

Good Governance in Telangana: Policies, Practices, and Prospects

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Abstract:

Good governance has been central to Telangana's public identity since the state's formation in 2014. This paper examines the policies, practices, and prospects of good governance in Telangana up to February 2024, a period that spans a decade of Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) rule and the first months of the Indian National Congress government that took office in December 2023. Using a qualitative, document-based design, it draws on official statistics, budget and white-paper disclosures, the national Good Governance Index, and contemporary reporting, and appraises them against the eight characteristics of good governance set out by UNESCAP (2009). The analysis finds strong economic and delivery outcomes, including high per capita income, large direct-benefit programmes, and claims of near-universal piped water, alongside uneven performance on transparency, accountability, and fiscal prudence. Contested debt figures, the failure of a barrage in the flagship Kaleshwaram project, weak information-commission capacity, and the exclusion of tenant farmers from investment support illustrate these gaps. The new government's Praja Palana outreach and its six guarantees signal participatory intent but raise questions of fiscal sustainability and administrative capacity. The paper concludes with reform priorities for institutionalising good governance in Telangana beyond electoral cycles.

Keywords: good governance; Telangana; welfare policy; e-governance; accountability; fiscal sustainability; Praja Palana

1. Introduction

Governance has moved from the margins of development thinking to its centre. Whether a state can convert public money into schools, water, roads, and security depends less on the size of its budget than on the quality of the institutions that spend it. In India's federal system, that quality is decided largely at the state level, where most of the policing, health care, land administration, irrigation, and welfare delivery that citizens actually encounter takes place. State-level governance is therefore a consequential arena of public administration and one that deserves sustained scholarly attention.

Telangana, carved out of Andhra Pradesh on 2 June 2014 as India's twenty-ninth state, offers an instructive case. Born of a long movement for self-rule, it was expected to show that a smaller state could govern more responsively. Over the following decade it built its public identity on a distinctive package of interventions: direct farmer investment support through Rythu Bandhu, piped drinking water through Mission Bhagiratha, the Kaleshwaram lift-irrigation project, a single-window system for industrial approvals (TS-iPASS), and a computerised land-records portal (Dharani). Official statistics present a state

whose per capita income is well above the national figure and whose government projected that average incomes would double in five to six years, against eight to nine for the country as a whole (Deccan Chronicle, 2023; Telangana Today, 2023).

Yet the same decade produced contested claims. The Congress government that took office on 7 December 2023 tabled a white paper within two weeks, describing a fiscal inheritance of about ₹6.7 lakh crore in total debt, a characterisation that the opposition disputed (Business Standard, 2023). In October 2023, piers of the Medigadda barrage, a component of the flagship Kaleshwaram project, sank (NewsMeter, 2023). Governance in Telangana has, in other words, been marked by demonstrable achievements and by unresolved questions about their cost, quality, and accountability.

Against this background, the paper asks three questions. First, what policies and administrative practices have defined governance in Telangana since 2014? Second, how do they perform when assessed against an established framework of good governance and against national indicators? Third, what prospects and reform priorities emerge as the state enters a new political phase? The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 sets out the conceptual framework and Section 3 the research design. Section 4 profiles the state's socio-economic context, Section 5 reviews policies and practices, and Section 6 appraises performance. Section 7 examines the transition of 2023–24, Sections 8 and 9 discuss challenges and prospects, and Section 10 concludes.

2. Conceptual Framework

The World Bank (1992) brought governance into mainstream development discourse by describing it as the manner in which power is exercised in managing a country's economic and social resources. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1997) widened the idea to include the political and administrative authority through which citizens articulate their interests and exercise their rights. The most widely used operational statement is that of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP, 2009), which identifies eight characteristics of good governance: participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, and accountability.

Other scholars sharpen or challenge this list. Kaufmann et al. (2010) measure governance through six aggregate dimensions (voice and accountability, political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption), demonstrating that governance can be compared across jurisdictions, although perception-based measures carry limitations. Rothstein and Teorell (2008) argue that the defining attribute of a well-governed state is impartiality in the exercise of public authority, a criterion that directs attention to how benefits are allocated rather than how much is spent. Fukuyama (2013) defines governance as a government's ability to make and enforce rules and deliver services, and stresses that this capacity should be distinguished from the ends to which it is applied. Grindle (2004) proposes "good enough governance" for developing countries: since no state can reform everything at once, priorities should be chosen for their contribution to poverty reduction and their feasibility. Sen (1999) supplies the normative anchor by treating participation and accountability not merely as means to development but as part of what development is.

