



Fragmented governance and inter-agency coordination in Delhi: Challenges for effective urban policy implementation

Yogita

Department of Political Science, CCS University, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract

The increasing complexity of urban governance has made institutional coordination a critical determinant of effective public policy implementation, particularly in metropolitan regions with multiple governing authorities. Delhi, as the National Capital Territory of India, presents a distinctive governance framework where administrative responsibilities are shared among the Government of NCT Delhi, the Union Government, the Lieutenant Governor, municipal bodies, and several statutory agencies. While this multi-layered institutional arrangement is intended to balance national and local governance, it has also created significant challenges in policy coordination, accountability, and administrative efficiency. This study examines how fragmented governance influences inter-agency coordination and affects the implementation of urban public policies in Delhi. The research adopts a qualitative and analytical approach, relying on secondary data collected from constitutional provisions, government reports, policy documents, judicial decisions, and peer-reviewed academic literature. It analyses selected policy sectors, including air pollution control, urban flooding, Yamuna River management, and urban infrastructure, to understand how institutional interactions shape governance outcomes. The findings reveal that many governance challenges in Delhi are rooted not in the absence of policy initiatives but in fragmented institutional arrangements, overlapping administrative responsibilities, and inadequate coordination among implementing agencies. These structural limitations contribute to delays in decision-making, inconsistent policy execution, and reduced public accountability. The study argues that strengthening collaborative governance, clarifying institutional roles, improving inter-agency coordination, and promoting evidence-based policymaking are essential for enhancing governance effectiveness. The article contributes to the growing discourse on urban governance and public administration by demonstrating that institutional coherence is fundamental to successful policy implementation. It further offers policy recommendations aimed at improving administrative coordination, transparency, and governance capacity in Delhi. The findings may also serve as a useful reference for other metropolitan regions confronting similar governance challenges arising from complex institutional structures.

Keywords: Fragmented governance, inter-agency coordination, urban governance, public policy implementation, Delhi, institutional accountability, collaborative governance, public administration

Introduction

Cities today are expected to deliver efficient public services while responding to increasingly complex challenges such as rapid urbanization, environmental degradation, population growth, and rising public expectations. The success of any government in addressing these issues depends not only on the quality of its public policies but also on the effectiveness of the institutions responsible for implementing them. Even well-designed policies often fail to achieve their intended outcomes when multiple agencies work in isolation, responsibilities overlap, or inter-agency coordination is weak. Therefore, effective governance is no longer measured solely by policy formulation but also by the ability of public institutions to work together in a coordinated, transparent, and accountable manner.

Delhi offers a unique example of these governance challenges. As the National Capital Territory (NCT) of India, it occupies a special constitutional position that combines features of both a Union Territory and a state. This distinctive arrangement has resulted in a governance system where authority is distributed among the elected Delhi Government, the Lieutenant Governor, the Union Government, municipal bodies, and several statutory agencies. While each institution has a defined role, their responsibilities often intersect, creating administrative complexities that affect policy implementation. As a result, many public issues in Delhi are not merely the consequence

of inadequate resources or poor planning but also of fragmented institutional arrangements and limited coordination among governing authorities.

In recent years, Delhi has experienced a series of urban governance challenges that have highlighted the limitations of this fragmented administrative structure. Persistent air pollution, annual waterlogging during the monsoon, traffic congestion, delays in infrastructure development, ineffective waste management, and the continuing pollution of the Yamuna River have raised important questions about the capacity of existing institutions to work collectively. These problems involve multiple departments and agencies, each operating under different administrative and legal frameworks. When coordination is weak, policy implementation becomes slow, accountability becomes unclear, and citizens ultimately bear the consequences through inadequate public service delivery.

The issue of fragmented governance is particularly significant because it extends beyond administrative efficiency and influences democratic accountability, institutional trust, and the overall quality of governance. In a city where several authorities share responsibility for the same policy areas, identifying who is accountable for policy failures becomes increasingly difficult. This often leads to delays in decision-making, duplication of efforts, and inconsistent implementation of public policies. Consequently, understanding the relationship between

institutional fragmentation and policy outcomes has become an important area of research in public administration and urban governance.

