



AI FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE: REIMAGINING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN INDIA

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly being positioned as a lever to transform public administration in India, promising gains in efficiency, transparency, and citizen-centric service delivery. This paper examines the emerging architecture of AI-enabled governance in India, situating it within the National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence, the IndiaAI Mission, and sector-specific applications in the judiciary, agriculture, urban management, and financial regulation. Drawing on secondary data from government reports, policy documents, and scholarly literature, the paper maps the institutional ecosystem supporting AI adoption and evaluates its contribution to the normative ideal of good governance — accountability, participation, rule of law, and responsiveness. The analysis identifies three interlocking tensions: the gap between innovation-first policy design and rights-protective regulation; uneven digital and institutional capacity across states; and the risk that algorithmic efficiency substitutes for, rather than strengthens, democratic accountability. The paper argues that reimagining public administration through AI requires embedding ethical safeguards, human oversight, and participatory design into the governance pipeline rather than treating them as downstream compliance concerns. It concludes with a four-part framework for responsible AI adoption anchored in procedural transparency, graduated human oversight, federal capacity-building, and participatory design and audit, offering policy-relevant insights for administrators, regulators, and researchers engaged in India's digital governance transition.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence; Good Governance; Public Administration; India; Digital Government; Algorithmic Accountability; Indiaai Mission.*

1. Introduction

Public administration in India has historically been shaped by a bureaucratic model inherited from the colonial period, characterised by hierarchical decision-making, procedural rigidity, and limited citizen participation. Over the past decade, successive waves of digitisation — from Aadhaar-based identity infrastructure to the Unified Payments Interface, which alone recorded 16.73 billion transactions worth roughly ₹23.25 lakh crore in December 2024 (IMPRI, 2025) — have begun to reconfigure the relationship between the state and the citizen, moving service delivery toward real-time, data-driven models. Artificial intelligence represents the newest and most consequential layer in this transformation. Unlike earlier e-governance initiatives, which primarily digitised existing paper-based processes, AI systems introduce predictive, adaptive, and increasingly autonomous decision-making capacities into administrative functions ranging from welfare targeting to judicial case management.

The Government of India has signalled a strong institutional commitment to this shift. NITI Aayog's 2018 National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence articulated a vision of “AI for All,” identifying healthcare, agriculture, education, smart mobility, and smart cities as priority sectors for intervention (NITI Aayog, 2018; Rao, M.K.P., 2018). This was followed in March 2024 by the Union Cabinet's approval of the IndiaAI Mission, backed by an outlay of approximately ₹10,372 crore over five years, intended to build sovereign compute capacity, curate public datasets, and expand AI skilling across government (Ojha, 2025). These initiatives sit alongside sector-specific applications such as the



Supreme Court's SUPACE platform for case-research assistance and AI-enabled crop advisories under the Digital Agriculture Mission (Sleepy Classes, 2024).

Yet the promise of AI-enabled administration cannot be assessed on technological capability alone. Public administration is, at its core, a normative enterprise concerned with the just and accountable exercise of state power, and its legitimacy has traditionally rested on identifiable officials who can be held answerable for the decisions they make. The introduction of algorithmic systems into this domain therefore raises a distinct set of questions that go beyond efficiency metrics: does AI strengthen the classical pillars of good governance — transparency, accountability, participation, and the rule of law — or does it risk displacing them behind a veneer of technical objectivity, in which decisions once open to explanation and appeal become opaque, statistically generated, and difficult to contest?

This paper addresses that question by examining the policy architecture, institutional ecosystem, and sectoral applications of AI in Indian public administration, and by identifying the structural tensions that must be resolved if AI is to serve, rather than erode, democratic governance. The paper's central argument is that India's AI-for-governance trajectory has, to date, prioritised infrastructure and capability over the accountability architecture needed to sustain public trust, and that reimagining public administration for the AI era requires treating good-governance safeguards as design requirements rather than downstream compliance concerns. The analysis proceeds in five parts. Section two situates the discussion within the conceptual literature on good governance and algorithmic administration. Section three maps India's emerging AI governance architecture, including a summary of key institutional milestones. Section four examines sectoral applications of AI in public administration with illustrative data. Section five identifies the principal challenges to realising good governance through AI in the Indian context, and section six proposes a framework for responsible adoption before the paper concludes with implications for policy and future research.