Two implications for the analysis follow from this literature. From Fukuyama (2013), the study separates what the state delivers, its outcomes, from the institutional capacity and independence that make delivery reliable. From Grindle (2004), it treats good governance as a set of priorities rather than a checklist, and asks which gaps matter most for citizens in Telangana's circumstances.

In India, the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG, 2021) has translated these ideas into the Good Governance Index (GGI), which ranks states across ten sectors using 58 indicators. Such an index is useful for comparison but captures only measurable outputs. This paper therefore combines it with a qualitative reading of institutions. Table 1 shows how the eight UNESCAP characteristics are operationalised in the Telangana context.

Table 1
Operationalising the Eight Characteristics of Good Governance

Characteristic	Operational focus in this study
Participation	Elections, public outreach programmes, local bodies, and grievance channels
Rule of law	Land-rights administration and the impartial application of rules
Transparency	Right to Information (RTI), budget and debt disclosure, and information commissions
Responsiveness	Service timelines, single-window approvals, and public hearings
Consensus orientation	Legislative debate and mediation among competing regional, social, and sectoral claims
Equity and inclusiveness	Coverage and targeting of welfare, exclusion of specific groups, and district disparities
Effectiveness and efficiency	Delivery outcomes, infrastructure quality, and project costs
Accountability	Audit, independent technical review, legislative oversight, and fiscal-responsibility norms

Note. Framework adapted from UNESCAP (2009); operational focus compiled by the author.

3. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive-analytical design based entirely on secondary evidence. Four categories of material were consulted. The first comprises official documents of the Government of Telangana, notably the Socio-Economic Outlook 2023, the vote-on-account budget speech for 2024–25, and press releases on the Praja Palana programme. The second comprises national governance assessments, principally the Good Governance Index 2021 (DARPG, 2021) and the report card on information commissions prepared by Satark Nagrik Sangathan (SNS, 2022). The third consists of technical assessments, such as the preliminary review of the Medigadda barrage by the National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA), as reported in the press. The fourth consists of contemporaneous reporting in the national and regional press, used chiefly for events of 2023–24 for which formal evaluations do not yet exist.

Evidence was assessed against the framework in Table 1 and triangulated wherever possible by setting government-reported figures beside independent or opposing accounts. Three limitations should be noted. Official statistics are self-reported and may reflect administrative priorities. The white paper on state finances is a political as much as an accounting document, and its figures are disputed. Finally, the recency of the December 2023 transition means that conclusions about the present government are provisional. Information is current to February 2024.

4. The Socio-Economic Context

Telangana's economy has expanded rapidly. According to the Socio-Economic Outlook 2023, the state's gross state domestic product (GSDP) at current prices reached ₹13.27 lakh crore in 2022–23, an increase of 15.6 per cent over the previous year, while per capita income stood at ₹3.17 lakh, ₹1.46 lakh above the national figure (Telangana Today, 2023). The state also reported that development expenditure accounted for 78.1 per cent of total budget spending during 2018–21, compared with an average of 68.4 per cent for Indian states. Table 2 summarises the principal indicators.

Table 2
Selected Socio-Economic Indicators, Telangana

Indicator	Value
GSDP at current prices, 2022–23	₹13.27 lakh crore
GSDP growth over 2021–22	15.6%
Per capita income, 2022–23 (Telangana / India)	₹3.17 lakh / ₹1.71 lakh
GVA growth, 2022–23: agriculture and allied	11.9%
GVA growth, 2022–23: industry	10.5%
GVA growth, 2022–23: services	17.5%
Population employed in agriculture	45.8%
Development expenditure share of budget, 2018–21 (Telangana / state average)	78.1% / 68.4%
Capital outlay, 2021–22 (revised estimates)	₹25,954 crore (up 63% from ₹15,922 crore)
Merchandise exports, 2021–22	₹81,971 crore

Note. Compiled from Government of Telangana (2023), Deccan Chronicle (2023), and Telangana Today (2023). GVA = gross value added.

