



Reformation in Administration and Good Governance: Insights from Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract

This paper examines recent administrative reforms and good governance initiatives in Arunachal Pradesh, with particular reference to decentralization, e-governance, institutional restructuring, and citizen-oriented service delivery. Drawing on government reports, policy documents, and state initiatives such as the Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC), e-Pragati, CM e-Seva, strengthened Panchayati Raj Institutions, and executive outreach programmes such as *Cabinet Aapke Dwar*, the study analyses reform outcomes, implementation challenges, and emerging governance practices. The findings indicate progress in digital monitoring, decentralized planning, and executive outreach mechanisms. At the same time, persistent constraints relating to infrastructure, human resources, and inclusive participation continue to limit the effectiveness of these reforms. The paper argues that administrative reform yields more sustainable outcomes when it is embedded within democratic processes and informed by culturally grounded governance practices, as these strengthen service delivery and citizen trust.

Keywords: Administrative reform; good governance; decentralization; e-governance; democracy; culture; Arunachal Pradesh.

1. Introduction

Administrative reform and good governance are widely recognized as central to improving public service delivery, strengthening accountability, and enhancing trust between citizens and the state. Within India's federal structure, state governments play a critical role in adapting national governance frameworks to local administrative contexts. Arunachal Pradesh presents a distinctive governance environment shaped by difficult terrain, dispersed settlements, ethnic diversity, and strategic location. These characteristics have historically influenced administrative functioning in the state and continue to necessitate governance arrangements that are flexible, inclusive, and sensitive to local socio-cultural conditions.

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In recent years, the Government of Arunachal Pradesh has undertaken several reform initiatives aimed at improving administrative effectiveness and governance outcomes. These include the establishment of an Administrative Reforms Commission, the expansion of e-governance platforms such as e-Pragati and CM e-Seva, efforts to strengthen decentralization through Panchayati Raj Institutions, and field-based executive outreach under *Cabinet Aapke Dwar*. This paper situates these initiatives within the broader administrative evolution of the state and examines how they collectively contribute to good governance, democratic participation, and improved service delivery.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The literature on administrative reforms and good governance has evolved from an early focus on bureaucratic efficiency to a broader concern with institutional quality, democratic accountability, and citizen-centered governance. Reform paradigms associated with New Public Management (NPM) emphasized managerial autonomy, performance indicators, and market-oriented mechanisms as means of enhancing administrative efficiency (Hood, 1991). While influential, NPM has been widely critiqued for weakening public accountability, fragmenting state capacity, and neglecting equity considerations, particularly in developing and culturally diverse governance contexts (Dunleavy et al., 2006).

In response, governance scholarship has increasingly shifted toward post-NPM perspectives such as Digital-Era Governance and New Public Service. Dunleavy et al. (2006) argue that contemporary reforms are characterized by reintegration of government functions, needs-based service design, and greater use of digital coordination. Denhardt and Denhardt (2015) similarly contend that public administration should prioritise democratic citizenship and public value rather than efficiency alone. These perspectives are especially relevant in frontier regions such as Arunachal Pradesh, where governance challenges arise not only from administrative limitations but also from geographic isolation and social diversity.

E-Governance and Administrative Capacity

E-governance has been widely promoted as a mechanism for improving transparency, efficiency, and accountability in public administration. Heeks (2006) notes that digital platforms can reduce transaction costs, strengthen monitoring, and expand citizen access to public services. However, he also cautions that e-governance initiatives frequently underperform when introduced without adequate administrative capacity, political commitment, or attention to local user contexts. Technology, therefore, cannot substitute institutional reform and must be embedded within existing administrative systems.



The OECD (2001) conceptualizes e-governance as a form of institutional transformation rather than simple digitization. From this perspective, digital reforms require changes in administrative culture, coordination practices, and accountability arrangements. In Arunachal Pradesh, platforms such as e-Pragati and CM e-Seva can thus be assessed not only for their technical features but also for their contribution to strengthening district-level governance and enhancing public trust.

Decentralization and Democratic Governance

Decentralization occupies a central place in governance reform literature. Rondinelli (1981) defines decentralization as the transfer of authority, responsibility, and resources from central governments to subordinate levels. Manor (1999) further argues that democratic decentralization strengthens accountability only when local governments possess political legitimacy, administrative capacity, and fiscal autonomy.

In India, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are constitutionally mandated as instruments of participatory democracy and local development. The Planning Commission of India (2008) emphasizes that effective decentralization depends on meaningful devolution of functions, funds, and functionaries. Empirical studies, however, suggest that decentralization outcomes vary considerably across regions, particularly where formal institutions intersect with customary governance arrangements. In Arunachal Pradesh, this interaction shapes how decentralization is operationalized, underscoring the importance of district-level administrative support.

