

REIMAGINING NATIONHOOD THROUGH POLICY REFORM: TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE AND ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT

The 21st century marks a transformative period in which the concept of nationhood is being redefined through policy innovation, governance restructuring, and participatory democracy. In contemporary India, the evolving character of governance reflects both developmental ambition and democratic experimentation. Policy reforms under the present government—from *Digital India* and *Atmanirbhar Bharat* to *PM Gati Shakti*, *Ayushman Bharat*, and *Viksit Bharat 2047 Vision*—have aimed to strengthen the fabric of nationhood through transparency, technology, and citizen empowerment. This study critically analyses how these reforms influence inclusive governance and accountability while shaping a collective national identity. According to recent governance indices, India ranks **39th globally in the Chandler Good Government Index (2024)**, reflecting steady progress in institutional capacity and public service delivery. Moreover, the *United Nations e-Government Development Index (2022)* places India among the top 10 developing nations in digital governance. These indicators reflect the measurable outcomes of reform-oriented governance and its impact on national cohesion. It also investigates the tension between centralization and participatory decentralization in governance structures. Drawing on qualitative analysis, policy documents, and socio-political data, the research reveals that while reforms have improved service delivery, enhanced public accountability, and boosted national pride, gaps persist in regional equity, institutional decentralization, and civic participation. The paper concludes that nationhood in the 21st century must transcend state-centric models and evolve through people-centric governance anchored in justice, equality, and inclusive participation.

Keywords: Nationhood, Policy Reform, Good Governance, Democratic Accountability, Inclusivity, Participatory Development, Digital India, Atmanirbhar Bharat, Welfare Reforms, India 2047 Vision

INTRODUCTION

Nationhood is both an idea and an evolving process. It encompasses the collective identity, values, and aspirations that unify diverse citizens under a shared democratic framework. In India, a nation marked by social plurality and regional diversity, the pursuit of inclusive and accountable governance has always been central to its constitutional ethos.

In recent decades, globalization, technological advancement, and rapid economic transformation have demanded that governments rethink traditional notions of nationhood. Nation-building is no longer confined to physical boundaries or cultural homogeneity—it extends to the state's ability to uphold justice, inclusivity, and equity through efficient governance.

The present Indian government (2014–2025) has introduced a wide spectrum of policy reforms that claim to redefine India's developmental identity. Programs like **Digital India**, **PM Gati Shakti**, **Smart Cities Mission**, **One Nation One Ration Card**, **Atmanirbhar Bharat**, and **Mission Amrit Sarovar** collectively signify a new model of “Reform, Perform, and Transform.” These initiatives aim

not only to modernize the administrative machinery but also to invoke a sense of national integration rooted in participatory progress.

In the post-pandemic context, India's governance approach has undergone structural reorientation. The **COVID-19 crisis** accelerated the digitization of welfare schemes and health systems through initiatives such as **CoWIN**, **Aarogya Setu**, and the **PM Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY)**, which reached nearly **800 million citizens**. These interventions not only demonstrated state capacity but also reinforced a sense of national unity through collective resilience. Furthermore, the government's **Viksit Bharat 2047** roadmap outlines a long-term vision of transforming India into a "developed nation" through inclusive growth, sustainable infrastructure, and accountable governance — central to the evolving concept of reimagined nationhood.

However, this shift also poses questions about the nature of inclusivity, accountability, and participatory democracy in practice. Does the centralization of power in the executive strengthen unity or weaken pluralistic engagement? Is the pursuit of efficiency overshadowing local voices and institutional diversity?

This research seeks to critically engage with these questions, interpreting nationhood as a living project shaped by policy reform and collective responsibility.

Objectives

1. To examine how recent policy reforms redefine the concept of nationhood in the contemporary Indian political landscape.
2. To evaluate the inclusivity and accountability dimensions embedded within government policy initiatives.
3. To analyse the socio-political and institutional outcomes of reforms introduced between 2014 and 2025.
4. To identify challenges in achieving participatory, decentralised, and equitable governance.
5. To suggest measures for strengthening inclusive, transparent, and people-centred nationhood through policy reform.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a **qualitative and descriptive-analytical methodology**, integrating theoretical and empirical approaches to understand the dynamic relationship between policy reform and nationhood.

Data Collection:

Primary Sources: Official government publications, *NITI Aayog Vision Documents*, *Parliamentary Standing Committee Reports*, policy guidelines, and national survey data.