Beyond the policy narrative, the Indian case is analytically significant for comparative public administration because it combines two features rarely found together: a democratic constitutional order with strong formal rights guarantees, and an administrative state operating at a scale and diversity — more than 1.4 billion citizens, twenty-two scheduled languages, and administrative capacity that varies from well-resourced metropolitan municipalities to thinly staffed rural block offices — that makes uniform, centrally designed safeguards difficult to implement in practice. This combination means that lessons drawn from smaller, more administratively homogeneous jurisdictions cannot simply be transplanted; India's AI-for-governance strategy must instead be evaluated on its own terms, against the specific institutional constraints and opportunities of Indian federalism. The paper's contribution is therefore twofold: empirically, it consolidates dispersed policy, institutional, and sectoral evidence on Indian AI governance into a single analytical account; and conceptually, it applies the good-governance framework to identify where that evidence suggests convergence with, and divergence from, the normative benchmarks the framework specifies.

2. Conceptualising Good Governance in the Age of AI

The concept of “good governance” gained currency through the work of multilateral institutions in the 1990s, which articulated a set of normative benchmarks — accountability, transparency, rule of law, participation, and responsiveness — against which state performance could be evaluated (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2010). Public administration scholarship subsequently absorbed these benchmarks into debates on New Public Management and, later, digital-era governance, which



emphasised the reintegration of fragmented service delivery through information technology and cross-agency data sharing (Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow, & Tinkler, 2006).

The introduction of AI into this lineage represents both a continuation and a rupture. On one hand, AI extends the digital-era governance agenda by enabling predictive analytics, automated eligibility determination, and real-time monitoring of public programmes — capacities that promise to reduce discretion-based corruption, shorten service-delivery timelines, and improve the responsiveness of the administrative state to citizen needs (Wirtz, Weyerer, & Geyer, 2019). On the other hand, algorithmic decision-making introduces a distinct accountability problem: when decisions are generated by opaque statistical models rather than identifiable officials, the traditional mechanisms of administrative accountability — reasoned justification, appeal, and redress — become harder to operationalise, since the logic underlying a given outcome may not be legible even to the officials nominally responsible for it (Bovens & Zouridis, 2002).

Janssen and Kuk (2016) describe this as the shift from “street-level bureaucracy” to “system-level bureaucracy,” in which the locus of discretion migrates from frontline officials, who directly interact with citizens and can be questioned about their decisions, to the designers and trainers of algorithmic systems, who are often located outside the administrative hierarchy altogether and may work for private technology vendors. This migration of discretion has particular salience in the Indian context, where administrative capacity varies substantially across states and union territories, and where legal literacy among citizens affected by welfare, taxation, and law-enforcement decisions is often low, limiting the practical ability of affected individuals to contest an algorithmically-informed outcome even where a formal appeal mechanism nominally exists.

Scholars of AI governance in India have further noted that national policy documents have tended to adopt a permissive, innovation-first posture, treating rights-related risks as distant contingencies to be addressed once they materialise rather than as design constraints built into systems from the outset (Joshi, 2024). This orientation stands in some tension with the good-governance framework outlined above, which treats accountability and rule-of-law safeguards as preconditions for legitimate state action rather than as retrofits applied after a system has already been deployed at scale. Reimagining public administration through AI, in this reading, is not simply a matter of technological deployment but of institutional design: determining where, within the administrative pipeline, human judgement, algorithmic recommendation, and citizen recourse should each sit, and ensuring that the efficiency gains of automation do not come at the cost of the answerability that legitimises state power.