Against this background, the present study explores how fragmented governance affects policy implementation in Delhi by examining the nature of inter-agency coordination across key sectors of urban governance. It seeks to understand the institutional factors that hinder effective collaboration and to assess how these challenges influence the delivery of public services and the implementation of public policies. The study argues that strengthening coordination mechanisms, clarifying institutional responsibilities, and promoting collaborative governance are essential for improving administrative effectiveness and ensuring better governance outcomes in the National Capital Territory. The findings of this research are expected to contribute not only to the understanding of Delhi's governance system but also to broader debates on urban governance, institutional reform, and public policy implementation in rapidly growing metropolitan regions.

Literature Review

The growing complexity of modern cities has transformed urban governance into one of the most important areas of research within public administration and public policy. Earlier studies primarily focused on the role of governments in formulating policies, whereas contemporary research increasingly emphasizes the importance of policy implementation, institutional coordination, and collaborative decision-making. Scholars generally agree that effective governance is not determined solely by the quality of public policies but also by the capacity of institutions to work together in achieving common objectives. As cities expand and governance responsibilities become more dispersed, inter-agency coordination has emerged as a critical factor influencing administrative efficiency and public service delivery.

A substantial body of literature examines the concept of fragmented governance, describing it as a situation in which authority is divided among multiple institutions without adequate mechanisms for coordination or accountability. Existing research suggests that such fragmentation often results in overlapping jurisdictions, administrative duplication, delayed decision-making, and unclear institutional responsibilities. These structural challenges frequently reduce the effectiveness of policy implementation because agencies operate within separate administrative frameworks rather than as parts of an integrated governance system. Consequently, many scholars argue that governance failures are often institutional rather than purely policy-related.

Another important theme in governance literature is collaborative governance, which highlights the value of cooperation among government departments, statutory bodies, local authorities, civil society organizations, and citizens. Research indicates that complex urban problems such as environmental degradation, traffic management, public health, waste management, and urban infrastructure development cannot be effectively addressed by a single institution acting independently. Instead, successful governance depends upon shared responsibility, information exchange, joint planning, and collective implementation. Studies further suggest that collaboration becomes more effective when institutions have clearly defined roles,

mutual trust, and transparent mechanisms for resolving conflicts.

The literature on institutional theory provides additional insights into the relationship between governance structures and policy outcomes. Institutional scholars argue that constitutional arrangements, legal frameworks, organizational norms, and administrative practices significantly influence the behaviour of public institutions. Governance systems characterized by ambiguous authority or overlapping responsibilities often experience conflicts that weaken administrative performance. Therefore, the effectiveness of governance depends not only on the availability of financial or technical resources but also on the design and functioning of institutions responsible for implementing public policies.

Within the Indian context, researchers have extensively discussed the challenges of urbanization, decentralization, and municipal governance. Rapid population growth and increasing demands for public services have placed considerable pressure on urban institutions, particularly in metropolitan regions. Existing studies highlight issues such as inadequate infrastructure, environmental stress, housing shortages, and unequal access to essential services. Although these studies provide valuable insights into urban development, relatively few have examined how fragmented institutional arrangements influence policy implementation across multiple sectors simultaneously.

The governance structure of Delhi has attracted considerable academic attention because of its special constitutional status and distinctive administrative framework. Unlike other Indian states, authority in Delhi is shared among the Government of the National Capital Territory, the Lieutenant Governor, the Union Government, municipal bodies, and several specialized statutory agencies. This distribution of responsibilities has created a governance model that is both unique and administratively complex. Existing research frequently discusses constitutional debates and political disagreements arising from this arrangement, yet comparatively less attention has been devoted to understanding how institutional fragmentation influences everyday policy implementation and administrative coordination.

