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Prasanna S,

Chairman of Institute of Legal Education

No. 08, Arul Nagar, Seera Thoppu,

Maudhanda Kurichi, Srirangam,

Tiruchirappalli – 620102

Phone : +91 73059 14348 – info@iledu.in / Chairman@iledu.in



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THE INTRICATE TAPESTRY OF INEFFICIENCY: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF BUREAUCRATIC AND POLITICAL STRUCTURES IN MODERN INDIA

AUTHOR – TANISHKA SALVI, STUDENT AT KES' LAW COLLEGE, MUMBAI

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Abstract

Through the lens of a common Indian citizen not experiencing incompetence on a daily basis is almost next to impossible, in our daily life we have to face multiple failures of the bureaucratic and political structure of India changing from potholes on the road to scams of thousands of crores, it has been a tiring experience, this research paper shed some light upon underlying factors that dictate present day fate of India and her citizens.

In a diverse and ancient country like India reasons behind incompetence or anything for that matter is not a straight line, but a complex web of diverse attributes and this study aims to indulge in those attributes, while considering cultural and historical past of India and its administrative structures, this critical review of modern day issues in Indian bureaucracy is our attempt to deeper understand the intricate, delicate tapestry that is known as INDIA.

Keywords:- India, Incompetence, Bureaucracy, Governance, Corruption, Public Service, Accountability

Introduction

Governance is the system through which authority operates, public resources are distributed, and policies are created and carried out to ensure stability, justice, and fair development. In India, the nature of governance has developed along a complicated historical path. The colonial government set up a centralized, extractive bureaucratic system that focused on resource extraction rather than local needs. This eroded traditional community-based governance and led to rigidity, lack of transparency, and a clear separation between those in power and the citizens.

After gaining independence, India became a socialist democratic republic. It kept much of the existing administrative structure while trying to balance centralized planning with the needs of its diverse population through constitutional protections, Five-Year Plans, and legislative

changes. Today, the Indian bureaucratic and political system shows this dual legacy: a structured civil service that adheres to procedures works alongside an active multi-party democracy.

Indian society, known for its deep-rooted diversity across caste, class, religion, language, and region, greatly influences governance. Social norms, identity-based connections, and different levels of civic engagement directly shape policy design, implementation, and public response. This relationship between societal factors and government processes is key to understanding the effectiveness, legitimacy, and flexibility of public administration in India.

For the average Indian citizen, dealing with administrative incompetence is a regular part of life. This can be seen in ongoing civic issues like bad roads and unreliable public utilities, as

well as broader problems like financial scams, bureaucratic delays, and slow justice. These issues are worsened by widespread corruption, weak accountability, and poor public service delivery, which often includes absenteeism among staff and failures in welfare distribution.

The overall impact of these failures goes beyond individual troubles. Incompetence in public administration undermines public trust, misuses limited resources, increases socioeconomic disparities, and hinders national progress. It leads to negative economic results such as rising non-performing assets, decreasing foreign investment, and limited growth for small and medium enterprises, all while affecting essential areas like public health and education. As a result, the perceived ineptitude of Indian authorities has become a significant challenge for governance and a burden for society. This calls for a thorough investigation into its causes, effects, and solutions.

This research aims to explore the structural, historical, and sociocultural aspects of administrative incompetence in India and its interconnection with societal features.

Specific objectives include:

1. Trace the historical and institutional roots of Indian governance and identify structural factors that continue administrative inefficiency.
2. Examine key areas of governmental failure, such as corruption, gaps in policy implementation, and problems in public service delivery.
3. Evaluate how sociocultural dynamics influence governance outcomes and citizen trust in public institutions.
4. Suggest practical recommendations for administrative reform, capacity improvement, and increased civic involvement to reduce incompetence and enhance governance.

Through this framework, the study aims to deepen the understanding of how governance

and society interact in India while providing paths toward more effective, accountable, and citizen-focused public administration.