This framing also clarifies why efficiency and accountability, though often discussed as complementary goals in official rhetoric, can pull in different directions in practice. An administrative system optimised purely for throughput — faster approvals, shorter queues, fewer manual touchpoints — may score well on responsiveness while performing poorly on accountability if the underlying decision logic cannot be explained to the citizen it affects. Good-governance frameworks resist trading one dimension off against the others; they treat the five benchmarks as jointly necessary rather than substitutable, which is the standard this paper applies when assessing India's emerging AI governance architecture in the sections that follow.

3. India's AI Governance Architecture: Policy and Institutions

India's institutional approach to AI governance has evolved through a series of overlapping strategy documents and organisational initiatives rather than a single comprehensive statute, reflecting a



preference for adaptive, sector-responsive policy over binding, ex-ante regulation. NITI Aayog's National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence (2018) established the foundational “AI for All” framework, identifying five priority sectors — healthcare, agriculture, education, smart mobility, and smart cities — and recommending coordinated investment across data infrastructure, research capacity, skilling, and ethics (NITI Aayog, 2018). This was followed by the “Responsible AI for All” approach papers, which articulated broad ethical principles — safety, equality, inclusivity, privacy, and accountability — while explicitly favouring a largely self-regulatory model over binding AI-specific legislation, on the reasoning that premature regulation could constrain innovation before risks became concrete (NITI Aayog, as cited in Joshi, 2024).

In March 2024, the Union Cabinet approved the IndiaAI Mission with an outlay of roughly ₹10,371.92 crore over five years, structured around pillars covering compute infrastructure, curated datasets, application development, a “Safe and Trusted AI” pillar, skilling, startup financing, and future-skills programmes (Ojha, 2025). As part of this mission, an AI Safety Institute (AISI) was established to examine risk-assessment and evaluation frameworks for high-impact AI systems, marking one of the first dedicated institutional homes for AI safety within the Indian government (Ojha, 2025). Complementing these national programmes, NITI Aayog's National Data and Analytics Platform seeks to make government datasets more interoperable, structured, and ethically accessible for AI-driven decision-making, while state-level Centres of Excellence in cities such as Gorakhpur, Lucknow, Shimla, Patna, and Muzaffarpur aim to decentralise AI infrastructure, training, and skilling capacity beyond metropolitan hubs (IMPRI, 2025).

Table 1 summarises the principal institutional and policy milestones that constitute this architecture, tracing its evolution from an initial sectoral roadmap toward a more resourced, mission-mode structure.

Table 1: Milestones in India's National AI Governance Architecture

Year	Initiative	Lead Institution	Governance Focus
2018	National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence (“AI for All”)	NITI Aayog	Sectoral roadmap; data, infrastructure, ethics
2020	RAISE Summit (Responsible AI for Social Empowerment)	MeitY / NITI Aayog	Global dialogue on responsible AI
2021–22	Responsible AI for All (approach papers)	NITI Aayog	Ethical principles; self-regulatory posture
2024	IndiaAI Mission approved (~₹10,372 crore, 5 years)	Union Cabinet / MeitY	Compute, datasets, safety, skilling
2024	AI Safety Institute (AISI) established	MeitY	Risk assessment and evaluation frameworks
2024	National Data & Analytics Platform expansion	NITI Aayog	Interoperable public datasets for AI
2025	AI for Inclusive Societal Development report	NITI Aayog	Informal-sector and inclusive AI deployment



Note. Compiled by the author from NITI Aayog (2018), Ojha (2025), IMPRI (2025), and Government of India press releases.

What is notable across these initiatives is the continued absence, as of the period under review, of a dedicated AI-specific statute comparable to the European Union's AI Act; instead, the government has relied on adapting existing instruments — the Information Technology Act, sectoral regulations, and a forthcoming amendment intended to address synthetic data — to govern emerging AI use cases (Ojha, 2025). This layered, non-statutory approach offers administrators considerable flexibility to respond to fast-moving technological change, but it also leaves open important questions about the enforceability of the ethical principles articulated in policy documents, a tension examined more closely in section five.

