RESEARCH FRONT
Multidisciplinary Peer Reviewed International Journal

ISSN
(Print) 2320 – 6446
(Online) 2320 – 8341

Restoring Public Trust Through Digital Transparency: A Strategic Roadmap for Viksit Bharat 2047

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19158079

Abstract:

This research paper explores how digital transparency can rebuild public trust in governance as India strives toward its Viksit Bharat 2047 vision. While initiatives like Digital India and Maharashtra's Aaple Sarkar portal have established a massive digital infrastructure—evidenced by nearly 97 crore internet connections and billions of UPI transactions—a significant "trust deficit" persists due to administrative inertia, frequent leadership transfers, and a lack of technical expertise at the ground level. Utilizing a descriptive-analytical framework and data from sources like the City E-Governance Index 2026, the study identifies socio-technical barriers such as the digital divide and the "middleman" culture that hinder effective e-governance. The paper proposes a "Trust-by-Design" strategic roadmap that integrates AI for accountability, blockchain for verification, and robust data privacy frameworks to transition from a transactional to a participatory governance model. Ultimately, it concludes that achieving a $30 trillion economy depends on fostering a transparent, ethical, and citizen-centric administration that ensures the dignity of all Indians by 2047.

Keywords - Aaple Sarkar, Digital transparency, Digital Infrastructure, E-Governance, Viksit Bharat

Introduction:

India is currently in Amrit Kaal, the vital countdown to becoming a Viksit Bharat (Developed India) by 2047. This vision targets a $30 trillion economy and per capita incomes exceeding $15,000. However, achieving these milestones depends less on raw numbers and more on the integrity of our governance and the public's faith in it.

Trust is the quiet engine of a healthy democracy. Yet, in economically pivotal states like Maharashtra, a gap remains between citizens and the administration. Many feel frustrated by slow, opaque processes and the inconsistent rollout of online services. While the Digital India initiative has laid a strong foundation, transitioning from paper-heavy traditions to a truly digital-first culture is still a work in progress.

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Rebuilding this bond requires more than just new software; it demands fundamental transparency. When systems are open and digital, corruption loses its hiding places, and the administration is seen as fair and reliable.

This research paper analyzes the current state of e-governance in India and Maharashtra, identifies the social and technical hurdles holding us back, and outlines a practical digital roadmap to help realize the dream of a developed India by 2047.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to examine how digital transparency can rebuild public trust in government systems, aligning with India's vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047.

To achieve this, the study pursues the following specific objectives:

- To assess the present status of digital infrastructure and e-governance implementation at the national level and particularly in Maharashtra, including levels of adoption and usage.
- To pinpoint the key barriers—administrative, social, and technical—that are preventing complete and effective rollout of e-governance in municipal corporations and various government departments.
- To measure citizens' actual engagement with digital government platforms, drawing on reliable statistical data from official sources to gauge the true reach and impact of existing initiatives.
- To explore the direct link between greater transparency in digital systems and improved levels of citizen confidence and trust in public administration.

These objectives together provide a clear path to turning digital tools into a stronger bridge of trust between government and citizens—making services more open, efficient, and reliable for all.

Research Methodology:

The research paper is in a descriptive-analytical framework, utilized secondary data synthesized from a wide array of official government reports, regulatory filings, and academic research.

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The data taken from the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), and the Department of Information Technology (DIT) of the Government of Maharashtra.[9]

Statistical information regarding internet penetration, mobile subscriber bases, and digital service transactions is drawn from the latest annual reports and press releases issued by the Press Information Bureau (PIB) and TRAI as of late 2024 and early 2025.[18]

The performance of municipal bodies is assessed through the City E-Governance Index (CEGI) 2026 and the Urban Governance Index (UGI) 2024, providing a benchmark for urban digital transformation.[21]

This approach ensures that the insights generated are evidence-based and aligned with the ground realities of Indian public administration.

Hypotheses

The central hypothesis of this roadmap is that a direct and positive correlation exists between the degree of digital transparency in public services and the level of public trust in the administration.

It is assumed that the "trust deficit" observed in Maharashtra's municipal and state departments is largely a function of "information asymmetry"—where the government possesses data that is inaccessible to the public.[7]

Successful e-governance is primarily an administrative challenge, not just a technical one. Overcoming institutional resistance and low digital literacy requires a "Trust-by-Design" architecture. By making transactions traceable and auditable in real-time, the state can eliminate the "middleman" culture and systematically rebuild public confidence.