Conceptual Framework

Understanding Governance and Societal Nature

Governance is an essential framework for a structured and equitable administration of public affairs, aiming to ensure stability, justice, and prosperity within a given nation, and most importantly a nation with good governance fosters robust economic development, enhances public trust, and promotes equitable societal values and results. So what exactly is governance by definition governance⁹²² concludes the processes and institutions through which authority is exercised, resources are managed, and public policy decisions are formulated and implemented. Societal nature refers to the inherent characteristics, values, and organizational and cultural structures that define a society, dictating its collective behavior, norms, and responsiveness towards the nature of governance.

Defining Incompetence in Public Administration

Incompetence⁹²³ is a complex and layered administrative failure consisting of bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of accountability, and poor policy implementation, often being multiplied because of continuous and normalized corruption and non responsive authorities with lack of transparency. This results in real world implications like resource misallocation, steady increase of distrust among public for bureaucracy and poor and slow socio-economic development of the nation.

Typologies of Governmental Failure

Governmental failures arise from a large array of structural, procedural, and behavioral deficiencies within public institutions of

⁹²² Francis Fukuyama, What Is Governance?, SSRN Journal (2013)

⁹²³ Ott, J. Steven, and Jay M. Shafritz. "Toward a Definition of Organizational Incompetence: A Neglected Variable in Organization Theory." Public Administration Review, vol. 54, no. 4, 1994

government of India, some of the most common governmental failures in India are bureaucratic inertia, pervasive corruption, insufficient regulatory oversight, and a lack of transparency towards the masses in decision-making processes.

Sociological Perspectives on Indian Society

Sociological perspectives⁹²⁴ vary vastly in a nation as diverse as India, reflecting its complex tapestry of caste, class, religion, and regional identities, which dictates the modern day quality of life and the future of our nation through the impact of societal norms and beliefs on the governance. This intricate interplay often manifests in governance challenges such as clientelism, identity-based politics, and resistance to universalistic policy reforms, hindering effective public administration and equitable development outcomes.

Interplay Between Governance and Societal Characteristics

Societal characteristics play a decisive role in policy formulation and its implementation, the collective nature of particular priorities and resistance towards governmental initiatives that ultimately decides the future of the nation is a major restraint for policy creation, particularly evident in a diverse country like India where in the past decade societal differences between communities have increased* and this leads to even greater tension and adds to the complexity of policy formulation and implementation, thereby increasing the challenges faced in public administration and governance. This dynamic relationship makes it essential to have a deeper understanding of societal norms and structure and how different policies and ideologies will have an effect upon the masses. Comprehensive understanding is crucial for developing governance strategies that will be effective and culturally resonate with the people

for greater civic engagement in governance and sustainable development of the nation.

Historical Context of Indian Governance

Colonial Legacy and Administrative Structures

Through the long and grueling British colonial rule, a very imperialistic center-oriented rule was established specially to extract resources on an unprecedented level while severely ignoring local responsiveness of the masses and exploiting them for labour and taxes. This was a normalized practice altogether while widening the communal gap⁹²⁵ between interdependent different local communities. This framework damaged the traditional administrative structures focused around local governance and left an enduring legacy of center-oriented governance, bureaucratic rigidity and further widened the gap between the ruling elites and common citizens. This historical centralized system of rule still influences modern day Indian administration* to this day and struggles to transform into decentralised and participatory decision-making administration.

Post-Independence Challenges and Reforms

After India won its independence, it faced a monumental challenge to transition from colonial administrative structure to a socialist democratic republic system that is sufficient to cater to a large diverse population as hundreds of princely states ascended into newly formed union, ridden with poverty and bruises of partition were still fresh, immediate administrative reforms were the need of the hour, primarily focused upon stability and slow but eventual growth of the nation. Following the establishment of a new parliament and the adoption of a comprehensive constitution, India embarked on a path of planned development, attempting to balance centralized authority with the diverse needs of its populace through various Five-Year Plans⁹²⁶ and legislative measures.

⁹²⁴ Sharma, A. K. (2003). Elements of Indian Civilisation: A Sociological Perspective. Indian Anthropologist, 33(1)

⁹²⁵ Washbrook, D. A. "Law, State and Agrarian Society in Colonial India." Modern Asian Studies 15, no. 3 (1981): 649–721.

⁹²⁶ V. K. R. V. Rao. "India's First Five-Year Plan--A Descriptive Analysis." Pacific Affairs 25, no. 1 (1952): 3–23.