Studies relating to environmental governance in Delhi further demonstrate the importance of institutional cooperation. Research on air pollution, Yamuna River restoration, solid waste management, urban flooding, and transport management consistently indicates that these issues require coordinated action by multiple departments and levels of government. However, the absence of integrated planning and effective communication among institutions often delays implementation and reduces policy effectiveness. These findings suggest that governance challenges in Delhi cannot be explained solely by financial constraints or technical limitations but must also be understood through the broader framework of institutional coordination and administrative capacity.

The literature on good governance also contributes significantly to this discussion. Researchers emphasize principles such as transparency, accountability, participation, responsiveness, efficiency, and the rule of law as the foundations of effective governance. Studies argue that governments perform more effectively when institutional responsibilities are clearly defined and decision-making processes are transparent. In fragmented

governance systems, however, accountability often becomes dispersed among several agencies, making it difficult to identify responsibility for policy failures and reducing citizens' confidence in public institutions.

Despite the expanding scholarship on urban governance, public administration, and institutional reform, an important gap remains. Most existing studies focus on individual governance challenges—such as constitutional disputes, environmental management, municipal administration, or public policy reforms—in isolation. Limited research has examined how fragmented governance, inter-agency coordination, and policy implementation interact across different sectors within Delhi's governance system. A comprehensive understanding of these interconnected dimensions remains underdeveloped in the existing literature.

The present study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between fragmented governance, institutional coordination, and urban policy implementation in Delhi. Rather than analysing governance challenges separately, the study adopts an integrated perspective to understand how institutional structures shape policy outcomes across multiple sectors. By doing so, it seeks to contribute to broader debates on urban governance, administrative reform, collaborative governance, and effective public policy implementation, while offering practical insights for strengthening governance in India's National Capital Territory.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine the relationship between fragmented governance, inter-agency coordination, and urban policy implementation in Delhi. The qualitative method is particularly appropriate because the study seeks to understand institutional arrangements, administrative processes, and governance practices rather than measure numerical relationships. It enables a detailed interpretation of how different public institutions interact and how these interactions influence the implementation of policies in a complex urban governance system.

The research follows a descriptive and analytical research design. The descriptive component explains the existing governance structure of the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi, identifies the major institutions involved in policy implementation, and outlines their respective roles and responsibilities. The analytical component critically examines how the distribution of authority among these institutions affects coordination, decision-making, accountability, and the effectiveness of public policies. This combination allows the study to move beyond description and explore the underlying institutional factors that shape governance outcomes.

The study relies entirely on secondary data, collected from a wide range of reliable and authoritative sources. These include Government reports, Parliamentary documents, policy papers, Supreme Court judgments, official publications of the Government of NCT Delhi, NITI Aayog reports, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) documents, reports of the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM), publications of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), research articles published in peer-reviewed journals, academic books, and reports prepared by national and international organizations. Newspaper reports

and policy briefs have also been consulted where they provide recent information on governance developments and administrative reforms.

To provide a comprehensive understanding of governance challenges, the research adopts a case study approach. Selected policy sectors—including air pollution control, Yamuna River management, urban flooding, solid waste management, and urban infrastructure development—are examined to understand how multiple institutions coordinate during policy implementation. These cases have been selected because they involve several government agencies working simultaneously and therefore offer valuable insights into the practical challenges of institutional coordination within Delhi's governance framework.

The study is guided by the principles of Good Governance Theory, Institutional Theory, and Collaborative Governance. Good Governance Theory provides the analytical framework for evaluating governance based on transparency, accountability, participation, responsiveness, and administrative effectiveness. Institutional Theory helps explain how constitutional arrangements, legal structures, and organizational norms influence the behaviour of public institutions. The concept of Collaborative Governance is used to assess the quality of cooperation among government departments and to understand how institutional partnerships contribute to or hinder effective policy implementation.

