



URBAN GOVERNANCE DIALOGUE

Transforming Urban Governance

September 2026

PRAJA.ORG
MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK

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Praja Foundation

2026 - SAMVAAD

Editorial

Greetings from the Team!

Prajatantra 2026 brought together young people from across India to explore a fundamental question: What does it take to build cities that work for everyone?

The eighth edition of, Praja Foundation's National Youth Festival, under the theme "Housing the Future: Building Cities for All," participants were invited to look beyond individual urban challenges and engage with the systems that shape everyday life in cities from housing and public services to participation, planning and governance.

Through the Qualifying Round and Semi-Finals, young people stepped into different roles within city governance. They debated policies, presented solutions, tested their understanding of urban governance, and imagined how institutions could respond more effectively to citizens' needs.

Prajatantra 2026 is co-organised by Praja Foundation, the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) and UN-Habitat India, with support from Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies and the Madhu Mehta Foundation.

As the festival progresses, the ideas developed by participants will move into the Grand Finale, where they will be further examined, challenged and strengthened.



From Participation To NATIONAL IMPACT

3,700+
Participants

700+
Teams

28 and 5
States & UTs

370
Colleges,
Institutions & CSOs

157
Cities

2026 | BOOTCAMP & KNOWLEDGE SESSIONS

Bootcamp

The Prajatantra 2026 Bootcamp kicked off the journey with an introductory session for participants, setting the context for this year's theme, "Housing the Future: Building Cities for All!" The session introduced participants to the event, its formats and the larger questions around housing, cities and urban governance, helping them prepare for the rounds ahead.

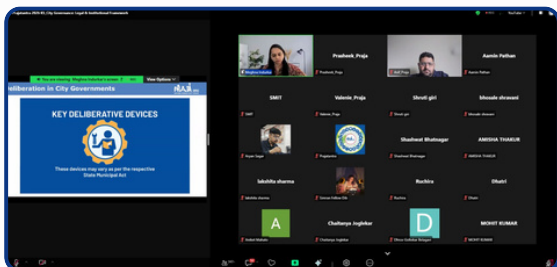
Knowledge Sessions

Knowledge Sessions form an important part of Prajatantra. The 2026 edition of Prajatantra continued this experience, helping participants build the context and understanding required to engage meaningfully with the theme "Housing the Future: Building Cities for All." Across four sessions, experts unpacked how City Governments, spatial planning, municipal finance, housing and citizen participation come together to shape urban life.

01 Legislative Structure of City Governments and Municipal Finance

Speaker: Meghna Indurkar, Praja Foundation

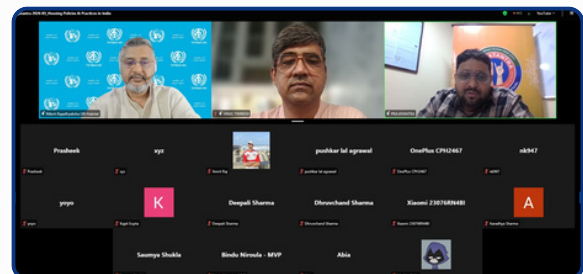
The session covered City Government structures, the 74th Constitutional Amendment, subsidiarity, and devolving funds, functions and functionaries. It also explored municipal budgets and citizen engagement in local governance.



02 Housing Policies and Practices in India

Speaker: Nilesh Rajadhyaksha, UN Habitat

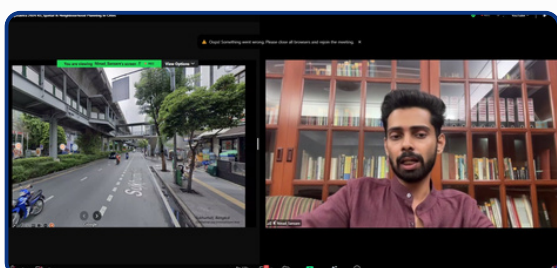
The session explored housing as part of a larger urban system, connecting it with land, infrastructure, mobility, services and opportunities. Participants were encouraged to think about housing solutions in the context of building inclusive and liveable cities.