Many new reforms were introduced for better governance of the nation taking inspiration from well established countries around the world, some reforms were inspired from other developing and developed countries.

Evolution of Bureaucracy and Political Systems

India post independence witnessed a substantial change in its bureaucratic system moving away from colonial practices but still inherently had hierarchical structure and preserved the complex and opaque nature of Indian bureaucracy to the layman.

India adopted a multi party democratic system, after independence which over the time led many reforms and developments this dynamic ecosystem of post independence bureaucracy and evolving political system has a major impact on India's modern day governance, although major drawbacks are still existent and a vast separation of bureaucracy and political systems has been observed between their respective functions leading to accountability issues and hindrance for public service delivery.

Manifestations of Incompetence in Indian Authorities

Policy Formulation and Implementation Gaps

One of the most prominent incompetency challenges that is persistent in the Indian government is policy formulation and its implementation. A real world analysis often reveals significantly distorted outcomes⁹²⁷ for a well formulated policy and its ground results and that is too when we have a well formulated policy to begin. These discrepancies often arise from inadequate data collection, insufficient stakeholder consultation, and a disconnection between policy design and the practical realities of local governance structures and lack of real world testing of the given policy frequently ends up wasting large amounts of public resources and time and notable

implementation failures and suboptimal public service delivery.

Corruption and Accountability Deficits

Corruption is a really deep rooted problem in India and Indian bureaucracy in general by definition corruption⁹²⁸ is dishonest behaviour by those in position of power for their personal gain such as financial and political gain, accountability for corruption in India is a distant dream in India, while there are multiple reasons⁹²⁹ that are primarily responsible for corruption, there are few which are the most prominent ones such as:

- a. Lack of transparency :-
- b. Weak institutional enforcement :-
- c. Low wages and incentives :-
- d. Bureaucratic lethargy :-
- e. Low expectations of accountability :-

Inefficiency in Public Service Delivery

Inefficient public service delivery is an everyday reality in India, with stark contrast of digital, direct benefit transfers and accessible technology with deep rooted inefficiencies such as bureaucratic lethargy, frontline absence of staff in health and educational sector and attitude issues of public servants, delayed and inefficient public service delivery is a slap in the face to common people while their resources are not utilised properly, if they are utilised at all to begin with. Some major setbacks to public service delivery are namely.

- a. Frontline absenteeism in key government departments such as schools, primary healthcare center, on any given day around 25% teachers and 40% healthcare workers are absent⁹³⁰, which results in massive amounts of delays, improper or inefficient workload

⁹²⁷ Yadav, Sushma. "PUBLIC POLICY AND GOVERNANCE IN INDIA: THE POLITICS OF IMPLEMENTATION." *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 71, no. 2 (2010): 439–57.

⁹²⁸Corruption, Black's Law Dictionary (12th ed. 2024).

⁹²⁹ Raju, Radha Vinod. *Fighting Corruption: How Serious Is India?* Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 2010.

⁹³⁰ Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Human Resource Development (India), *Teachers' Absenteeism* (2017). Priyanka Kerketta et al., *Exploring Health Worker Absenteeism at Public Healthcare Facilities in Chhattisgarh, India*, 25 *Primary Health Care Rsch. & Dev.* 1 (2024)

on other staff and wastage of public resources on large scale

- b. Resources not able to reach the needy due to welfare leakages is a known reality highlighted by costly subsidized services like public distribution system (PDS) or rural veterinarian support systems⁹³¹ often sell resources such as grains and medicines in open markets instead of being utilized for the citizens .
- c. Attitudinal issues of public officials and lacking of basic empathy and respect for the common masses and ill treatment of their grievances often lead to mistreatment of the victims and needy people and increase of opaqueness and sharp decline in reliability of public officials and pave the way to middlemen and bribes to officials for a fast-track resolution .

These subtle issues that drag behind the growth of our nation must be addressed and rectified with reform initiatives such as **Right to Time-bound Delivery of Public Service Act**⁹³² and stronger accountability enforcements and expand the scope of citizen partnership to erase such inefficiencies.