Two features of this profile matter for governance. First, the structure of the economy is uneven. Services generate the fastest growth, yet nearly half the population depends on agriculture, so policies for farmers carry disproportionate political and administrative weight. Second, the export base is narrow: pharmaceuticals and organic chemicals make up 57.31 per cent of goods exports (Deccan Chronicle, 2023). The Outlook also reports that per capita income in every district exceeded the national figure of ₹1,26,855 in 2020–21 (Telangana Today, 2023), although district averages conceal variation within districts and across social groups. Capital outlay rose by 63 per cent in 2021–22 (revised estimates), to ₹25,954 crore from ₹15,922 crore, which the Outlook presents as support for the post-pandemic recovery (Deccan Chronicle, 2023). Infrastructure spending of this kind creates obligations for quality control and maintenance, an issue taken up in Section 5.2. In short, the state has fiscal room and administrative experience, which makes the quality of its institutions, rather than the scarcity of its resources, the central governance question.

5. Policies and Practices

5.1 Welfare and Social Protection

The signature of the Telangana model is direct cash support. Rythu Bandhu, introduced in 2018, gives land-owning farmers ₹10,000 per acre per year in two seasonal instalments (The News Minute, 2023). By

the end of 2022, about 70.54 lakh farmers were receiving assistance at an annual cost of roughly ₹15,000 crore. The Aasara pension scheme, for which the government lowered the eligibility age from 65 to 57, was reaching 44.54 lakh people each month at about ₹12,000 crore a year, with monthly amounts of ₹2,016 for most categories and ₹3,016 for persons with disabilities (Venkat Ram Reddy, 2022). Together, these two programmes cost roughly ₹27,000 crore a year, a large recurring commitment that tests the state's delivery systems. Table 3 lists these and other major instruments.

Table 3
Major Policy Instruments, 2014–2024

Instrument	Reported scale	Governance significance
Rythu Bandhu (2018)	About 70.54 lakh farmers; about ₹15,000 crore a year; ₹10,000 per acre per year	Direct transfer; excludes tenant cultivators
Aasara pensions (from 2014)	44.54 lakh monthly beneficiaries; about ₹12,000 crore a year	Eligibility age lowered to 57; ten categories
Mission Bhagiratha (2016)	Over 54 lakh rural and 20 lakh urban households; over ₹45,000 crore (by July 2021)	Piped water; functionality assessments disputed
TS-iPASS	2,518 projects approved; ₹20,237 crore of investment (to January 2023)	Single-window, time-bound approvals
Mahalakshmi (December 2023)	Free travel for women, girls, and transgender persons in state buses	Launched two days after the change of government
Rajiv Aarogyasri (December 2023)	Health cover of ₹10 lakh per beneficiary	Expanded health protection

Note. Compiled from Venkat Ram Reddy (2022), The News Minute (2023), Telangana Today (2021a), Deccan Chronicle (2023), and Deccan Herald (2023c).

From a governance standpoint, direct transfers have clear strengths. They reduce discretion at the point of delivery, are predictable and timely, and give beneficiaries a claim rather than a favour. They also have design limits that bear on equity and inclusiveness. Because Rythu Bandhu is paid to the holder of the land title regardless of who cultivates the land, tenant cultivators fall outside it (Outlook India, 2024). Sreenivasulu (2023) documents how pure and mixed tenants remain excluded from the scheme and from other benefits, and notes that farmer suicides in the state have been concentrated among tenants and poor farmers. Impartial allocation, the test proposed by Rothstein and Teorell (2008), is therefore only partly met: the benefit is predictable for title-holders and unavailable to many of those who actually farm.