Analysis and Interpretation of data

To understand the potential for digital transparency, the researcher has analyzed the scale of India's digital surge. Over the last decade, the nation has witnessed an exponential increase in connectivity, providing the necessary plumbing for transparent governance.

National Telecommunications and Internet Proliferation

The foundation of the 2047 vision is a connected citizenry. Internet connections have grown from a mere 25.15 crore in 2014 to 96.96 crore by mid-2024, registering a growth of

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285.53%.[9] This expansion is supported by a massive tele-density increase, particularly in rural areas, which is critical for inclusive development.

The cost of wireless data, a significant barrier to digital inclusion, has plummeted from ₹308 per GB in 2014 to just ₹ 9.34/- in 2022, making digital services affordable for the common man.[18] Furthermore, the rapid rollout of 5G—with 4.74 Lakh towers installed by 2025 covering 99.6% of districts—enables the high-speed connectivity required for real-time transparent monitoring systems.[9]

Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and Usage Trends:

The "India Stack," comprising Aadhaar for identity, UPI for payments, and DigiLocker for document exchange, forms the core of the e-governance ecosystem.[2] The scale of adoption of these platforms indicates a growing readiness for digital interaction.

- Aadhaar: Serving as the digital backbone, with over 141.88 crore IDs generated by April 2025, facilitating e-KYC and Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT).[18]
- Unified Payments Interface (UPI): A global leader in real-time transactions, used by 460 million individuals and 65 million merchants. In April 2025 alone, UPI processed 1867.7 Crore transactions worth ₹24.97 Lakh Crore ₹24.77 Lakh Crore [9]
- DigiLocker: Providing access to authentic digital documents for 53.92 crore users as of June 2025, effectively reducing the need for physical paperwork and associated bureaucratic delays.[9]
- UMANG: A single mobile platform offering 2,300 government services in 23 languages, which has recorded 597 crore transactions by 2025.[9]

E-Governance Efficacy in Maharashtra: A Regional Analysis

Maharashtra is a critical testing ground for the 2047 vision. As the state with the highest contribution to the national industrial output 20%, its administrative efficiency directly impacts national growth.[3] However, the state exhibits a dichotomy between advanced policy frameworks and ground-level implementation challenges.

The Aaple Sarkar Portal: Scaling Citizen Services

The Department of Information Technology (DIT) in Maharashtra has consolidated state services under the "Aaple Sarkar" portal. This platform is a primary vehicle for digital

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transparency, allowing citizens to track application statuses and hold departments accountable for delays.[23]

Aaple Sarkar Metric	**Total Cumulative (as of 2025)**	**Annual Performance (2025-26)**
Notified Services	1212	--
Total Services on Portal	1077	--
Participating Departments	38	--
Applications Received	21,15,37,227	2,58,65,908
Applications Disposed	19,95,34,477	2,43,90,815
Disposal Rate	94.3%	94.3%

Source: [13] https://aaplesarkar.mahaonline.gov.in/en.

While the disposal rate is high, the "trust deficit" persists because "disposal" does not always equate to "citizen satisfaction".[6] Research indicates that citizens are often only "marginally satisfied" with the quality of service, citing issues such as improper guidance from staff and the continued presence of unauthorized "agents" who navigate the digital interface on behalf of the illiterate or unaware.[6]

Municipal Performance: Leaders and Laggards

The City E-Governance Index (CEGI) 2026 provides a detailed look at how 29 municipal corporations in Maharashtra are performing.[22] The Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation (NMMC) emerged as the leader, setting a benchmark for technology-driven urban administration.

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The success of NMMC is largely due to its commitment to "paperless administration" and the integration of an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system that streamlines inter-departmental coordination.[27] Conversely, cities like Mumbai face challenges of "overlapping responsibilities" among multiple agencies, which confuses citizens and erodes trust.[30]

Telecommunications Usage in Maharashtra

The number of potential participants in e-governance in Maharashtra is reflected in its massive subscriber base. As of December 2025, the state remains a major hub for digital engagement.

