STUDY NOTES · BASIC CONCEPT

What are the Constitutional framework of local body elections?

Polity & Governance

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What?

The Constitution establishes separate provisions for the conduct of rural and urban local body elections.

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Article	Provision
Article 243K	Elections to Panchayats; supervision, direction and control by the State Election Commission
Article 243ZA	Elections to municipalities; supervision, direction and control by the State Election Commission
Article 243D	Reservation of seats in Panchayats for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women
Article 243T	Reservation of seats in municipalities for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women
Article 243E	Duration of Panchayats, ordinarily five years
Article 243U	Duration of municipalities, ordinarily five years
Article 243G	Powers, authority and responsibilities of Panchayats, as provided by state law
Article 243W	Powers, authority and responsibilities of municipalities, as provided by state law

Role of the State Election Commission

1. The State Election Commission is responsible for the constitutional supervision, direction and control of elections to Panchayats and municipalities.
2. It is distinct from the Election Commission of India, which conducts elections to Parliament, State Legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice-President.
3. Election Commission of India — Article 324.
4. State Election Commission for Panchayats — Article 243K.
5. State Election Commission for municipalities — Article 243ZA.

The three Fs: Functions, Funds and Functionaries

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A major issue in democratic decentralisation is whether local bodies possess sufficient authority and resources to perform their responsibilities.

The concept of the three Fs is a useful framework for understanding this challenge.

F	Meaning	Example
Functions	Responsibilities assigned to local bodies	Sanitation, local roads and water management
Funds	Financial resources to perform responsibilities	Local taxes, fees, grants and transfers
Functionaries	Personnel required to implement decisions	Municipal engineers, sanitation workers and administrative staff

The 73rd and 74th Amendments provide a constitutional framework, but the extent of actual devolution depends significantly on state laws and implementation.

Challenges facing local self-government in India

Challenge	Consequence	Possible reform
Inadequate financial autonomy	Dependence on higher levels of government	Strengthen own-source revenues and predictable transfers
Limited administrative capacity	Poor implementation of projects	Train elected representatives and local staff
Unclear division of responsibilities	Overlapping authority and accountability gaps	Clearly assign functions across government levels
Political interference	Reduced institutional autonomy	Strengthen lawful, transparent decision-making
Irregular or delayed elections	Weakens democratic representation	Ensure elections within constitutional timelines
Limited citizen participation	Local priorities may be overlooked	Strengthen Gram Sabhas and ward committees
Weak transparency	Greater risk of waste or misuse of funds	Improve audits, public disclosure and social audits

Local democracy becomes meaningful when citizens can both elect representatives and hold them accountable for the quality of governance.

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