4. AI in Public Administration: Sectoral Applications

The sectoral diffusion of AI within Indian public administration illustrates both the scale of ambition and the unevenness of implementation across different arms of the state. In the judiciary, the Supreme Court's SUPACE platform assists judges and law clerks by organising case-relevant facts, evidence, and precedents, reducing research time without automating the judicial decision itself, thereby preserving human adjudication while accelerating administrative throughput in a system long associated with case backlogs (Sleepy Classes, 2024). In agriculture, the Digital Agriculture Mission integrates AI-based advisory tools that analyse soil-health data, weather patterns, and market signals to generate crop and input recommendations for farmers, aiming to reduce the information asymmetries that have historically disadvantaged smallholders relative to larger, better-resourced cultivators (Sleepy Classes, 2024).

In urban governance, AI applications under the Smart Cities Mission span adaptive traffic-signal management, predictive maintenance of municipal infrastructure, and computer-vision-based waste and public-safety monitoring, positioning AI as an operational layer embedded within existing municipal administration rather than as a wholesale replacement for it (Sleepy Classes, 2024). Financial governance has also become a significant site of AI deployment: NITI Aayog's sectoral analysis highlights AI's growing role in automating regulatory compliance, detecting fraud, and strengthening credit-risk assessment within the financial-services ecosystem, sectors that collectively represent a substantial share of India's projected 2035 GDP and that the government has flagged as priorities for AI-enabled productivity gains (CoinGeek, 2025).

Beyond these flagship applications, NITI Aayog's 2025 report on AI for Inclusive Societal Development shifts emphasis toward the informal workforce, framing AI not as a replacement for human labour and judgement but as a tool intended to amplify the capabilities of workers such as home-care aides, carpenters, farmers, and artisans who have historically been at the margins of formal digital governance initiatives (PIB, 2025). Table 2 presents an illustrative summary of sectoral AI applications, their administrative function, and the primary good-governance dimension each engages.

Table 2: Illustrative Sectoral Applications of AI in Indian Public Administration

Sector	Application	Administrative Function	Primary Governance Dimension
Judiciary	SUPACE case-research assistant	Decision support for judges/clerks	Efficiency; preserved human adjudication



Sector	Application	Administrative Function	Primary Governance Dimension
Agriculture	Digital Agriculture Mission advisories	Predictive crop/input recommendations	Responsiveness; information symmetry
Urban governance	Smart Cities traffic and safety analytics	Real-time infrastructure monitoring	Efficiency; public safety
Financial services	AI-enabled compliance and fraud detection	Regulatory monitoring, risk assessment	Accountability; rule of law
Welfare/informal sector	AI for Inclusive Societal Development tools	Access and capability augmentation	Inclusion; participation

Note. Compiled by the author from Sleepy Classes (2024), CoinGeek (2025), and PIB (2025).

Read together, these applications reveal a consistent pattern: AI is being layered onto administrative processes principally as a decision-support and efficiency tool in high-visibility sectors with strong political salience, while the harder governance questions — how an affected citizen contests an algorithmically-informed outcome, how administrative discretion is documented when a recommendation engine is involved, and how outcomes are audited for disparate impact across social groups — remain comparatively underdeveloped in the publicly available policy record, a gap that becomes more consequential as these applications scale from pilot projects to nationwide administrative infrastructure.

It is also worth noting the pace at which these applications have moved from pilot to scale. Several of the initiatives summarised in Table 2 originated as narrow, geographically limited pilots — a single court, a cluster of districts, a handful of cities under the Smart Cities Mission — before being generalised into standing administrative infrastructure. This pilot-to-scale trajectory compresses the window available for independent evaluation of a system's accuracy, fairness, and citizen impact before it becomes embedded in routine administrative practice, reinforcing the case made in the next section for building evaluation and audit capacity in parallel with deployment rather than after it.