Secondary Sources: Peer-reviewed academic papers, books on public policy and governance, reports by think tanks such as PRS India, and media analyses from *The Hindu*, *Indian Express*, and *Economic Times*. **Framework of Analysis:**

The study utilizes three analytical parameters:

1. **Inclusivity** – assessing equity and access in policy implementation.
2. **Accountability** – examining transparency mechanisms and institutional checks.

3. Participatory Governance – evaluating citizen engagement and decentralization.

Scope and Limitations: The study focuses primarily on national-level reforms and their socio-political implications, while acknowledging regional variations. Quantitative data is used selectively to support qualitative findings.

Main Matter / Study:

1. Nationhood and the New Governance Paradigm:

Traditional nationhood in India was anchored in the ideals of unity in diversity, sovereignty, and social justice. However, the global digital age has redefined the relationship between citizens and the state. Today, nationhood is increasingly measured through the effectiveness of governance systems, the inclusiveness of development, and the responsiveness of institutions.

The **idea of reimagined nationhood** thus emphasizes participatory citizenship, technological empowerment, and equal opportunity. The current policy environment demonstrates a shift from welfare paternalism to citizen empowerment—transforming beneficiaries into stakeholders in nation-building.

2. Policy Reform as the Engine of Democratic Nationhood

Policy reform acts as the driving mechanism for modernizing the governance structure. In India's current context, reforms are strategically framed to balance economic liberalization, technological advancement, and social inclusion.

a) Digital India and Governance Transformation:

The **Digital India Mission (2015)** laid the foundation for transforming India into a knowledge-driven, digitally empowered society. Platforms such as **DigiLocker**, **e-Governance Service Portals**, **BHIM-UPI**, and **PM Jan Dhan–Aadhaar–Mobile (JAM) Trinity** have revolutionized administrative transparency.

According to the **Digital India Progress Report (2024)**, more than **1,400 government services** have been made accessible online, and over **50 crore digital documents** are now stored securely on Digi Locker. India's digital payment ecosystem processed over **120 billion UPI transactions** in 2023–24, symbolizing not just financial inclusion but the integration of technology into everyday citizenship.

Additionally, **Bhashini (National Language Translation Mission)**, launched in 2022, is helping bridge linguistic barriers, enabling citizens to access services in 22 Indian languages - a crucial step toward linguistic inclusivity within nationhood.

Digitalisation has reduced bureaucratic corruption and empowered citizens through online access to rights, subsidies, and records. For example, the *DBT system* ensures that welfare benefits reach beneficiaries directly, minimising leakages.

However, digital inequality persists: around 30% of rural households lack reliable internet access (TRAI Report 2024), and gendered barriers in digital literacy still exclude marginalised populations. Hence, while digitalisation strengthens governance, inclusivity remains an unfinished task.

b) Economic Nationalism and the Atmanirbhar Bharat Vision

The **Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan (2020)** represents an attempt to link economic sovereignty with self-reliant nationhood. The policy framework integrates domestic manufacturing, MSME revival, and innovation ecosystems through schemes like **PLI (Production Linked Incentive)** and **Startup India**.

These reforms strengthen India's economic independence and global competitiveness. Yet, scholars argue that true self-reliance must include equitable distribution of economic gains. As per the **Economic Survey 2024–25**, India's manufacturing share in GDP rose from **15.1% in 2018–19 to 18.4% in 2024–25**, with the PLI schemes contributing significantly to electronics, pharmaceuticals, and automobile sectors. The **Make in India 2.0** initiative has attracted over **\$95 billion in FDI** between 2019–2024.

However, the **Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE)** data indicates that micro and small enterprises still face liquidity challenges, implying the need for localized industrial credit reforms. Sustainable economic nationhood must therefore balance global competitiveness with rural industrial inclusivity. For instance, regional disparities in industrial growth—especially between northern and southern states—highlight that economic nationalism must be coupled with social federalism.

c) Social Welfare Reform and Human Development

The government's approach to welfare has undergone a major transformation—from entitlement-based distribution to outcome-based accountability. Programs such as **Ayushman Bharat – PMJAY, PM-KISAN, PM Awas Yojana, and Ujjwala Yojana** embody this shift.

According to NITI Aayog's *Multidimensional Poverty Index 2024*, over **13.5 crore Indians** were lifted out of multidimensional poverty between 2016–2024, reflecting the impact of targeted welfare mechanisms.

The **National Family Health Survey-6 (2023–24)** shows remarkable improvements in healthcare coverage under **Ayushman Bharat**, with over **30 crore e-cards** issued and **5.5 crore hospitalizations** covered by March 2024. Moreover, under **PM Awas Yojana**, more than **3 crore houses** have been sanctioned across rural and urban India, symbolizing the material realization of social inclusion. However, the *Standing Committee on Rural Development (2024)* notes regional disparities in fund utilization, emphasizing the need for better monitoring and community-based evaluation mechanisms to ensure accountability.