5.2 Water and Irrigation

Water infrastructure is the second pillar of the state's policy. Mission Bhagiratha, launched in August 2016, aims to supply treated piped water to every household. By July 2021 the state reported tap connections to more than 54 lakh rural and 20 lakh urban households at a cost above ₹45,000 crore, of which the Centre had contributed ₹2,324.42 crore, roughly six per cent (Telangana Today, 2021a). The achievement is substantial, but its verification has been contested. In 2022 the Union Jal Shakti Ministry stated that Telangana had reported full tap-water coverage without obtaining the gram-panchayat

certification required under the Jal Jeevan Mission, and that its own functionality assessment found households receiving less water than claimed (The Statesman, 2022). The episode shows that a delivery claim becomes credible governance only when it is independently certified.

The Kaleshwaram lift-irrigation project illustrates the same point on a larger scale. On 21 October 2023, several piers of the Medigadda (Lakshmi) barrage sank. The NDSA's preliminary review attributed the failure to a combination of shortcomings in planning, design, quality control, and operation and maintenance, and identified settlement of the barrage raft as the primary cause (NewsMeter, 2023). The NDSA chairman wrote that the barrage was unusable until fully rehabilitated, while the state government responded that the letter had been sent in haste (Deccan Herald, 2023a). Financing has drawn equal scrutiny. Speaking in the Assembly in December 2023, the Chief Minister said that special-purpose corporations had borrowed for Kaleshwaram and Mission Bhagiratha against undertakings that project revenues, ₹5,199 crore a year from water sales in the first case and ₹5,706 crore in the second, would service the debt (Sudhir, 2023). Whatever the final technical findings, the episode exposes weaknesses in independent quality assurance and in the transparency of off-budget financing.

5.3 Digital Governance and Land Administration

Telangana has invested heavily in e-governance. The Socio Economic Outlook credits TS-iPASS, the self-certification and single-window system for industrial approvals, with clearing 2,518 projects representing ₹20,237 crore of investment by January 2023 (Deccan Chronicle, 2023). In land administration, the Dharani portal, introduced in 2020, sought to replace paper-based records with an integrated online system for registration and mutation. Digitisation, however, magnifies the consequences of data errors. Because Rythu Bandhu is tied to the title recorded in the land database, weaknesses in the record translate directly into exclusion from benefits. In January 2024 the new government constituted a committee to study the implementation of Dharani (The Hindu, 2024), a step that acknowledges the need for review.

5.4 Transparency and Accountability Institutions

Transparency institutions have been comparatively weak. The report card on information commissions for 2021–22 recorded the Telangana commission among four state commissions without a chief information commissioner at the time of assessment, alongside those of Manipur, West Bengal, and Andhra Pradesh (SNS, 2022). The same report found 3.14 lakh appeals and complaints pending in the 26 commissions for which data were available on 30 June 2022, which shows that the problem is national in scale. Because the Right to Information Act is the citizen's principal instrument for scrutinising public spending, a commission that is headless or under-staffed reduces the practical value of formal transparency laws. The contrast with the visible welfare architecture is notable: the state has been strong in delivering benefits and comparatively weak in strengthening the independent bodies that allow citizens to verify delivery.

5.5 Fiscal Governance

Fiscal governance became the most contested dimension after the change of government. The white paper tabled on 20 December 2023 reported total debt, including borrowings by state-owned corporations and non-guaranteed loans, of ₹6,71,757 crore, against ₹72,658 crore in 2014–15 (Business Standard, 2023). Budgetary debt within the limits of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) framework was projected at ₹3,89,673 crore at the end of 2023–24 (South First, 2023). Debt servicing was said to

consume 34 per cent of revenue receipts, with salaries and pensions taking a further 35 per cent (Business Standard, 2023). Table 4 gives the principal figures.

Table 4

Fiscal Indicators in the White Paper on State Finances (December 2023)

Indicator	Reported figure
Outstanding debt, 2014–15	₹72,658 crore
Total debt including off-budget and non-guaranteed borrowing, 2023–24	₹6,71,757 crore
Budgetary (FRBM) debt, projected end of 2023–24	₹3,89,673 crore
Average annual growth of debt, 2014–15 to 2022–23	24.5%
Debt-to-GSDP ratio, 2015–16 / 2023–24	15.7% / 27.8%
Debt servicing as share of revenue receipts	34%
Salaries and pensions as share of revenue receipts	35%
Gap between budgeted and actual expenditure	About 20%

Note. Compiled from Business Standard (2023), South First (2023), and The Wire (2023). Figures are the current government's and are disputed by the opposition.