Challenges to Realising Good Governance Through AI

Despite this expanding footprint, several structural challenges complicate the claim that AI is straightforwardly advancing good governance in India, and each merits distinct attention from administrators and policymakers. The first concerns the tension between innovation-first policy design and rights-protective regulation. Scholarship on India's AI governance trajectory observes that national strategy documents have consistently framed risks to rights as distant or speculative, to be managed only once they become concrete, rather than as design parameters built into system deployment from the outset (Joshi, 2024). This self-regulatory posture places significant reliance on voluntary compliance by both government agencies and the private vendors who frequently supply the underlying administrative AI systems, with comparatively limited independent audit or certification mechanisms to verify that stated ethical principles are actually operationalised in deployed systems.

Second, digital and institutional capacity remains highly uneven across India's federal structure. While flagship missions concentrate investment in compute infrastructure and Centres of Excellence in a relatively small number of cities, frontline administrative capacity to interpret, contest, or override



algorithmic recommendations varies considerably between better-resourced and less-resourced states and districts, raising the risk that AI adoption widens rather than narrows existing governance disparities between regions.

Third, the “system-level bureaucracy” dynamic identified by Janssen and Kuk (2016) is particularly acute where AI vendors and model developers sit outside the traditional civil-service accountability chain: when a welfare-eligibility algorithm or a predictive-policing tool produces a contested outcome, the citizen's avenues for appeal are often unclear, since the relevant technical expertise and system logic reside with a private vendor rather than with an identifiable public official who can be summoned to explain or defend the decision.

Fourth, data quality and representativeness pose a further risk: administrative AI systems trained on historical administrative data can encode and amplify existing social biases — along lines of caste, gender, religion, region, or economic status — into ostensibly neutral algorithmic outputs, a concern that is particularly salient in a highly diverse and historically unequal society such as India's, where administrative records themselves often reflect uneven access to formal documentation and service delivery.

Fifth, the absence of a dedicated AI statute means that the ethical principles articulated in NITI Aayog's approach papers — safety, equality, privacy, accountability — currently function as normative aspirations rather than enforceable legal obligations, leaving citizens without a clear statutory basis on which to challenge algorithmically-informed administrative decisions in court or before an independent regulator (Ojha, 2025). Taken together, these five challenges suggest that the current trajectory of AI adoption in Indian public administration is technically ambitious and well-resourced at the level of infrastructure, but institutionally uneven in the attention it pays to the accountability, participation, and redress dimensions that the good-governance framework treats as equally essential.

A sixth, cross-cutting challenge deserves mention: the measurement gap. Because most publicly available evidence on administrative AI in India comes from government press releases, mission documents, and promotional reporting rather than independent evaluation, it is currently difficult to assess with precision how often algorithmic recommendations are overridden by human officials, how frequently citizens successfully contest an AI-informed outcome, or whether error rates differ systematically across social groups or geographic regions. This measurement gap is not simply a data-availability problem; it is itself a governance issue, since the good-governance benchmark of transparency applies as much to the performance of AI systems after deployment as to the existence of the systems themselves.

6. Towards a Framework for Responsible AI-Enabled Governance

Addressing these tensions requires treating good-governance safeguards as integral to system design rather than as compliance add-ons applied after deployment, and this section proposes four interlocking elements as the core of such a framework. The first is procedural transparency: administrative agencies deploying AI in decision-support or decision-making roles should be required to disclose, in accessible language and through channels citizens are likely to encounter, that an algorithmic system is involved in a given process, the categories of data it draws upon, and the general criteria by which its recommendations are generated, extending the long-standing administrative-law



logic of reasoned decision-making into the algorithmic domain rather than treating automation as exempt from it.

The second is a graduated human-oversight requirement, calibrated to the stakes of the decision at hand: low-stakes, high-volume administrative tasks such as document verification or appointment scheduling may reasonably rely on higher degrees of automation, whereas welfare-eligibility, law-enforcement, and judicial-adjacent applications should preserve meaningful human review and the possibility of a distinct, human-authored justification attached to any final decision, directly addressing the “system-level bureaucracy” concern raised in section five.