The collected information is analysed using qualitative content analysis. Government reports, policy documents, judicial decisions, and academic literature are systematically reviewed to identify recurring themes related to institutional fragmentation, coordination mechanisms, administrative challenges, policy implementation, and governance outcomes. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns, comparing institutional responsibilities, and interpreting how governance structures influence public policy implementation across different sectors.

The scope of the study is limited to the governance system of Delhi and focuses primarily on the institutional dimensions of policy implementation. It does not attempt to evaluate the technical performance of individual government schemes or measure quantitative policy outcomes. Instead, the emphasis remains on understanding how institutional arrangements, constitutional provisions, and administrative coordination influence governance effectiveness within the National Capital Territory.

Although the study is based on secondary sources, every effort has been made to ensure the reliability, credibility, and objectivity of the findings by consulting authentic government publications, judicial records, and well-established academic literature. Information obtained from different sources has been compared and interpreted carefully to maintain accuracy and reduce bias. This approach strengthens the validity of the analysis and enables the study to present a balanced assessment of the governance challenges associated with fragmented institutional arrangements in Delhi.

By combining qualitative analysis, case study examination, and institutional interpretation, the methodology provides a comprehensive framework for investigating how fragmented governance affects urban policy implementation. It also offers a strong foundation for identifying governance reforms that can enhance inter-agency coordination, improve administrative efficiency, strengthen institutional

accountability, and contribute to more effective public service delivery in the National Capital Territory of Delhi.

Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of Delhi's governance system demonstrates that many of the city's persistent policy challenges are not merely the result of inadequate financial resources or weak policy formulation. Rather, they are deeply connected to the nature of its institutional architecture, where authority is distributed among multiple agencies with overlapping responsibilities. This arrangement has created a pattern of fragmented governance, making effective inter-agency coordination one of the most significant challenges to successful urban policy implementation. The findings indicate that governance outcomes are shaped as much by the quality of institutional relationships as by the content of the policies themselves.

Fragmented Institutional Structure and Policy Implementation

Delhi's governance framework is distinctive because administrative authority is divided among the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, the Union Government, the Lieutenant Governor, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), the Delhi Jal Board (DJB), the Delhi Police, and several other statutory agencies. Each institution operates within its own legal and administrative framework, with separate reporting mechanisms and decision-making processes. Although this distribution of authority was intended to balance national interests with local governance, it has also produced considerable institutional complexity. The analysis suggests that overlapping responsibilities frequently create uncertainty regarding which institution should lead policy implementation. In several instances, multiple agencies possess partial authority over the same issue without a clearly defined coordinating mechanism. This often delays administrative action, weakens accountability, and reduces the overall effectiveness of public policies. Consequently, governance challenges in Delhi are closely linked to institutional fragmentation rather than the absence of policy initiatives.

Inter-Agency Coordination as the Central Governance Challenge

A recurring theme emerging from the analysis is the limited effectiveness of inter-agency coordination. Complex urban issues rarely fall within the jurisdiction of a single department. Instead, they require continuous cooperation among organizations responsible for planning, implementation, regulation, monitoring, and public service delivery. However, institutional collaboration in Delhi frequently remains reactive rather than proactive.

Differences in administrative priorities, organizational procedures, and reporting structures often restrict the exchange of information and delay joint decision-making. As a result, policies that require coordinated implementation are executed unevenly. The absence of an integrated institutional framework also limits opportunities for long-term planning, forcing agencies to focus on immediate administrative responses rather than preventive governance strategies.

Air Pollution: A Case of Shared Responsibility without Unified Governance

The issue of air pollution illustrates the practical consequences of fragmented governance. Improving air quality requires coordinated action by environmental regulators, transport authorities, municipal bodies, neighbouring state governments, and central institutions. Although several policy initiatives have been introduced to reduce emissions and improve environmental quality, implementation remains uneven because responsibilities are distributed across numerous agencies.