The Nature of Indian Society and its Influence

Socio-Cultural Factors and Governance:

Socio- cultural factors heavily influence citizen welfare, many aspects of collective ideals, behaviour and aspirations to the society in a given nation is the foundation to a greater Good of the country and empower it citizen to act against unlawful and corrupt governance,

Ignorant and a political nature can really hamper a country's growth and that totally depends upon the collective ideas of a citizen and what they stand for . Demanding accountability and standing against corruption and illegal practices even in society is the

representation of the nature of an average citizen just like a member of parliament represents in average of its constituency if a member parliament is uneducated or corrupt it is most likely that the state of their constituency is no good too.

Citizen Participation and Civic Engagement:

Citizen participation is one of the most vital needs for a responsive democracy in India. Citizen participation is often related to its 73rd and 74th amendments which empowered rural gram sabhas and urban ward committees. Increasing citizen participation in self local governance and addressing local issues and resolutions in a systematic way.

Transparency and accountability mechanism ensure evident and responsible part towards development where citizen can ensure accountability from government authorities and provide be back suggestions and often activities participate in policy creation and can also register their grievances to seek resolution, important provisions like **Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005**⁹³³ allows citizens to access information and hold officials accountable for their actions and ensure accountability, digital portals like [MyGov.in](https://mygov.in) acts as a platform for citizens to participate in policy formulation and ground feedback for those policies too

A well established and working grievances redressal mechanism provides citizen much needed assistance for their complaints and can be used to further improve ground based impact though updation of policies by feedback of the citizens

Public Perception of Government and Trust:

Public perception of government is often inaccurately described as politics in India, while a positive perception is very much needed and is a powerful tool to foster growth and establish dominance and eradicate unconstitutional institutions, public perception of government is very much skewed in India, in recent years high

⁹³¹ Rs 3.5 Crore Scam: Nanaji Deshmukh Veterinary Science University Madhya Pradesh Cow Dung Urine Research, INDIA TODAY (Jan. 11, 2026), indiatoday.in .

⁹³² Kuljit Singh, Right to Service in India, 11 Dehradun L. Rev. 53 (2020) RIGHT TO SERVICE IN INDIA - Dehradun Law Review

⁹³³ Right to Information Act, No. 22 of 2005, INDIA CODE (2005).

level of trust on top heavy central government⁹³⁴ is displayed by the majority of Indian citizens but the contradicting ground realities are vastly different with deep frustration with corruption, infrastructural deficits, environmental concerns and increasing wealth inequality in India.

Roughly 59% of Indians express satisfaction with national governance and favour 'strong' leadership⁹³⁵, however people are still unsatisfied by local government and authorities

An age-old practice of donor-recipient relationship between government and citizens for accountability is also coming to a stop and demands for accountability and participation in governance is on rise as recorded in the report on Transparency for Inclusive Governance.

Case Studies of Incompetence and Societal Response

Analysis of Specific Bureaucratic Failures:

There is a long list of historic and recent administrative failure of government, having their roots in structural rigidity, corruption, political interference and outright apathy towards the citizens,

- a. Bhopal Gas Tragedy(1984)⁹³⁶ – one of the most horrendous failures in India's history, a toxic leak of methyl isocyanate in Bhopal from a foreign industrial complex, failure at its largest scale adorned by failing safety systems and inadequate oversight by the government, its impact was multiplied by delayed accountability, justice and compensation to the victims and its side effects lasting for decades
- b. The Emergency (1975–77)⁹³⁷ – often dubbed as black period of India's democracy, almost identical to tyranny.

⁹³⁴ Karli Srinivasulu, Nationalism and Dynamics of Federal Politics in Contemporary India, 69 Indian J. Pub. Admin. 719 (2023).

⁹³⁵ 59% Indians Favour a 'Strong Leader', Satisfied with Govt Performance: Study, Moneycontrol (Apr. 16, 2024),

⁹³⁶ Union Carbide Corporation v. Union of India, AIR 1990 SC 273.

⁹³⁷ Christophe Jaffrelot & Pratinav Anil, India's First Dictatorship: The Emergency, 1975–1977 (2021).

India's government illegally arrested, sterilized Indian citizens and unconstitutional suspension of rights was unjustified and is still condemned to this day

- c. Recent Infrastructure Failure⁹³⁸ – in the last 5 years many infrastructure failures have unfortunately occurred due to governments failure to provide a basic standard to infrastructure projects including many bridge collapses, airport roof falling, train accidents, notoriously expensive highways et cetera are included.

