



# Defining Good Governance

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India as a nation has had one of the most complete historical canvases. Without ever being a conquering race, we have been able to conquer hearts of one and all alike. Although we have lost a lot of sheen over the journey across a few centuries, the values still remain intact. We have always strived to progress ahead as one single entity.

India may not be a young country in terms of commercial trade but as far as scripting the growth story as an independent nation is concerned, we are relatively young. No nation is bigger than the people, and all policies and initiatives undertaken by any government is for the people. How does it even matter who governs or who is at the helm? The prima facie task of any government is governance, but there is a world of difference between governance and 'good governance' and very few governments over the years have practised it.

Good governance has to be a relative term rather than being absolute. The global definition of good governance may not fit into the scenario of every country since the demand side of governance may differ from one country to another. The UNDP definition of "good governance" encompasses three key words: transparency, accountability and participatory. These three words form a key part of any governance model which may be deemed 'good'.

There are models of governance prevalent in each country. In India, if one wishes to categorise states into models of governance, one may have to narrow it down to party based governance models: The BJP model, the Congress model, the regional party model and the Left model. How a state is governed is largely based on who is at command.

When we talk of good governance in the Indian context, we must ask a basic question to ourselves: is good governance largely based on public perception or is based on just performance numbers? If we talk of good governance on performance numbers and leave public perception alone, should we look at the numbers from an absolute sense or a relative one? Let us start judging governance by numbers alone. If we go by the 2013 legal structure and security index values, released by the Cato Institute, the best performing state Madhya Pradesh has an index score of 0.62. Tamil Nadu which was ranked second with a score of 0.55 wouldn't be considered to have done too badly, considering the performance of the best performing state. But these are just numbers in isolation. Tamil Nadu, in the same rankings had a score of 0.80 in 2005 and 0.90

in 2009. It means its index value fell by around 40% in 4 years. So should we laud the state for the second best legal and security structure or should we hold the government accountable for misgovernance. In fact, the best performing state has also seen a drop of around 25% in the index values in 2 years. Gujarat with an index value of 0.87 has done a commendable job with minimum days lost due to lock-outs and strikes and with market wage rates higher than the minimum wage rates.

One thing which hasn't seen the light of the day in our democratic structure is the horizontal deployment of good governance techniques across states. In our democratic structure, where parties wrestle it out to leverage good governance points, they are just too stringent to openly acclaim other party's model by implementing it in their own state. Andhra Pradesh has its separate Society for Social Audit, Accountability and Transparency (SSAAT) which has become a model for study across the world. It has been able to curb a lot of ground-level corruption in MGNREGA across the state and is one of the best models of accountability and transparency in the country as it gives complete autonomy to the unit with separate budgetary allocations as well. Why is it that other states have failed to show the same will to implement similar schemes or at least duplicate them? As of June 2014, 12 out of 29 states did not even have a social audit unit, let alone implementation.

How do we define good governance if we try to move out of number. Is public perception quantifiable? Do we really need to quantify it to pass a judgment? In a country like India, perception may be divided.

A clear distinction, in the minds of the people, between the union government policies and the state policies can't be made. If the ground level implementation of a welfare scheme is poor, it falls on the shoulders of the state government. But the general perception of the scheme itself suffers and the ill-effects of which have to be borne by the government at the Centre.

One of the dimensions which has gained prominence and may be considered as the fourth dimension of governance is time. Gone are those days when only the delivery of services was important. How quickly is a service delivered to the beneficiaries is also important. On this front, a combination of numbers and perception can provide us a fair indication. The extent of use of technology by a government can be estimated by the number of e-services offered. How well have the people taken up to e-services can be estimated by the number of e-transactions per 1000 people. Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh are the only two states who have managed to touch the five-figure mark. Bihar stands as the second lowest state with just 138.4 e-transactions recorded per 1000 people. The general perception of all the 3 states by its residents is also quite similar. A combination of numbers and perception can provide us a satisfactory judgment.

The talks on good governance may remain a rhetoric unless our models of governance come out of the party politics and look at identifying good policies on governance and focus on horizontal deployment across states. Also, the concept of good governance has evolved and new dimensions like those of time and technology are largely being identified. Parties and governments need to take heed and work in an absolute sense to take both their numbers and the public perception to a new high.