The analysis indicates that no single institution possesses complete authority over all major sources of pollution. Vehicular emissions, construction activities, industrial pollution, waste burning, and seasonal agricultural burning require action by different organizations operating under separate jurisdictions. This institutional fragmentation often produces delays in implementation and inconsistent enforcement of environmental regulations. Consequently, policy effectiveness depends not only on environmental legislation but also on the ability of institutions to coordinate their activities across administrative boundaries.

Urban Flooding and Infrastructure Management

Recurring urban flooding during the monsoon further demonstrates the consequences of weak institutional coordination. Drainage management, road maintenance, sewerage systems, traffic regulation, and emergency response are administered by different agencies. While each institution performs specific functions, the absence of integrated planning frequently results in delayed responses and duplication of efforts.

The analysis suggests that urban flooding in Delhi reflects broader governance challenges rather than isolated infrastructure failures. Administrative fragmentation reduces the capacity of institutions to anticipate risks, coordinate preventive measures, and implement comprehensive urban planning strategies. Strengthening institutional cooperation before the onset of the monsoon could significantly improve preparedness and reduce the social and economic costs associated with flooding.

Yamuna River Pollution and Environmental Governance

The continuing pollution of the Yamuna River represents another example of fragmented governance. River restoration involves environmental regulators, municipal authorities, water management agencies, urban planning institutions, and central government organizations. Despite repeated policy interventions and investment in river-cleaning programmes, environmental improvements have been limited.

The analysis indicates that governance challenges arise because responsibilities for sewage treatment, industrial regulation, waste disposal, and river conservation are divided among multiple institutions. Without effective coordination, environmental programmes often operate independently instead of as part of a comprehensive river management strategy. This fragmentation reduces policy efficiency and delays measurable environmental outcomes.

Administrative Accountability and Public Trust

One of the most significant consequences of fragmented governance is the weakening of institutional accountability.

In governance systems where multiple agencies share responsibility, identifying accountability for policy failures becomes increasingly difficult. Citizens frequently encounter uncertainty regarding which institution is responsible for addressing specific public grievances. This diffusion of responsibility not only delays administrative action but also affects public confidence in government institutions.

The analysis further suggests that accountability should not be viewed solely as a mechanism for assigning responsibility after policy failure. It should also function as a preventive governance tool that clearly defines institutional roles before implementation begins. Greater clarity regarding administrative responsibilities would improve transparency, strengthen coordination, and enhance public trust in governance institutions.

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the argument that effective governance depends not merely on the existence of well-designed public policies but on the strength of the institutional relationships responsible for implementing them. Delhi's experience demonstrates that fragmented governance can reduce administrative efficiency even when adequate policy frameworks already exist. This observation is consistent with broader debates in public administration, which increasingly recognize that complex urban challenges require integrated governance rather than isolated institutional action.

The analysis also highlights that governance reforms should move beyond creating new policies and instead focus on strengthening institutional coordination, shared accountability, integrated planning, and collaborative decision-making. Establishing permanent coordination mechanisms, promoting regular information sharing among agencies, adopting digital governance platforms, and clarifying institutional responsibilities could substantially improve policy implementation across sectors.

Overall, the study demonstrates that the principal governance challenge in Delhi is not a shortage of policy initiatives but the absence of sufficiently integrated institutional arrangements to implement them effectively. Addressing this structural issue is essential for improving public service delivery, enhancing administrative effectiveness, and building a governance system capable of responding efficiently to the complex needs of a rapidly growing metropolitan city.

Policy Recommendations

The findings of this study indicate that improving governance in Delhi requires more than the introduction of new public policies. The central challenge lies in strengthening the institutional framework responsible for policy implementation. Accordingly, governance reforms should prioritize enhanced inter-agency coordination, stronger institutional accountability, and mechanisms that support collaborative decision-making. Based on the analysis, the following policy recommendations are proposed.