However, critics note that welfare rationalization has sometimes narrowed inclusivity—leaving informal workers, migrants, and tribal populations underrepresented. For policy reform to embody nationhood, the inclusion of vulnerable groups in planning and execution remains critical.

d) Infrastructure and Sustainable Development: Nationhood through Connectivity

Policies such as **PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan (2021)** and **National Infrastructure Pipeline** seek to connect the nation physically and economically. The expansion of rural roads, ports, railways, and digital corridors symbolizes the “physical manifestation of unity.”

Additionally, initiatives like **Jal Jeevan Mission, Swachh Bharat Mission, and National Green Hydrogen Mission** integrate environmental sustainability into developmental nationhood. These programs frame environmental protection as a shared national duty—redefining patriotism through ecological responsibility.

The **PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan (2021)** integrates **16 central ministries** through a Geographic Information System (GIS) platform to improve coordination in infrastructure development. As of 2025, over **1,600 infrastructure projects worth ₹11 lakh crore** are being tracked on this platform, enhancing transparency and inter-departmental synergy.

Additionally, the **National Green Hydrogen Mission (2023)** and **Ethanol Blending Program (20% target by 2025)** align environmental goals with industrial growth, projecting India as a responsible global actor in climate governance. These initiatives tie environmental stewardship directly to the reimagination of nationhood as sustainable, future-oriented, and globally accountable.

4. Accountability and Transparency in Modern Governance

Accountability in governance is essential for sustaining public trust and legitimacy. The Indian government's **Good Governance Index**, **RTI framework**, and **citizen grievance platforms (CPGRAMS)** have enhanced institutional transparency.

The creation of **Performance Dashboards** and the **Parliamentary Monitoring of Schemes** also reflects progress toward measurable accountability. However, effective accountability requires decentralization—empowering *Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)*, *Urban Local Bodies*, and *Civil Society* to monitor reforms at the grassroots.

Moreover, while the state promotes “minimum government, maximum governance,” centralization of administrative control—especially in welfare and digital policy—can dilute institutional autonomy. Reimagining accountability thus involves balancing executive efficiency with democratic oversight.

According to *Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (2024)*, India's rank improved to **85th from 93rd in 2020**, reflecting incremental success in curbing bureaucratic corruption. Furthermore, the **Public Grievance Portal (CPGRAMS)** processed over **14 lakh complaints** in 2024–25, with an average disposal rate of 92%.

However, scholars caution that technological accountability must be accompanied by institutional accountability - ensuring parliamentary oversight, free media, and judicial independence as complementary safeguards of democratic nationhood.

4. Inclusivity: The Core of Nationhood

Inclusivity is the moral and structural foundation of democratic nationhood. True inclusivity means ensuring equal representation in development processes across gender, region, caste, and class.

- **Gender Inclusivity:** Initiatives like *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*, *MUDRA Yojana for Women Entrepreneurs*, and the **2023 Women's Reservation Bill (Nari Shakti Vandana Adhiniyam)** mark institutional progress toward gender equality.
- **Regional Inclusion:** The focus on *Aspirational Districts Program* and *Vibrant Villages Initiative* demonstrates attempts to bridge urban–rural divides and integrate border regions into national development.
- **Social Equity:** The expansion of *EWS (Economically Weaker Section) reservations*, *NEP 2020 reforms*, and *Skill India Mission* contributes to leveling opportunities.
- The **Aspirational Blocks Programme (2023)**, covering **500 underdeveloped blocks across India**, and the **PM Vishwakarma Scheme (2024)** for traditional artisans are direct interventions aimed at empowering marginalized occupational groups. Similarly, the **National Education Policy 2020** has begun reshaping school and higher education with multilingual instruction, skill integration, and digital pedagogy—building cultural inclusivity into knowledge systems.

According to the **World Bank Gender Data Portal (2024)**, India's female labor force participation rate rose to **32%**, its highest since 2005, indicating tangible progress in gendered

inclusivity. These achievements reaffirm that nationhood thrives when governance creates equitable platforms for participation.

Yet, the inclusivity debate extends beyond welfare to representation. Scholars like Yogendra Yadav and Jean Drèze argue that inclusive governance must include political participation from marginalized sections—not only access to schemes.

