

Transparency and Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies: A Study of Jaipur Nagar Nigam

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Abstract

Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in India occupy a constitutionally mandated position as the third tier of democratic governance, yet their performance on the twin parameters of transparency and public participation remains contested and context-dependent. Grounded in both primary field data and secondary documentary evidence, this study investigates the levels, determinants, and barriers of transparency and citizen participation in Jaipur Nagar Nigam (JNN), the municipal corporation responsible for administering Rajasthan's capital city. A purposive sample of 50 respondents comprising 30 citizens drawn from representative wards and 20 administrative officials across various hierarchical levels of JNN was surveyed using structured questionnaires tailored separately for each respondent category. Secondary data were derived from RTI application records, JNN annual reports, National Urban Information System (NUIS) documents, audit reports, and relevant legislative frameworks including the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (1992) and the Right to Information Act (2005). The findings reveal significant asymmetries: while e-governance initiatives and RTI compliance have improved perceptibly, citizens continue to perceive governance as opaque, and meaningful participation beyond electoral exercise remains structurally limited. Five null hypotheses were tested using chi-square statistics, all of which were rejected at the 0.05 level of significance, confirming significant associations between education, income, gender, and administrative experience on the one hand and transparency awareness and participatory behaviour on the other. The study concludes with a multi-tiered framework of recommendations addressing digital inclusion, institutional reform, capacity building, and legislative strengthening.

Keywords: Jaipur Nagar Nigam, urban local bodies, transparency, public participation, RTI, e-governance, 74th Amendment, ward committees, citizen grievances, India

1. Introduction

The concept of democratic governance in urban areas rests on two foundational pillars: the willingness of public institutions to be open, accountable, and accessible (transparency), and the active engagement of citizens in decisions that shape their living environments (public participation). These twin imperatives gained constitutional force in India through the 74th Constitutional

Transparency and Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies: A Study of Jaipur Nagar Nigam

Dr. Laxmi Parewa

Amendment Act of 1992, which envisioned Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) not merely as service delivery agencies but as vibrant institutions of self-governance embedded in the fabric of local democracy (Ministry of Law and Justice, 1992). Three decades since this landmark amendment, the realisation of its promise in most Indian cities remains partial and uneven.

Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan and one of India's fastest urbanising cities, presents a particularly important site for examining these governance dynamics. With a population exceeding 3.4 million as of the 2011 Census—and significantly higher by current estimates—Jaipur is administered by the Jaipur Nagar Nigam (JNN), which was bifurcated into JNN Heritage and JNN Greater in 2019 to address administrative complexity. JNN is responsible for civic services including water supply, solid waste management, road maintenance, public health, and urban planning for a large and diverse urban population characterised by wide disparities in income, literacy, and access to digital infrastructure.

Despite notable investments in e-governance—including the launch of the Jan Soochna Portal by the Government of Rajasthan, the Smart City Mission initiatives for Jaipur, and an online citizen grievance redressal system—field-level evidence suggests persistent gaps in the availability, accessibility, and comprehensibility of civic information for ordinary residents. Ward-level participation mechanisms mandated under the Rajasthan Municipalities Act, 2009, including ward committees and ward sabhas, function with varying degrees of effectiveness across the city's diverse residential geography.

This study engages critically with these gaps by generating original primary data on citizen and official perceptions of transparency and participation in JNN, complemented by secondary data on institutional performance. The research is distinctive in its dual-respondent design, which captures the governance experience from both sides of the citizen-state interface, and in its integration of qualitative insights with statistical analysis to produce a comprehensive situational assessment grounded in the specific context of Jaipur's municipal administration.

1.1 Objectives

The study pursues five specific objectives: to assess citizen perceptions of transparency in JNN's functioning; to evaluate citizen levels of awareness and participation in local governance processes; to examine the perspectives of JNN administrative officials on transparency and participatory practices; to identify structural and attitudinal barriers that impede transparent and participatory governance; and to draw upon secondary data on RTI compliance and institutional performance to triangulate primary findings.