One of the most effective reforms would be the creation of a Permanent Inter-Agency Coordination Council comprising representatives from the Government of NCT Delhi, the Union Government, the Lieutenant Governor's Office, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), the Delhi

Development Authority (DDA), the Delhi Jal Board (DJB), environmental authorities, and other relevant agencies. The council should meet regularly to coordinate planning, monitor policy implementation, resolve institutional disputes, and ensure that major urban policies are implemented through a unified administrative approach rather than isolated departmental action.

A major source of governance inefficiency is the existence of overlapping jurisdictions and unclear administrative responsibilities. The Government should undertake a comprehensive review of existing laws, administrative rules, and institutional mandates to clearly define the responsibilities of each agency. Clearly delineating functions would reduce duplication, improve accountability, and accelerate policy implementation across sectors such as environmental management, transport, urban infrastructure, and public service delivery.

Effective coordination requires timely access to reliable information. A shared digital governance platform should be developed to connect all major government departments and statutory agencies. Such a platform would facilitate real-time data sharing, joint monitoring of projects, digital tracking of policy implementation, and faster administrative communication. Integrated digital systems would also enhance transparency by enabling policymakers and citizens to monitor the progress of major public initiatives.

Improving governance requires stronger institutional accountability rather than merely assigning responsibility after policy failures occur. Each implementing agency should have clearly defined performance indicators, periodic evaluation mechanisms, and publicly available implementation reports. Independent audits and regular performance reviews would promote administrative efficiency while increasing public confidence in government institutions.

Governance challenges such as air pollution, urban flooding, Yamuna River restoration, and solid waste management cannot be addressed by individual departments acting independently. Government agencies should adopt a collaborative governance model that encourages joint planning, shared budgeting where appropriate, coordinated implementation, and regular communication among institutions. Collaborative governance should become a permanent administrative practice rather than a temporary response during crises.

Delhi requires a more integrated approach to urban planning that aligns land use, transportation, housing, environmental protection, and public infrastructure within a common policy framework. Preparing integrated metropolitan development plans through the participation of all concerned institutions would reduce policy contradictions and improve long-term urban sustainability. Strategic planning should also emphasize climate resilience and future population growth.

Effective governance depends on active engagement between government institutions and citizens. Public participation should be strengthened through digital grievance redressal systems, public consultations, social audits, and community-based monitoring mechanisms. Citizen feedback should become an integral part of policy evaluation, enabling government institutions to identify implementation gaps and improve the quality of public service delivery.

The effectiveness of governance depends not only on institutional structures but also on the capacity of public officials to work across organizational boundaries. Regular capacity-building programmes, leadership development, and inter-departmental training should be organized to enhance coordination skills, conflict resolution, policy analysis, and collaborative decision-making. Developing a culture of cooperation among officials is essential for improving administrative performance.

Government decisions should increasingly rely on evidence-based policymaking supported by empirical research, performance data, and independent policy evaluations. Collaboration between government institutions, universities, research organizations, and policy think tanks can strengthen the quality of decision-making and ensure that governance reforms respond effectively to emerging urban challenges. Periodic impact assessments should become a mandatory component of major public policies.

Given Delhi's special constitutional status, long-term governance reforms should encourage greater cooperation between the Union Government and the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi. Institutional dialogue, regular coordination meetings, and transparent mechanisms for resolving administrative differences would reduce governance conflicts and improve policy implementation. Strengthening the principles of cooperative federalism would enable institutions to work toward common developmental objectives while respecting their constitutional responsibilities.

Conclusion of Policy Recommendations

The future of governance in Delhi depends less on the introduction of additional policies and more on improving the institutional arrangements through which existing policies are implemented. Strengthening inter-agency coordination, promoting collaborative governance, ensuring institutional accountability, encouraging citizen participation, and adopting evidence-based decision-making can substantially improve governance outcomes. These reforms would not only enhance the effectiveness of public policy implementation in Delhi but also provide valuable lessons for other metropolitan regions facing similar administrative and institutional challenges. A governance system built on cooperation, transparency, and clearly defined responsibilities is more likely to deliver efficient public services, strengthen democratic accountability, and promote sustainable urban development in the years ahead.

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