The third element is federal capacity-building: national infrastructure investment under the IndiaAI Mission should be paired with a parallel, equally resourced programme of administrative capacity-building at the state and district level, so that officials tasked with implementing AI-informed processes are equipped with the technical literacy to interpret, question, and where necessary override algorithmic outputs, rather than treating them as authoritative by default simply because they are computationally generated.

The fourth element is participatory design and audit: civil-society organisations, independent domain experts, and representatives of the communities most likely to be affected by a given administrative AI application should be structurally included in system design and in periodic post-deployment audit processes, complementing the largely government- and industry-led consultation model that has characterised Indian AI policy development to date (NITI Aayog, as cited in Joshi, 2024).

A fifth, cross-cutting recommendation follows from the measurement gap identified in section five: independent, publicly reported evaluation. Each of the four design elements above depends on evidence — of who is affected, how often recommendations are overridden, and whether outcomes vary across social groups — that only becomes available if agencies are required to publish standardised, disaggregated performance data on their AI systems at regular intervals, ideally reviewed by a body independent of the deploying agency itself. Without this evaluative layer, even well-designed transparency and oversight requirements risk becoming procedural formalities rather than substantive checks on administrative power.

None of these five elements requires India to abandon its current innovation-oriented posture; rather, they are intended to make explicit, operational, and institutionally durable the accountability and participation commitments that already appear, at least in principle, within NITI Aayog's own stated ethical framework. Embedding them within the IndiaAI Mission's implementation guidelines and sectoral rollout plans, rather than deferring them to future legislation that may take years to materialise, would represent a meaningful and comparatively low-cost step toward reconciling administrative efficiency with democratic legitimacy as AI moves from pilot projects toward the everyday infrastructure of Indian public administration.

7. Conclusion

This paper has examined the emerging relationship between artificial intelligence and public administration in India through the analytical lens of good governance. The evidence reviewed indicates that India has built a substantial and rapidly expanding institutional architecture for AI adoption, anchored in the National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence, the IndiaAI Mission, and a growing set of sectoral applications spanning the judiciary, agriculture, urban governance, and



financial regulation, each summarised through illustrative data drawn from government and secondary sources. These initiatives have delivered demonstrable gains in administrative efficiency and, in some documented cases, in the responsiveness of public services to citizen needs, from reduced judicial research time to more timely agricultural advisories.

At the same time, the analysis has identified persistent structural tensions that complicate any straightforwardly positive account of AI's contribution to democratic administration: an innovation-first policy posture that treats rights-related risk as a future contingency rather than a present design constraint; uneven institutional capacity to interpret and contest algorithmic outputs across India's federal structure; the migration of administrative discretion toward technical vendors positioned outside conventional civil-service accountability chains; the risk of social bias encoded through historical administrative data; and the absence of statutory enforceability for the ethical principles articulated in national policy documents.

Reimagining public administration through AI, this paper has argued, cannot be reduced to a question of technological capability or infrastructure investment alone. It is fundamentally a question of institutional design — of where, within the administrative pipeline, transparency, human oversight, capacity, and participation are built in as preconditions for legitimate state action, rather than retrofitted after systems have already been deployed at scale. The framework proposed here — procedural transparency, graduated human oversight, federal capacity-building, participatory design and audit, and independent evaluation — offers one practicable route toward reconciling India's ambitious AI agenda with the normative commitments of good governance, without requiring the government to abandon the innovation-first posture that has driven its considerable progress to date.

As the IndiaAI Mission moves from strategy to implementation, and as further sectoral applications are rolled out under the 2025 focus on inclusive societal development, the extent to which these accountability-enhancing elements are embedded into administrative practice, rather than treated merely as aspirational text within policy documents, will substantially determine whether AI ultimately strengthens or erodes the democratic character of Indian public administration. Future research should track implementation-level evidence — including independent audit outcomes, redress mechanisms actually accessed by affected citizens, and state-level variation in administrative AI capacity — to assess empirically whether the trajectory identified in this paper shifts over time toward more accountable, transparent, and participatory forms of algorithmic governance, or whether the tensions documented here become further entrenched as AI adoption deepens across the Indian administrative state.

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