With over 10 crore subscribers in a state with a population of approximately 12.5 crore, the reach of digital platforms is nearly universal. However, the gap between having a mobile connection and being able to effectively use a government portal for a caste certificate or property tax or other services remains significant.[3]

Socio-Administrative Barriers to Trust Restoration

The lack of full e-governance implementation in various departments is not merely a technological failure but a systemic one. Several key barriers prevent digital transparency from translating into public trust.

Administrative Inactivity and Human Resource Challenges

One of the biggest obstacles to progress is the lack of involvement from the actual implementers on the ground. In many municipal corporations, e-governance projects stall because department heads and project leaders are frequently transferred. This constant turnover erases institutional memory and breaks project continuity.

Furthermore, many administrations lack the internal technical expertise to manage complex IT systems. This creates an over-reliance on private vendors whose profit motives don't always align with the public's best interests.

At the local level, some political and administrative elites view digital transparency as a threat to their personal influence. By operating more like "social clubs" than democratic institutions, some city councils have allowed factionalism to take root, effectively excluding marginalized groups from the benefits of a digital-first government. [4]

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Public Awareness and the Digital Divide

A significant portion of the Indian public remains digitally unaware or illiterate. While programs like the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA) have made strides, the sheer scale of the task is daunting.

- PMGDISHA Impact: As of mid-2024, approximately 7.35 crore candidates were enrolled and 6.39 crore trained nationwide.[32]
- Maharashtra Performance: The state has seen 53.23 Lakh beneficiaries under the DISHA scheme, including 8,223 ASHA workers who serve as digital conduits in rural areas.[33]
- Execution Skills: While 78.4% of youths aged 15-24 can send messages with attachments, the ability to navigate complex government "Dashboard" systems for tracking multi-stage applications is much lower.[33]

The "digital divide" is not just about access to devices but about "technical literacy." Socio-cultural resistance in rural areas and the lack of content in regional dialects further prevent citizens from fully embracing digital governance.[5]

The Transactional vs. Participatory Model

Currently, e-governance in India is largely "transactional"—citizens use it to pay bills or apply for certificates. However, trust is built through "participatory" models where transparency is a dynamic process.[36] Citizens often express dissatisfaction with current practices because disclosures are vague, feedback loops are limited, and accountability is missing after data misuse or service failures.[36] Trustworthy communication must be iterative and inclusive, recognizing citizens as partners in governance rather than mere "customers" of a service.[36]

The Transparency-Trust Nexus: Interpreting the Data

Statistical analysis and qualitative surveys reveal a deep-seated link between openness and institutional legitimacy. Global and domestic studies confirm that when governments are open about their processes and resource use, citizens perceive them as more reliable.[7]

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Observations on Transparency and Public Perception

In a 2025 survey, public trust in government in certain contexts rose to 69%, largely driven by improvements in information transparency (rated 3.8/5) and service responsiveness (rated 3.7/5).[14] Transparency reduces "perceived risks," particularly in digital environments where face-to-face interaction is absent.[37]

Dimension of Trust	Impact of Digital Transparency
Institutional Integrity	Reduces corruption opportunities by creating digital audit trails.[7]
Information Openness	Provides citizens with the data needed to scrutinize government actions.[7]
Service Responsiveness	Real-time tracking of grievances (e.g., token systems) improves satisfaction.[14]
Fiscal Accountability	Online budget publication and performance metrics reassure taxpayers.[38]

However, digitalization without a robust regulatory framework risk creating a "trust deficit" due to weak accountability.[14] For example, despite high levels of trust in the executive branch (up to 97.5% in some surveys), trust in legislative or local bodies can be as low as 45.8%, reflecting the perceived gap in grassroots transparency.[14]

The Role of E-Governance in Achieving Viksit Bharat 2047

Digital transparency is the "strategic compass" that will guide India toward its 2047 goals.[43] Its contribution is multifaceted:

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1. Economic Competitiveness: By reducing the cost of doing business and minimizing bureaucratic hurdles, transparent governance makes India an attractive destination for global investment.[24]
2. Universal Inclusion: Digital enablement is the only way to reach all population segments by 2047. It ensures that credit, healthcare, and education are accessible to those at the "bottom of the pyramid".[2]
3. Resilient Infrastructure: Smart city technologies, powered by real-time data, allow for better disaster risk reduction, navigation, and logistics, building a resilient nation.[29]
4. Sustainability: Open data on energy usage and carbon emissions is essential for tracking progress toward the Net Zero 2070 goal, which is a key pillar of Viksit Bharat.[1]

Suggestions / Strategic Roadmap for Viksit Bharat 2047

To bridge the trust deficit and fully implement e-governance, a multi-dimensional strategic roadmap is required. This roadmap must align with the national priority of creating a self-reliant, resilient, and transparent developed nation.