03 Spatial Planning and Neighbourhood Planning in Cities

Speaker: Ninad Sansare, UDRI

The session explored integrated planning across regional, city and neighbourhood levels, drawing on Mumbai and London. It highlighted the need to align housing, mobility, public spaces, economic activity and environmental priorities with local needs.



04 Municipal Finance, Budgets and Financing Housing

Speaker: Aviral Dubey, Praja Foundation

The session linked municipal finance to housing, covering revenue, expenditure, grants, borrowing and outcome budgeting. Participants analysed City Government budgets, explored how long-term municipal investment can turn housing needs into solutions.



WHERE IDEAS TOOK THE STAGE

The eight competitions at Prajatantra 2026 focused on the theme “Housing the Future: Building Cities for All.” Participants engaged in various activities, such as acting as a mayor, debating housing issues, and creating models, etc. Each format highlighted different aspects of city-making, allowing participants to think quickly, defend ideas, and present creative solutions. The competition intensified through quizzes, debates, and creative presentations, culminating in heightened anticipation for the Grand Finale.

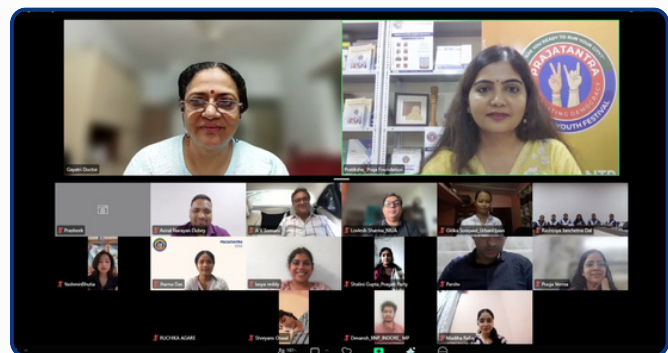
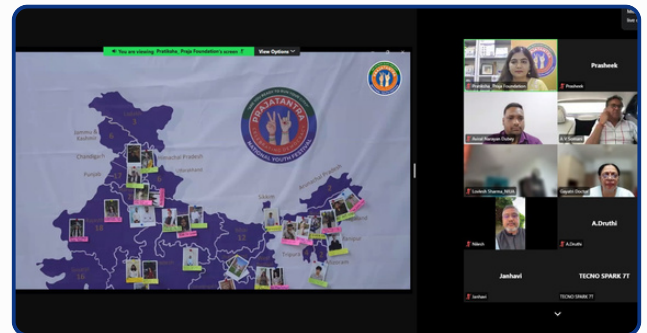
OPENING CEREMONY

Prajatantra 2026 officially began with an opening ceremony bringing together young participants and leaders from the urban development sector around this year’s theme, ‘Housing the Future: Building Cities for All.’

The panel highlighted that housing is more than the provision of homes, it is closely connected to affordability, livelihoods, climate resilience and access to essential city services. Participants were encouraged to think about housing as part of the larger urban system and explore ideas that can inform how cities plan and govern.

A key message for the young participants was that they are citizens of today, not just tomorrow. Understanding how cities are governed, engaging with communities and governments, and contributing ideas can help young people play a more active role in shaping their cities.

With that, the opening ceremony marked the beginning of the Prajatantra 2026.





MAYOR'S SPEECH COMPETITION

The Mayor's Speech Competition invited participants to step into the role of a city's elected Mayor and articulate a vision for the city they would govern. Participants were challenged to identify pressing urban issues, establish priorities and present a governance agenda that responded to the needs of citizens.

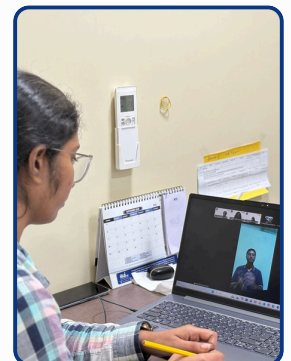
The exercise moved beyond public speaking. It required participants to consider how priorities translate into policy, how city governments can respond to citizens, and what makes urban decision-making inclusive and accountable. The speeches reflected a range of perspectives on building cities that are more liveable, inclusive and responsive.