Public Health System Effectiveness

The state in which public health services are in India right now is a well known fact, ranging from crumbling infrastructure, adulterated medicines, almost non-existent primary healthcare facilities and staff absenteeism are major problems faced by citizens.

These chronic failures are the result of low public spending (around 1.4% of GDP)⁹³⁹, and a serious shortage of doctors, nurses and medical staff.

Urban public health facilities are overburdened and understaffed, with an estimate of 65% of hospitals⁹⁴⁰ in India serving more patients than what government standard permits allow, combined with inadequate medicine stockpiles, proper equipment and sanitation increasing the risk of wrongful or mistreatment of the patients

This lack of public service delivery increase in rural areas with statistics such as up to 62% of government hospitals⁹⁴¹ in rural areas lack a

⁹³⁸ Garg, Chandra & Kumar, Analysis of bridge failures in India from 1977 to 2017, STRUCTURE AND INFRASTRUCTURE ENGINEERING (2020), Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Government of India, Annexure-I: The details of collapse of bridges/ tunnels in the country during 2021–2024 (2024).

⁹³⁹ National Health Policy 2017: Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Gov't of India, National Health Policy 2017, 24 (2017)

⁹⁴⁰ TeamLease RegTech, Simplifying Compliance Management for Hospitals (2024).

⁹⁴¹ Int'l Inst. for Population Scis., District Level Household and Facility Survey (DLHS-4), 2012–13 (2014), Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Gov't of India, Health Dynamics of India (Infrastructure and Human Resources) 2022–23 (2024).

gynecologist and face severe doctor and nurse shortage Governmental efforts on increasing the number of urban hospitals and facilities that they provide are not sufficient without a strong support from primary healthcare centers, overcrowding at specialty hospitals for primary healthcare is a prime example of the crippling state of rural and primary healthcare facilities.

Consequences of Incompetence on National Development

Economic Impact and Investment Climate:

Economic impact due to incompetence in India has snowball consequences and often result in poor economic performance high level of low or non performing asset decline in MSME growth and job loss loss of jobs are some prominent and visible economic impact because of incompetence in bureaucracy, economic impact on a large scale results in unemployment which has increased upto 11 million youth according to reports⁹⁴² of Deccan herald increased economic stress upon the common masses is the result of stagnant growth of businesses but rising inflation, millions of people post below the poverty line into debt trap because of economic shocks ,sanctions have resulted in arising dependent upon the freebies given by the government.

Regulatory inconsistencies serve as roadblocks in the path of economic growth of businesses with some firms experiencing 15.9% regulatory burdens⁹⁴³ compared to lower rates in other developing Nations,

A prime content contender of decline is the education system where major gaps between present education and industry demands are present with up to 75% of higher education institutes⁹⁴⁴ producing graduates that lack industry standard of knowledge and contribute towards unemployment as a result. Large scale Persona of the government is also damage and

perception of easiness of doing business is also hampered with foreign direct investment on a decline it has been reported from 44 billion dollars in 2020 21 to just 353 million dollars⁹⁴⁵ due to inconsistent bureaucratic practices and regulations

Recommendations for Improving Governance and Societal Engagement

Administrative Reforms and Capacity Building:

Administrative reforms are very much needed in India and they should be ended transforming public Administration and Bureaucratic lethargy, reforms in structural procedural and legal nature and working of Indian Administration is much needed citizen centric initiative such as decentralization high citizen participation in policy creation and implementation and reducing rigidity and higher structure of bureaucracy with along with high recruitment and quality training of employees and education of citizens to increase their awareness about bureaucracy it's procedures and scheme availments and resources

Reforms such as behaviour training and technology along with increased account ability for corruption and illegal unconstitutional political influence must be improved to create a better inclusive environment for citizens capacity building is also the need of the hour with integration of digital governance and new public management systems to increase efficiency and efficient resource allocation and utilisation good governance initiative to increase the benchmark performance of the authorities is much needed.