1. Unified Digital Infrastructure and "Trust-by-Design"

The fragmentation of government systems must be replaced by a unified, cloud-based digital infrastructure.[40] This involves integrating front, middle, and back-office operations to ensure a seamless data flow.[40]

- Adoption of Zero-Trust Architecture: Every digital artifact or resource must be validated at every stage of interaction, right from the physical data center to the user interface.[15]
- Blockchain Integration: To restore social trust, blockchain should be implemented in sensitive areas such as supply chains, public finance, land records (MahaBhulekh), and academic credentials.[15]
- Standardization: A common solution architecture must be adopted across all departments and municipal corporations in Maharashtra to ensure interoperability and avoid the duplication of infrastructure.[3]

2. Leveraging Artificial Intelligence for Accountability

The IndiaAI Mission, approved with a budget of over ₹10,371 crore, provides a framework for integrating AI into governance.[9]

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- AI-Enabled Grievance Redressal: Moving beyond simple tracking to "Predictive Analysis." AI can identify recurring civic issues and suggest proactive solutions before they escalate into public dissatisfaction.[17]
- Transparent Algorithmic Governance: To maintain trust, AI deployment must be safe, ethical, and transparent. Citizens should have a "Right to Know" how AI algorithms influence the decisions that affect them.[2]
- Voice-Based Governance: Utilizing AI voice bots (as seen in PMC for tax collection) to bridge the gap for those with low digital literacy, allowing for voice-based interaction in regional languages like Marathi.[17]

3. Strengthening the Regulatory and Privacy Framework

Digital transparency cannot exist without the assurance of data privacy. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act and associated rules are foundational to building trust.[16]

- Consent-Driven Governance: Citizens must have the right to give, refuse, or withdraw consent for the use of their personal data.[41]
- Timely Grievance Resolution: All requests for data correction, update, or erasure must be addressed within a maximum of ninety days to ensure institutional accountability.[41]
- Cyber Surakshit Maharashtra: The state must strictly implement its Cybersecurity Policy 2025 to safeguard digital infrastructure from advanced threats, ensuring that the "transparency" does not become a vulnerability.[24]

4. Human-Centric Change Management

The "lack of implementation" identified in various departments is often a human failure.

- Karmayogi Bharat: Civil servants at all levels must be onboarded onto capacity-building platforms to develop a "digital-first" mindset. As of 2025, over 1.21 crore officials have already been onboarded.[9]
- Training for Implementers: Specific training programs for district administrative staff and municipal officers should focus on "Change Management" to adapt to new digital workflows.[10]

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- Incentivizing Transparency: Performance metrics for municipal commissioners should include "Transparency and Open Data" scores as part of their evaluation, similar to the CEGI rankings.[26]

5. Enhancing Public Awareness and Participation

To ensure that e-governance is not just a "government-centric" exercise, the public must be made an active participant.

- Open Data Portals: All municipal corporations must publish budgets, spending, performance metrics, and decision-making processes in accessible, jargon-free formats.[38]
- Two-Way Communication: Governments should move away from "token consultation" to "meaningful participation." This includes host in-person meetings, online forums, and "You Said, We Did" updates that demonstrate how citizen feedback influenced policy.[38]
- Multilingual and Intuitive Platforms: E-governance portals like Aaple Sarkar must be made more intuitive and fully supported in Marathi and other Indic languages to ensure inclusive access.[13]

Conclusion

India's journey toward Viksit Bharat 2047 depends on merging technology with governance. In Maharashtra, despite millions of digital transactions, the final hurdle is restoring public trust. Moving from "closed-door" administration to digital transparency is the only way forward.

The current implementation gaps, caused by administrative inertia and lack of skilled staff, must be tackled through urgent capacity building. By adopting a "Trust-by-Design" roadmap—using AI for accountability and blockchain for verification—we can ensure progress is both inclusive and mission-driven.

Ultimately, a developed nation is defined by the dignity of its people, not just economic stats. To build a developed India by 2047, we must first build a transparent one.

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