POLICY ON HOUSING COMPETITION

The Policy on Housing competition invited participants to approach housing as policy-makers, moving from identifying a challenge to developing a considered policy response. Participants examined questions around adequate and affordable housing, governance responsibilities, implementation and citizen needs, while considering how their ideas could work within the realities of cities.

The competition encouraged participants to look beyond the housing problem itself and think about who is responsible, what resources are available and how policy can translate into better outcomes for citizens.

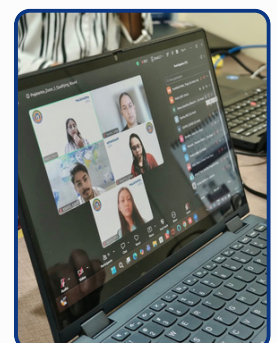


POLICY ON HOUSING FINANCE COMPETITION

The Policy on Housing Finance competition focused on the financial systems and mechanisms that shape people's access to housing.

Participants explored the challenges that influence housing affordability and considered how policy could make housing finance more accessible, effective and responsive to citizens' needs.

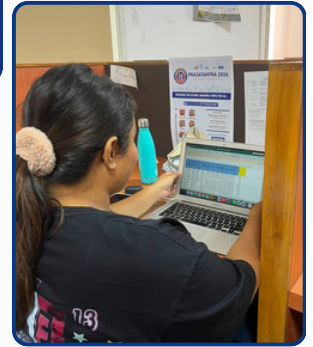
The competition encouraged participants to think through the relationship between finance, policy, institutions and the community, and how these can shape access to housing across different sections of society.





POLICY DEBATE COMPETITION

The Policy Debate gave participants a platform to engage with competing perspectives on how cities can respond to housing challenges. Through structured debates, participants researched their positions, challenged opposing arguments and defended their recommendations. The first motion examined whether cities should promote home ownership as a goal or rental housing as a practical solution, bringing out questions around housing choice, affordability and the realities of urban residents. The second motion explored whether public housing alone can meet the demand for affordable housing or whether private sector participation is essential, prompting participants to consider the roles of different actors in addressing the housing challenge. Together, the debates encouraged participants to look beyond easy answers and engage with the trade-offs, institutional responsibilities and citizen implications that shape urban policy decisions.



QUIZ COMPETITION

The Quiz Competition tests participants' knowledge and understanding of urban governance. It aims to promote healthy competition, foster a deeper understanding of governance, and enhance the overall learning experience. Questions were drawn from three categories: the Constitution of India, Urban Governance, and Democracy (basic principles), Housing. The competition served as a platform to assess participants' knowledge and skills related to the theme, while also stimulating their political and constitutional awareness. It was designed to improve quick decision-making as well as spontaneous and rational thinking.



OP-ED WRITING COMPETITION

The Op-Ed Writing Competition invited participants to develop research-based perspectives on issues shaping the future of cities. Participants were encouraged to move beyond identifying urban problems and instead examine why these challenges persist, how institutions respond, and what changes could improve outcomes for citizens. The submissions reflected a growing interest among young people in understanding urban governance through evidence, argument and public discourse.





REEL MAKING COMPETITION

The Reel Making Competition brought urban governance into the language of digital storytelling. Participants used short-form video to communicate their perspectives on cities, citizens, governance and the theme of building cities for all. The competition demonstrated how social media can become a platform not only for awareness, but also for making complex civic and governance questions more accessible to wider audiences.



MODEL MAKING COMPETITION

The Model Making activity gave participants an opportunity to translate their ideas for better cities into tangible models. Participants submitted a proposal and developed a concept for the urban challenge it addressed and how their model could respond to it. The activity encouraged participants to connect creative thinking with urban challenges, practical solutions and the realities of city life.