Capacity building in indigenous authorities and corporations of India done through transformation of current practices into a competency driven frameworks all while integrating traditional knowledge and work ethic of Indians and utilisation of full potential of

⁹⁴² Around 11 Million Graduates Unemployed in India: Report, Deccan Herald (Mar. 17, 2026).

⁹⁴³ Ministry of Fin., Gov't of India, Economic Survey 2024-2025 (2025).

⁹⁴⁴ Nearly 75% of higher education institutions not aligned with industry needs in India: TeamLease EdTech report, Hindustan Times (Jan. 15, 2026),

⁹⁴⁵ State of the Economy, Reserve Bank of India Bulletin (Reserve Bank of India, Mumbai, India), May 2025., Net FDI falls 96% in 2024-25 to \$353 mn, gross FDI remains robust, The Hindu (May 22, 2025)

the talent presently working, high quality training suggest skill development and rule base training localising governance via local authorities bodies and connection with local population is available solution to capacity building.

Strengthening Accountability Mechanisms:

Accountability mechanism in India are suffering right now, a huge decline in accountability and a sharp increase in corruption infrastructure failure and policy failures⁹⁴⁶ has been observed in recent years strengthening accountability⁹⁴⁷ in India can be done by institutionalizing social audits digitalising government processes to enhance transparency Educating citizens about these accountability measures so that they can act as a second layer of protection against in efficient resource allocation and misused resources, Good initiative suggest RTI exist and strengthen accountability measures, Key institutions such as anti-corruption bodies⁹⁴⁸ like Lokpal, Lokayukta, ED, ACB should establish a community level monitoring and implementing binding citizens charter.

Strengthening transparency laws and accountability procedures in India can be monumental in India's bureaucratic history.

Conclusion

This study shows that administrative incompetence in India is a widespread issue that comes from historical, structural, and sociocultural factors. The colonial era established a centralized and rigid bureaucracy. This old system still affects governance today, creating a gap between administrators and citizens. Reforms after independence kept the hierarchical procedures but added democratic elements. However, these changes did not fix the issues of unclear

processes and slow responses. Key signs of incompetence include gaps in policy implementation due to poor data and lack of stakeholder input, ongoing corruption caused by weak transparency and enforcement, and ineffective public service delivery, which is marked by absentee staff, waste of welfare resources, and negative attitudes. These failures lead to serious problems such as loss of public trust, poor resource allocation, increasing non-performing assets, a drop in investment, and weaker sectors like health and education. The diversity of society adds to the challenges in governance. Factors like caste, religion, and regional identities affect how policies are received and encourage favoritism. At the same time, low public participation limits accountability.

The findings confirm that governance and society in India influence each other in a dynamic way. Social characteristics do not just react to government actions; they also help shape policy creation, implementation, and acceptance. Similarly, governance affects how people participate, trust, and engage. Thus, incompetence is not just a bureaucratic problem but a sign of a misfit in the relationship between the state and society. Effective public administration must understand that technical changes alone won't work. The strategies need to resonate with the culture, involve citizens, and respond to local contexts. Improving this connection through decentralization, better transparency measures, and civic education is crucial for rebuilding trust and promoting fair development.

More empirical research is needed to measure the economic impact of specific incompetencies across different states and sectors. Comparing decentralized and centralized administrative systems in India can help identify best practices. Additionally, long-term studies of citizen engagement tools like Right to Information (RTI), social audits, and digital complaint systems can reveal how they affect accountability. Research that combines behavioral economics with public

⁹⁴⁶ Indian Institute of Public Administration, Public Policy Making In India: Issues and Remedies (2022), Comptroller and Auditor General of India, Performance Audit on National Rural Health Mission (2024).

⁹⁴⁷ Dev. Monitoring & Evaluation Office, NITI Aayog, Thematic Report: Accountability and Transparency (2022)

⁹⁴⁸ Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, No. 49 of 1988, India Code. Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003, No. 45 of 2003, India Code. Right to Information Act, 2005, No. 22 of 2005, India Code. Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013, No. 1 of 2014, India Code.

administration may also find ways to tackle the shortcomings in attitudes within the bureaucracy. Finally, exploring how new technologies can help reduce discretion and improve transparency is an important area for future studies aimed at creating a competent, citizen-focused governance system.

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