1.2 Research Hypotheses

The study formulated and tested five null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance: (H01) there is no significant association between citizens' education level and their awareness of RTI provisions; (H02) there is no significant association between citizens' income level and their frequency of

Transparency and Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies: A Study of Jaipur Nagar Nigam

Dr. Laxmi Parewa

grievance portal use; (H03) there is no significant difference in perceptions of political interference based on designation level of administrative officials; (H04) there is no significant association between gender of citizens and frequency of participation in ward sabhas; and (H05) there is no significant association between years of service experience of officials and their attitude toward e-governance adoption.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is threefold. Empirically, it fills a gap in the literature on urban governance in Rajasthan by generating systematic primary evidence from a sample that includes both lay citizens and functionaries, enabling a comparison of perspectives that single-stakeholder studies cannot provide. Theoretically, it advances the application of the democratic accountability and participatory governance frameworks in the Indian ULB context, extending the theoretical insights of Fung and Wright (2003) and Brinkerhoff (2004) to a specific regional and institutional setting. Practically, its findings and recommendations are directly actionable by JNN administration, the Government of Rajasthan, and civil society organisations working in the domain of urban governance and citizen rights.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Transparency in Public Administration

Transparency in governance refers to the degree to which governmental processes, decisions, expenditures, and outcomes are visible, comprehensible, and accessible to citizens and oversight institutions (Hood, 2010). It is understood both as an intrinsic democratic value—derived from the Madisonian tradition that linked accountability to information—and as an instrumental mechanism for reducing corruption, improving service delivery, and building public trust. Heald (2006) identified several dimensions of government transparency including transparency about policy inputs (resources), processes (procedures), outputs (outcomes), and the behaviour of individual actors, arguing that different dimensions serve distinct accountability functions.

In the Indian administrative context, the Right to Information Act (2005) represented a landmark legislative institutionalisation of the transparency norm. Multiple studies have documented the transformative potential of RTI for municipal governance: Pande (2015) found that systematic RTI use by organised citizen groups in Mumbai significantly increased the quality of public works documentation and reduced fraudulent billing, while Singh and Sarkar (2012) noted that RTI applications in Rajasthan were most effectively utilised by educated, urban, male respondents—a socio-demographic profile that raises equity concerns about access to transparency mechanisms.

The literature on e-governance and digital transparency consistently identifies the digital divide as a critical mediating variable. Bhatnagar (2014) demonstrated that e-governance platforms in Rajasthan, including the Rajasthan Sampark portal, improved grievance redressal response rates

Transparency and Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies: A Study of Jaipur Nagar Nigam

Dr. Laxmi Parewa

among connected users but simultaneously excluded large segments of elderly, rural, and economically disadvantaged populations from the benefits of digital transparency. Joshi (2013) similarly cautioned that digitisation of records, while necessary, is insufficient for achieving substantive transparency in the absence of corresponding institutional cultures of proactive disclosure.

2.2 Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies

Public participation in local governance is understood as the processes through which citizens influence decisions affecting their lives, ranging from information provision and consultation to co-production and community control (Arnstein, 1969). In the Indian constitutional framework, the 74th Amendment created a structural mandate for participation through ward committees, ward sabhas, and the devolution of specified functions to ULBs via the Twelfth Schedule. However, Mathur (2009) documented widespread failure to operationalise these mechanisms meaningfully, finding that ward committees in most Indian cities functioned as rubber-stamp bodies with little actual decision-making authority and minimal citizen engagement.

Rajasthan presents an illustrative case of this implementation paradox. The Rajasthan Municipalities Act, 2009 formally empowers ward committees to deliberate on local development priorities and monitor the execution of municipal schemes, yet Datta (2015) found through field research in Rajasthan ULBs that ward committees met infrequently, lacked technical capacity, and operated in an environment of political dominance that marginalised the deliberative function. Women's participation was found to be particularly constrained by social norms, time poverty, and the physical design of meeting venues.

International scholarship on participatory urban governance provides comparative benchmarks. Fung and Wright (2003) developed the concept of Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG), characterising effective local participation by three features: a practical focus on specific problems, the involvement of ordinary citizens and officials in deliberation, and the development of institutional linkages between deliberation and action. Applied to Indian ULBs, Sivaramakrishnan (2011) argued that EPG remains largely aspirational, with a structural disconnect between participation in formal mechanisms (attending ward sabhas) and substantive influence over resource allocation or policy. Rao and Walton (2004) further observed that the social embeddedness of participation in Indian communities means that caste, class, and gender inequalities reproduce themselves within participatory spaces unless actively counteracted by design.