The BRS opposition rejected this framing. Its former finance minister described the paper as full of mistakes and argued that borrowing had created productive assets (Business Standard, 2023). A cabinet minister, for his part, pointed to liabilities outside the budget, including ₹56,000 crore of debt in the civil supplies corporation (The Federal, 2023). Irrespective of who is right on magnitude, three governance points are clear. Off-budget borrowing through special-purpose vehicles reduces the transparency of public finance. A persistent gap of about 20 per cent between budgeted and actual expenditure weakens the budget's credibility as a plan (Business Standard, 2023). And the debt-to-GSDP ratio exceeded the state's 25 per cent ceiling in 2020–21 and 2021–22 (South First, 2023), although pandemic-era disruption complicates the interpretation of those years.

6. Appraisal of Governance Performance

National indices provide an external benchmark. In the GGI 2021, Telangana ranked ninth in the “Other States, Group A” category, in which Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Goa took the top three places (DARPG, 2021; Telangana Today, 2021b). The state ranked first in Commerce and Industry and in Social Welfare and Development, and second in Economic Governance and in a public-utilities sector (Telangana Today, 2021b). Table 5 summarises the position.

Table 5

Telangana in the Good Governance Index 2021 (Group A States)

Measure	Telangana
Composite rank	9th
Composite score, GGI 2019 to GGI 2021	4.83 to 4.84
Commerce and Industry	1st
Social Welfare and Development	1st (score 0.617)
Economic Governance	2nd (score 0.632)
Public utilities sector	2nd

Note. Source: Telangana Today (2021b), reporting DARG (2021).

The pattern is revealing. Telangana's strengths lie in the economic and welfare sectors, in line with the state's policy emphasis, while its composite position is held back elsewhere. The composite score barely moved between 2019 and 2021 despite significant growth in some sectors (Telangana Today, 2021b), a reminder that leadership in two sectors does not by itself produce leadership overall. Indices of this kind, moreover, do not capture several institutional issues discussed in Section 5, among them information-commission capacity, off-budget borrowing, and independent quality assurance. A principle-by-principle appraisal is therefore also necessary, and Table 6 offers one.

Table 6

Appraisal against the Eight Characteristics of Good Governance

Characteristic	Principal evidence	Appraisal
Participation	Praja Darbar and Praja Palana outreach (2023–24); turnout of about 71% in the 2023 election	Strengthening
Rule of law	Land-record disputes; review of the Dharani portal	Mixed
Transparency	Information commission vacancies; off-budget borrowing	Weak
Responsiveness	Single-window approvals; rapid rollout of early guarantees	Moderate to strong
Consensus orientation	Sharp partisan dispute over fiscal facts and over Kaleshwaram	Weak
Equity and inclusiveness	Large transfers; exclusion of tenant cultivators	Mixed
Effectiveness and efficiency	Strong outcome claims; Medigadda failure; disputed water coverage	Mixed
Accountability	Independent technical review after failure; weak statutory watchdogs	Weak to mixed

Note. Qualitative appraisal by the author on the basis of the evidence reviewed in Sections 5 and 7.

The appraisal in Table 6 is interpretive rather than numerical, and reasonable observers could rate individual characteristics differently. Two points nevertheless emerge. First, the characteristics rated weakest, transparency, consensus orientation, and accountability, depend on institutions outside the

executive: information commissions, auditors, courts, and an opposition with access to reliable data. Second, the characteristics rated more favourably, participation and responsiveness, are those that an energetic executive can improve quickly. The distinction matters for reform because the two groups call for different instruments. Leadership can deliver the second group, but only durable institutional design can deliver the first.

Read together, the indicators suggest that Telangana performs best where governance is measured by delivery and least well where it is measured by verification. This does not diminish the reach of its welfare programmes. It does suggest that the durability of those achievements depends on institutions, such as auditors, information commissions, and technical regulators, that make delivery claims checkable by someone other than the government making them.