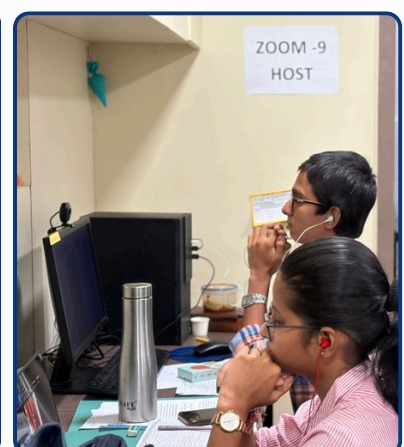


We need to examine existing data to understand how policies impact grassroots individuals. Initially, I doubted my contribution to finance due to my medical background and limited financial knowledge. However, I recognized that diverse perspectives are valuable, leading to engaging discussions on shaping policies.

Alankrita Gautam,
Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College, Karnataka

This competition is unique as it emphasises understanding the local community and municipal corporation, providing support from teachers and coordinators. Participants explore new topics, overcoming communication fears, leading to increased confidence and improved communication skills.

Devansh Prajapati,
Aks University, Madhya Pradesh



QUALIFYING ROUND AND SEMI-FINALS

The Qualifying Round and Semi-Finals marked the initial stages of participants' journey through 2026. Across competitions, participants were asked to do more than identify urban problems. They were encouraged to question existing systems, understand the role of institutions, consider different perspectives and propose solutions that place citizens at the centre. The diversity of entries reflected the breadth of India's urban realities. At the same time, a common thread emerged: the need for cities where decisions are better informed, institutions are more responsive and transparent, and the young people increasingly participated in shaping their communities. The Qualifying Round and Semi-Finals therefore served not only as a competition, but as a space for learning, deliberation and civic engagement.

I am even more excited than the students for the upcoming competition, eager to present it innovatively. The key aspect is the new knowledge the children gain, and their enthusiasm and confidence as they reach the semi-finals are remarkable. This competition allows many children to learn more about their city.

Prof. Dr. Neha Kalyani,
GS College of Commerce, Nagpur

By the end of Prajatantra, students show improved communication skills, increased confidence, and enhanced teamwork. The programme also fosters networking among participants and values student voices, allowing them to express their thoughts and engage with important city issues.

Prof. Dr. Umera Begum,
Holy Cross College, Tamil Nadu

CLOSING CEREMONY

The Prajatantra 2026 Qualifying and Semi-Finals concluded with a closing ceremony that brought together participants, judges, volunteers, fellows and the Praja team to reflect on the journey so far. In its eighth year, Prajatantra brought together many teams from across 28 states and 5 Union Territories. In its young phase, the young people wanted this year's theme, 'Housing the Future: Building Cities for All.' Across policy presentations, debates, model making, mayor's speech and other competitions, participants examined housing not only as a question of shelter, but also through governance, planning, finance, infrastructure, affordability and livability.

The ceremony also featured reflections from judges and participants, highlighting the depth of research, diverse perspectives and citizen-focused ideas presented during the semi final round. Their experiences reflected the larger purpose of Prajatantra: creating a space where young people can engage with the challenges shaping their cities and think critically about possible solutions.

LOOKING AHEAD

Prajatrantra 2026 has brought together ideas and perspectives from young people across India. The participants advancing to the Final Round will now have an opportunity to take these ideas further, refining their arguments, responding to feedback and engaging more deeply with the challenges of building inclusive and sustainable cities.

As Prajatrantra 2026 progresses, the focus remains on creating opportunities for young people to understand how cities are governed and how they can participate in shaping them. We look forward to seeing how India's young people imagine the cities of the future and the institutions that will make them possible.

Best Regards,
The Prajatrantra Team

We would appreciate your views and feedback based on the information shared above. Please feel free to reach out to us at info@praja.org.



Nitai Mehta

Managing Trustee, Praja Foundation



Milind Mhaske

CEO, Praja Foundation