2.3 Jaipur Nagar Nigam: An Institutional Overview

Jaipur Nagar Nigam, as a statutory body constituted under the Rajasthan Municipalities Act, 2009, is governed by an elected council comprising ward councillors, a mayor elected through direct popular vote, and a hierarchical administrative structure headed by the Municipal Commissioner. Following

Transparency and Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies: A Study of Jaipur Nagar Nigam

Dr. Laxmi Parewa

the 2019 bifurcation, JNN Heritage covers the walled city and old urban areas while JNN Greater administers the newer peripheral development zones. Both entities share administrative infrastructure and are subject to oversight by the Urban Development Department of the Government of Rajasthan.

JNN has participated in several national and state governance initiatives aimed at enhancing transparency and citizen engagement. As a Smart City Mission beneficiary, Jaipur has received funding for the development of an Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC), digital street lighting management, and GIS-based property tax systems. The city has also been included in the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) framework, which includes citizen engagement as a performance benchmark. Notwithstanding these interventions, systematic evaluation of their impact on ground-level transparency and participation in JNN has not been conducted.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design integrating descriptive survey methodology for primary data collection with documentary content analysis for secondary data. The mixed-methods approach was chosen to enable triangulation: primary perceptual data from respondents were cross-validated against institutional performance data from official sources, yielding a more robust and nuanced understanding of the research problem than either method alone could provide (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted within the jurisdictional limits of Jaipur Nagar Nigam, focusing specifically on six wards selected to represent the diversity of the city's residential geography: two wards from the walled city area characterised by dense traditional housing and lower digital penetration; two wards from middle-income planned residential colonies; and two wards from peri-urban areas with mixed socioeconomic profiles. Administrative officials were drawn from the headquarters offices of JNN Greater.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The total sample comprised 50 respondents: 30 citizens and 20 JNN administrative officials. Citizen respondents were selected using purposive sampling from the six study wards, ensuring inclusion of both male and female respondents, economically marginalised households, and respondents across education levels. Administrative officials were selected through purposive sampling to include representation from junior, middle, and senior hierarchical levels and from diverse functional departments including general administration, engineering, health and sanitation, finance, and information technology. The sample composition is detailed in Table 1 below.

Transparency and Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies: A Study of Jaipur Nagar Nigam

Dr. Laxmi Parewa

Table 1: Sample Distribution by Category and Sub-Group (N = 50)

Category	Sub-Group	Number	Percentage (%)
Citizens	Ward-Level Residents	30	60.0
	Below Poverty Line Households	10	20.0
	Women Respondents	15	30.0
Administrative Staff	Junior-Level Officials	8	16.0
	Middle-Level Officials	7	14.0
	Senior-Level Officials	5	10.0
Total Sample	-	50	100.0

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

Two separate structured questionnaires were developed for the citizen and official respondent categories. The Citizen Questionnaire comprised four sections: Section I (socio-demographic profile); Section II (perception of transparency in JNN, 8 items on a 5-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree); Section III (perception of and engagement in public participation, 8 items); and Section IV (perceived barriers to transparency and participation). The Official Questionnaire similarly comprised four sections: Section I (professional profile); Section II (self-assessed institutional transparency, 8 items); Section III (assessment of participatory governance mechanisms, 8 items); and Section IV (perceived barriers). Content validity of both instruments was established through review by three academic experts in Public Administration and two senior retired IAS officers. Reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81 for the citizen transparency scale, 0.79 for the citizen participation scale, 0.84 for the official transparency scale, and 0.77 for the official participation scale—all above the accepted threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978).

3.5 Secondary Data Sources

Secondary data were collected from the following sources: RTI application and response records maintained by the Public Information Officer (PIO) office of JNN; the Government of Rajasthan's Jan Sookna Portal (jansookna.rajasthan.gov.in) for proactive disclosure compliance; reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) pertaining to Rajasthan ULBs; Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs annual reports on Smart City and AMRUT schemes; and published data from the National Urban Information System (NUIS).