7. The Transition of 2023–24

The Assembly election of 30 November 2023 produced a change of government, with turnout of roughly 71 per cent (Deccan Herald, 2023b). Congress won 64 of 119 seats with 39.40 per cent of the vote, while the BRS won 39 seats with 37.35 per cent, a fall of more than ten percentage points from 2018 (The Tribune, 2023). Table 7 shows the seat distribution.

Table 7
Telangana Legislative Assembly Election, 2023

Party	Seats won	Vote share
Indian National Congress	64	39.40%
Bharat Rashtra Samithi	39	37.35%
Bharatiya Janata Party	8	n/a
All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen	7	n/a
Communist Party of India	1	n/a

Note. Compiled from The Tribune (2023) and Deccan Herald (2023b). Vote shares are shown only where cited sources report them; n/a = not reported in the cited sources.

The new government moved quickly on participation and welfare. Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy took office on 7 December and held a Praja Darbar at Praja Bhavan the next day. On 9 December the government launched Mahalakshmi, which provides free travel for women, girls, and transgender persons in state-run buses, together with an expanded Rajiv Aarogyasri health cover of ₹10 lakh (Deccan Herald, 2023c). The six guarantees promised in the campaign are Mahalakshmi, Rythu Bharosa, Gruha Jyothi, Indiramma housing, Yuva Vikasam, and Cheyutha (Government of Telangana, 2024b). They include a monthly pension of ₹4,000 under Cheyutha and a Vidya Bharosa card worth ₹5 lakh for students under Yuva Vikasam (The News Minute, 2024).

One feature of the early measures deserves comment from a fiscal-governance perspective. The order launching Mahalakshmi provides that the government will reimburse the state road transport corporation for the fares that would have been collected on the basis of actual distance travelled by women passengers (Deccan Herald, 2023c). Financing a welfare commitment through a visible, on-budget reimbursement is consistent with the principle of transparent public finance whose absence Section 5.5 identified. Whether the reimbursement is paid promptly and in full is an empirical question that later data must answer, but the design principle is sound.

The Praja Palana outreach, held from 28 December 2023 to 6 January 2024 in gram panchayats and municipal wards, received 1,25,84,383 applications, of which 1,05,91,636 related to five of the guarantees (The News Minute, 2024). By 12 January, data entry of 1,09,01,255 applications had been completed. Officials told the Chief Minister that some applicants had submitted duplicates or omitted Aadhaar and ration-card details, and he directed re-examination and field verification where necessary (Government of Telangana, 2024a). The Chief Secretary said the exercise would be repeated every four months (The News Minute, 2024). The vote-on-account budget presented on 10 February 2024 proposed total expenditure of ₹2,75,891 crore, including ₹53,196 crore for the guarantees (Business Standard, 2024). Table 8 summarises these measures.

Table 8

Key Measures of the New Government, December 2023 to February 2024

Measure	Reported figure
Praja Palana applications received (28 December to 6 January)	1,25,84,383
Of which for five of the six guarantees	1,05,91,636
Applications registered after data entry (12 January)	1,09,01,255
Vote-on-account, 2024–25: total expenditure	₹2,75,891 crore
Allocation for the six guarantees	₹53,196 crore
Allocation for agriculture	₹19,746 crore
Allocation for irrigation	₹28,024 crore
Allocation for Panchayat Raj and Rural Development	₹40,080 crore

Note. Compiled from The News Minute (2024), Government of Telangana (2024a), Business Standard (2024), and India TV News (2024).

Praja Palana is significant as a governance experiment. It converted an electoral promise into a registered claim at village and ward level and created a database on which delivery can be planned. It also raises questions. Application-based targeting depends on documentation that the poorest households may lack, and duplicate and incomplete applications place a heavy verification burden on field staff. The Finance Minister said further funds would be provided once the schemes had been fully assessed (India TV News, 2024), and the government chose a vote-on-account so that its full budget could follow the Union budget (Deccan Herald, 2024). The costing of the guarantees, in short, remains provisional.

8. Challenges

Five challenges stand out. The first is fiscal sustainability. The state must service the debt it has inherited, however that debt is measured, while funding new commitments, and the absence of an agreed baseline makes planning harder. The second is inclusion. Rythu Bandhu's exclusion of tenants (Sreenivasulu, 2023) and the documentation requirements of Praja Palana show that both governments have relied on instruments that sort citizens by paperwork.