5. Policy Reform, Federalism, and Nationhood

Federal balance forms the structural pillar of India's unity. Recent policy reforms have redefined center-state relations by integrating cooperative federalism with competitive performance. Platforms like **GST Council**, **NITI Aayog**, and **PM-DevINE (Development of North-East Region)** exemplify coordinated planning.

However, tensions between central policy design and state implementation autonomy have occasionally led to friction. Fiscal federalism—especially the declining state share in central taxes—raises questions about equity. Strengthening nationhood requires cooperative decision-making rather than vertical command structures.

6. Citizen Participation and Democratic Engagement

Democratic nationhood thrives on active citizen participation. The **MyGov platform**, **Jan Bhagidari campaigns**, and **Swachhata Hi Seva drives** have attempted to convert citizens into partners in governance.

Between 2022 and 2025, over **2 crore citizens** engaged through *MyGov* consultations on various policies, including the *National Education Policy*, *Swachh Bharat 2.0*, and *Digital India 2.0*. The **Amrit Mahotsav Campaign** and **Meri Maati Mera Desh initiative (2023)** further transformed civic patriotism into participatory community action. However, civil society organizations have pointed out that formal mechanisms for policy dialogue remain limited. Establishing a *National Council for Citizen Partnership in Policy Formulation* could institutionalize this process, bridging state-citizen collaboration.

Participatory models such as **Smart City Citizen Forums** and **Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDP)** show the possibilities of bottom-up planning. Yet, participation remains limited to consultation rather than co-decision-making.

For true participatory governance, the government must institutionalize mechanisms for public deliberation, social audit empowerment, and citizen feedback integration.

Findings and Suggestions

Major Findings:

1. **Reforms have enhanced transparency and efficiency**, reducing corruption and leakages in service delivery.
2. **Digital transformation** has expanded accessibility but highlighted the digital divide and regional disparities.
3. **Economic reforms** have promoted growth and global integration but risk uneven distribution of benefits.
4. **Inclusivity and accountability** remain partially realized goals—particularly at the local and institutional levels.

5. **Federal cooperation** is strong in design but weakened by fiscal centralization and uneven implementation.
6. **Public participation** has improved symbolically but remains limited in policymaking authority.
7. India's governance model demonstrates a global shift toward **techno-democratic governance**, where artificial intelligence, big data, and digital identity systems enhance service delivery but also raise questions about data ethics, privacy, and citizen consent. The *Digital Personal Data Protection Act (2023)* represents a critical step toward reconciling these tensions.

Suggestions for Policy and Practice

1. **Institutionalize participatory governance frameworks:** Strengthen Gram Sabhas, citizen councils, and local digital forums for real policy influence.
2. **Expand digital equity programs:** Establish a *National Digital Inclusion Mission* ensuring universal access to internet and digital literacy by 2030.
3. **Enhance fiscal decentralization:** Empower state and local governments with greater financial autonomy.
4. **Integrate accountability audits:** Mandate independent audits for flagship programs with citizen representation.
5. **Promote civic education:** Introduce curriculum on participatory democracy and digital citizenship at school and university levels.
6. **Strengthen gender and social equity policies:** Institutionalize affirmative frameworks for leadership inclusion in governance structures.
7. **Develop a national participatory platform:** Create a continuous, government–citizen policy dialogue forum to co-create policy drafts and evaluations.

CONCLUSION

Reimagining nationhood through policy reform is a long-term democratic journey—anchored not merely in administrative modernization but in ethical governance, shared responsibility, and civic participation. The present government's reform trajectory illustrates a strong intent to build a capable, responsive, and digitally empowered state. Yet, the soul of nationhood lies beyond efficiency—it lies in inclusion, empathy, and justice.

Nationhood cannot be measured by GDP growth or technological innovation alone. It must be gauged by how equitably opportunities are distributed and how deeply citizens participate in the governance process. A truly inclusive and accountable governance system is one that democratizes power, decentralizes authority, and empowers every individual to be a co-architect of national destiny.

India's reimagined nationhood must, therefore, blend tradition with transformation—merging constitutional ideals with contemporary policy wisdom. Only then can governance become not just a system of administration, but a living embodiment of democratic unity, equality, and national purpose.

As India moves toward its centenary of independence in 2047, the challenge before policymakers is to balance technological modernization with democratic morality. The next phase of governance must prioritize institutional autonomy, digital ethics, and environmental justice as integral parts of nationhood. Reimagined nationhood is not just a policy goal but a civic philosophy — one that treats

citizens as co-authors of governance and not passive recipients. Only through inclusivity, accountability, and empathy can India evolve into a model of participatory democracy for the world.

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