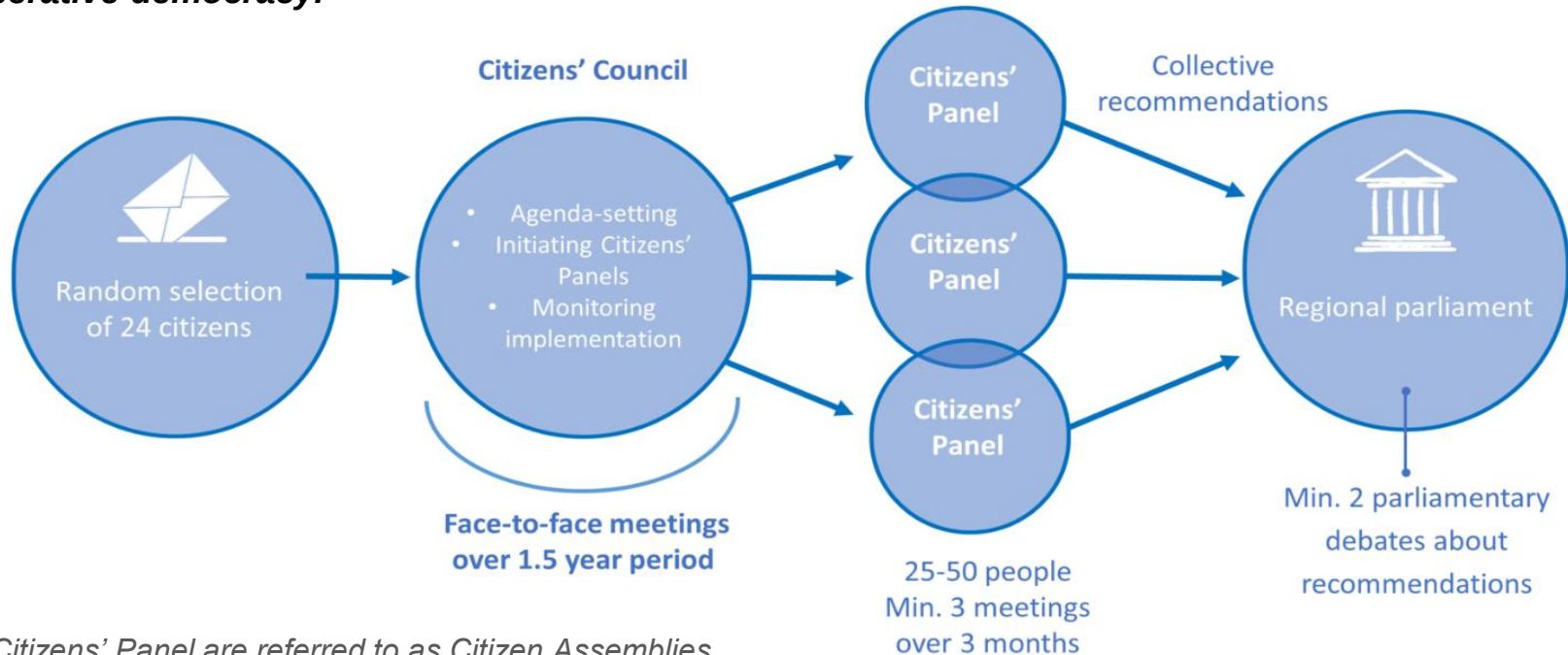
Participants then received **balanced briefing documents** and were randomly divided into 16 **discussion groups of 16**, with discussion facilitated by trained high school teacher moderators.

Observation : After deliberation, participants' rankings shifted significantly, with **increased support for three sewage treatment plants, a city design plan, major repairs to the main village road, and a 'Citizen's Park,'** while support decreased for several minor road projects and maintenance of an existing public park.

Deliberative Democracy in Belgium

Ostbelgien (East Belgian) Model

In 2019, a **permanent Citizens' Council** was created in Ostbelgien (the German-speaking community of Belgium) to serve as **the third key democratic institution** alongside the Parliament and the Executive **institutionalizing deliberative democracy**.



Note: Citizens' Panel are referred to as Citizen Assemblies.

Breaking down the Ostbelgien (East Belgium) Model

Structure

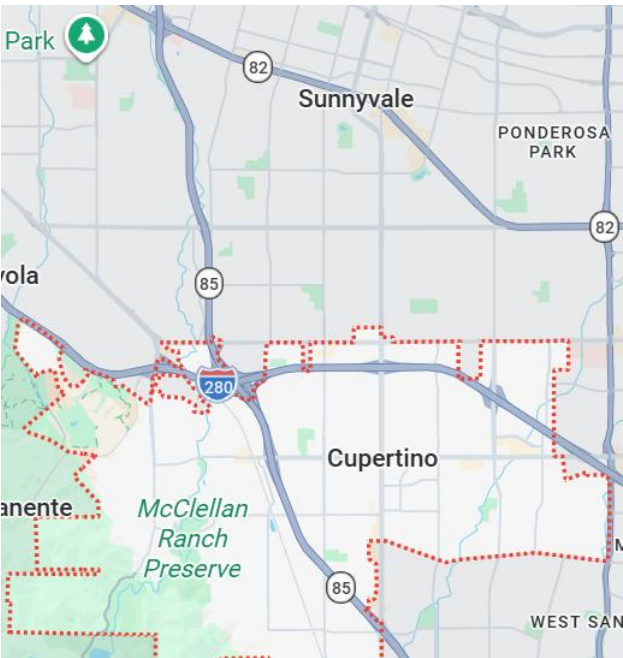
- **Citizens Council – 24 members**
 - 06 from a previous Citizens' Panel
 - 06 politicians (one from each party)
 - 12 randomly selected Ostbelgien citizens, with one-third rotating out every 6 months to introduce new participants.
- **Citizen Assembly – 25-50 members**
 - Randomly selected from among residents ≥ 16 years in the 9 German-speaking municipalities of East Belgium, excluding public office holders.
 - The size and duration of each Citizens' Assembly is set by the Citizens' Council.

Process – Four Steps

- **Topic Selection:** Citizens' Council invites proposals aligned with the Parliament's authority from all East Belgians annually. Must be supported by at least 100 signatures.
- **Deliberation:** Citizens' Assembly is then convened on accepted proposal. It must meet for a minimum of 3 times over 3 months to generate recommendations for the Parliament.
- **Policy Recommendations:** Post-discussion recommendations are presented at an open meeting of the parliamentary committee, where MPs and the relevant minister decide on implementation, announcing their decision publicly and justifying any rejections.
- **Implementation:** The Citizens' Council and Permanent Secretary oversee the implementation of recommendations, with a follow-up open meeting scheduled within a year for MPs, the minister, and Citizens' Assembly members to discuss progress.

Better School District → Higher Property Prices

- **Sunnyvale vs Cupertino** (Bay Area): Similar location, vastly different property values
- **Key Differentiator:** Effective local school governance in Cupertino
- **Tax-Service Link:** Local taxpayers access public schools → strong incentive to reside
- **Outcome:** High housing demand → sharp rise in property values



City	Property Value (Dec 2025)*
Cupertino	\$2,900,000
Sunnyvale	\$1,700,000

**Median of all house prices bought and sold in December 2025.*

“Nowhere has democracy functioned well without a large measure of local self-governance”

– *Friedrich Von Hayek*
in “*The Road to Serfdom*”