The third challenge is institutional accountability. Weak information commissions (SNS, 2022) and the absence of routine independent quality assurance for major works, exposed by the Medigadda failure

(NewsMeter, 2023), leave the state dependent on crisis-driven scrutiny. The fourth is state capacity and data quality. Digital systems such as Dharani only deliver transparency if the underlying records are accurate and errors can be corrected quickly, and the verification of more than a crore of applications will test district administrations. The fifth is the politicisation of facts. When each government presents a fiscal or technical account that the other rejects, consensus orientation, one of the eight characteristics, is undermined, and citizens lack a trusted reference point.

9. Prospects and Recommendations

The prospects for good governance in Telangana are cautiously favourable. The state has a strong income base, considerable experience with direct benefit transfer, and a new government that has signalled openness through Praja Darbar and a recurring Praja Palana. The political calendar will test these intentions: a full state budget is to follow the Union budget, and general elections are approaching (Deccan Herald, 2024). In the spirit of Grindle's (2004) "good enough governance", the recommendations below are selected for feasibility and for their contribution to citizen welfare rather than as a comprehensive reform agenda.

Three trajectories are plausible, and they are offered here as illustrations rather than forecasts. In a favourable scenario, the state reconciles its fiscal accounts, phases the guarantees against revenue, and uses Praja Palana data to improve targeting, allowing welfare expansion without a fiscal squeeze. In a baseline scenario, welfare delivery continues at scale while institutional reform proceeds slowly, leaving the accountability gaps identified in this paper largely intact. In an adverse scenario, competing fiscal narratives harden, borrowing rises to meet commitments, and infrastructure and land-record problems recur. Which path is followed will depend less on the state's economic strength, which is considerable, than on the choices made about transparency and institutional independence in the coming budgets.

1. **Establish an agreed fiscal baseline.** Publish an annual statement of total liabilities, including off-budget borrowing and guarantees, audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General, and consider an independent fiscal council to reduce disputes over the numbers.
2. **Restore and resource statutory watchdogs.** Fill vacancies in the State Information Commission and similar bodies promptly, and adopt proactive disclosure of scheme beneficiaries and expenditure.
3. **Institutionalise independent technical review.** Require third-party quality audits and public reporting for major infrastructure, and publish the findings of inquiries such as the Medigadda review in full.
4. **Make Praja Palana permanent.** Convert the campaign-style exercise into a continuous grievance and application system with tracking numbers, time limits, and social audits.
5. **Correct exclusion.** Recognise tenant cultivators through a verifiable tenancy record, simplify documentation requirements, and provide grievance windows for households that are wrongly left out.
6. **Sequence commitments to fiscal capacity.** Phase the guarantees with published costings and evaluate their outcomes, so that expansion follows evidence.

10. Conclusion

This paper has examined governance in Telangana against the eight characteristics of good governance and the national Good Governance Index. Its central finding is an asymmetry. On delivery, the state has much to show: high and rising incomes, large and predictable direct transfers, near-universal tap-water claims, and a record of ranking first nationally in welfare and commerce. On verification, the record is

weaker. Information commissions have lacked leadership, off-budget borrowing has obscured the state's finances, a flagship irrigation structure failed within a few years of completion, and important claims, from water coverage to debt, remain contested. Because this study relies on secondary evidence current to February 2024, its findings are best treated as a baseline, and future research using beneficiary surveys, district-level administrative data, and comparison with other Indian states could test whether the asymmetry between delivery and verification holds more widely.

The transition of December 2023 has changed the emphasis rather than resolved the underlying question. The new government has widened participation through Praja Darbar and Praja Palana and moved quickly on welfare guarantees, but it has also inherited, and in part contested, the state's fiscal position, and it faces the same task of making delivery checkable by independent institutions. Good governance in Telangana will ultimately be judged less by the number of schemes announced than by whether citizens, auditors, courts, and opposition parties can verify what has been delivered, at what cost, and with what quality. Strengthening those verification institutions is the most durable contribution any government can make to good governance, and it is the priority on which Telangana's prospects most depend.

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