Good Governance as a Normative Framework

The concept of good governance gained prominence in development discourse during the 1990s, particularly through international institutions. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1997) identifies participation, transparency, accountability, responsiveness, effectiveness, rule of law, equity, and inclusiveness as core principles of good governance. Rather than prescribing a single administrative model, this framework provides criteria for assessing institutional performance and governance outcomes.

Subsequent scholarship has argued that good governance should be evaluated not only through procedural compliance but also through outcomes such as citizen satisfaction, institutional trust, and access to services (OECD, 2001). District administrations play a crucial role in translating policy objectives into everyday administrative practice. This perspective is particularly relevant when examining field-based initiatives such as *Cabinet Aapke Dwar*, which seek to bring governance closer to citizens.

Cultural Legitimacy and Governance in Plural Societies

An important strand of governance literature highlights the role of cultural legitimacy, particularly in ethnically diverse and postcolonial contexts. Elwin (1959) and later scholars of Northeast India observed that governance arrangements introduced without sensitivity to local customs and social norms often encounter resistance or limited acceptance. Cultural legitimacy refers to the extent to which administrative institutions align with local values and community practices.

Recent studies suggest that governance systems that are culturally aligned are more likely to encourage participation and policy acceptance. In Arunachal Pradesh, where customary institutions and village-level norms continue to influence social organization, administrative reforms that acknowledge these realities are more likely to achieve sustained outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

Drawing on these strands of literature, this study adopts a multidimensional conceptual framework linking administrative reform, good governance, democracy, culture, and sustainable development. Reforms in administration through decentralization, e-governance, and institutional restructuring are assessed against principles of good governance. Democratic processes provide participation and accountability, while cultural legitimacy supports trust and social acceptance. Together, these elements contribute to inclusive and sustainable governance.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on purposeful document analysis. Primary sources include government notifications, departmental reports, policy handbooks, and official program documents from the Administrative Reforms Department, Department of Information & Public Relations, Information Technology Department, and Panchayati Raj Institutions. Secondary sources consist of government blogs and media coverage of reform initiatives. Priority was given to official documents to ensure accuracy regarding institutional mandates and implementation processes.

4. Administrative Evolution of Arunachal Pradesh

The administrative structure of Arunachal Pradesh has evolved under unique historical and geopolitical conditions. During the colonial period, the region was governed as a frontier area through indirect rule, relying heavily on customary tribal institutions with limited bureaucratic intervention (Government of



India, 1961; Ramachandran, 1990). The Inner Line system reflected an approach focused more on control than developmental integration.

Following independence, the area became the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) in 1954 and was placed under direct central administration. Governance during this phase emphasized security, welfare, and national integration but allowed limited democratic participation (Elwin, 1959). The Indian Frontier Administrative Service played a significant role in extending administration while accommodating customary institutions.

The transition to Union Territory status in 1972 and statehood in 1987 marked major milestones in administrative consolidation. These changes enabled representative governance, institutional expansion, and the gradual integration of Panchayati Raj systems (Government of India, 1973; 1987). Since statehood, administrative priorities have increasingly focused on development planning, service delivery, and governance reform.

5. Reformation in Good Governance and Administration

Reformation in good governance and administration goes beyond procedural refinement or the introduction of new schemes; it signifies a structural, functional, and normative transformation in the way the state governs and engages with citizens. Contemporary administrative reform literature conceptualizes reform as a shift from rigid, rule-bound, and authority-driven administration toward responsive, accountable, participatory, and outcome-oriented governance (UNDP, 1997; OECD, 2001). In the context of Arunachal Pradesh, this transformation is particularly significant due to the state's historical experience of frontier administration, difficult geography, and deep cultural plurality.

From Control-Oriented Administration to Service-Oriented Governance

Historically, administration in Arunachal Pradesh was shaped by a control-and-protection paradigm, prioritizing territorial integrity, law and order, and minimal administrative intrusion into tribal societies. While this model preserved customary autonomy, it also limited democratic participation and constrained access to public services. Recent reforms indicate a gradual but decisive shift toward a service-oriented governance model, where administrative effectiveness is measured by accessibility, responsiveness, and citizen satisfaction rather than procedural compliance alone.



Citizen-facing initiatives such as CM e-Seva, e-Pragati, and Cabinet Aapke Dwar exemplify this transition by repositioning citizens as active stakeholders rather than passive recipients of administrative authority. This shift aligns with the New Public Service perspective, which emphasizes serving citizens and strengthening democratic engagement over managerial efficiency alone (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015).

Institutional Reform and Accountability Mechanisms

A core component of governance reform is the strengthening of institutional accountability. The establishment of the Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) in 2024 reflects an acknowledgment that governance challenges often arise from systemic inefficiencies such as overlapping mandates, fragmented service delivery, and weak monitoring rather than individual administrative failure. By institutionalizing review, simplification, and evaluation, the ARC represents a move toward continuous and evidence-based administrative reform.

Digital monitoring systems under e-Pragati further reinforce accountability by enabling real-time tracking of scheme implementation and inter-departmental coordination. Such mechanisms enhance transparency and answerability while also supporting informed decision-making at both political and administrative levels.

Decentralization as Administrative Reorientation

Reformation in administration is also evident in the growing emphasis on functional and fiscal decentralization. Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions through planning instruments like *My Village My Development Plan* and fiscal frameworks such as SPICE reflects a conscious effort to relocate decision-making closer to communities. However, decentralization in Arunachal Pradesh should be understood not merely as a transfer of functions, but as a reorientation of administrative logic.

In this model, district administrations increasingly act as facilitators and integrators, supporting local institutions rather than exercising direct control. This aligns with decentralization theory, which holds that devolution enhances governance outcomes only when accompanied by administrative support, capacity-building, and political commitment (Manor, 1999).

Reconfiguring the Role of District Administration

One of the most visible indicators of administrative reform is the changing role of the Deputy Commissioner (DC). Traditionally vested with extensive executive, revenue, and magisterial powers, the DC's role has

evolved toward coordination, convergence, and problem-solving. The contemporary DC functions as a governance integrator, linking line departments, Panchayati Raj Institutions, and digital service platforms.

Field-based initiatives such as Cabinet Aapke Dwar institutionalize this shift by relocating executive authority to district and sub-divisional levels. This not only reduces administrative distance but also strengthens responsiveness and trust, reinforcing the principles of good governance at the grassroots.

Cultural Legitimacy as a Dimension of Governance Reform

A distinctive feature of administrative reform in Arunachal Pradesh is the increasing recognition of cultural legitimacy as a governance asset. Governance systems that acknowledge customary institutions, local norms, and community leadership structures are more likely to gain public trust and compliance. Rather than viewing culture as a constraint, recent reforms increasingly treat it as a resource for effective policy implementation.

This culturally informed approach enhances democratic participation and aligns formal administrative processes with lived social realities, addressing a long-standing challenge in governance across ethnically diverse regions.

Governance Reform and Sustainable Development

Ultimately, reformation in good governance and administration aims to support sustainable development, understood in institutional, social, and democratic terms. By integrating transparency, accountability, decentralization, and cultural sensitivity, governance reforms contribute to development outcomes that are inclusive, resilient, and locally grounded.

The relationship between good governance, democracy, culture, and sustainable development is therefore cyclical rather than linear. Improved service delivery strengthens citizen trust, which deepens democratic participation and reinforces governance legitimacy. This virtuous cycle underscores that administrative reform in Arunachal Pradesh is not a one-time intervention, but an ongoing process of institutional learning and adaptation.

7. Interlinkages between Good Governance, Democracy, Culture, and Sustainable Development

Good governance, democracy, culture, and sustainable development operate in a circular and mutually reinforcing relationship. Good governance ensures transparency, accountability, and responsiveness.

Democracy facilitates participation and representation, aligning governance with citizen needs. Cultural awareness lends legitimacy by embedding administrative practices within local values and traditions. Together, these elements promote sustainable development through inclusive and durable policy outcomes.

In Arunachal Pradesh, the evolving role of the Deputy Commissioner and initiatives such as *Cabinet Aapke Dwar* act as institutional connectors linking executive authority, decentralized institutions, and local communities. Improved service delivery and effective grievance redressal strengthen citizen trust, which in turn enhances democratic participation and governance legitimacy.

8. Challenges and Constraints

Despite progress, several challenges persist. Difficult terrain and infrastructural limitations restrict service outreach and ICT expansion. Human resource shortages, frequent transfers, and capacity gaps disrupt implementation continuity. Inclusivity remains uneven, particularly for women, marginalized groups, and remote communities. Data interoperability, management systems, and privacy safeguards also require strengthening.

9. Recommendations

- Adopt hybrid service delivery models combining digital platforms with mobile and field-based outreach.
- Enhance human resource capacity through targeted training and stable postings
- Strengthen fiscal devolution with robust accountability mechanisms
- Design inclusive, multilingual e-governance platforms
- Develop comprehensive data governance and privacy frameworks
- Institutionalize monitoring and evaluation through the ARC

10. Conclusion

Administrative reforms in Arunachal Pradesh reflect a context-sensitive approach to good governance grounded in decentralization, democratic engagement, and cultural awareness. Initiatives such as the Administrative Reforms Commission, e-governance platforms, strengthened district administration, and *Cabinet Aapke Dwar* demonstrate how reform can improve service delivery and citizen satisfaction. Addressing remaining structural and capacity constraints will be essential for consolidating these gains and advancing sustainable, inclusive governance.



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