3.6 Statistical Analysis

Primary data were tabulated and analysed using SPSS version 25.0. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean) were computed for all questionnaire items. Chi-square tests of independence were applied to test the five null hypotheses. The level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$ for all inferential tests. Secondary data were analysed using trend analysis and percentage calculations to assess institutional performance trajectories over time.

Transparency and Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies: A Study of Jaipur Nagar Nigam

Dr. Laxmi Parewa

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

4.1.1 Citizens

Table 2 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the 30 citizen respondents. The sample was predominantly male (70.0%), which reflects both the deliberate inclusion of female respondents proportionate to their active civic engagement profile in the study wards and the social reality that male household members disproportionately represent families in formal civic interactions. The dominant age cohort was 31–45 years (46.7%), suggesting a working-age population with direct stake in municipal service quality. Educational attainment varied: 33.3% were graduates or above, while 13.3% were functionally illiterate—a variation critical to interpreting differential RTI awareness and digital engagement findings. Monthly income distribution revealed that 73.3% of citizen respondents earned below INR 25,000, underscoring the predominantly lower-middle and working-class composition of the sample.

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Profile of Citizen Respondents (n = 30)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	21	70.0
	Female	9	30.0
Age Group (years)	20–30	8	26.7
	31–45	14	46.7
	46–60	6	20.0
	Above 60	2	6.7
Education Level	Illiterate	4	13.3
	Primary/Middle	7	23.3
	Secondary	9	30.0
	Graduate & Above	10	33.3
Monthly Income (INR)	Below 10,000	10	33.3
	10,001–25,000	12	40.0
	25,001–50,000	6	20.0
	Above 50,000	2	6.7

4.1.2 Administrative Officials

Table 3 presents the profile of the 20 administrative official respondents. The sample was distributed across junior (40.0%), middle (35.0%), and senior (25.0%) hierarchical levels, ensuring representation of different decision-making strata within the organisation. The majority (45.0%) had 5 to 15 years of service experience, with 30.0% having served for more than 15 years—indicating a substantial proportion of experienced personnel. Departmental representation covered the key functional wings of JNN including general administration, engineering, health, finance, and IT.

Transparency and Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies: A Study of Jaipur Nagar Nigam

Dr. Laxmi Parewa

Table 3: Socio-Demographic Profile of Administrative Official Respondents (n = 20)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Designation Level	Junior Official (Clerk/JE/Inspector)	8	40.0
	Middle Level (Assistant Eng./Supdt.)	7	35.0
	Senior Level (Dy. Commissioner/CE)	5	25.0
Experience (years)	Below 5	5	25.0
	5-15	9	45.0
	Above 15	6	30.0
Department	General Administration	6	30.0
	Engineering & Works	5	25.0
	Health & Sanitation	4	20.0
	Finance & Accounts	3	15.0
	IT & e-Governance	2	10.0

4.2 Citizens' Perception of Transparency in JNN

Table 4 presents citizen responses to eight transparency-related statements, scored on a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 5, Strongly Disagree = 1). The mean scores provide a summary measure of perceived transparency across different governance dimensions.

Table 4: Citizens' Perception of Transparency in JNN (n = 30) [SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, N=Neutral, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree]

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean
JNN budget & expenditure details are publicly available	10.0	26.7	23.3	30.0	10.0	2.97
Meeting minutes of ward committees are accessible to public	6.7	20.0	20.0	36.7	16.7	2.63
Tender & procurement information is transparent	13.3	30.0	20.0	23.3	13.3	3.07
Citizens are informed in advance about policy changes	3.3	16.7	23.3	40.0	16.7	2.50
JNN website provides updated and useful information	16.7	33.3	20.0	20.0	10.0	3.27
RTI applications are responded to in a timely manner	13.3	23.3	20.0	26.7	16.7	2.90
Action taken reports are shared with citizens	6.7	16.7	23.3	36.7	16.7	2.60
Social audit findings are made public	3.3	13.3	26.7	36.7	20.0	2.43

Transparency and Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies: A Study of Jaipur Nagar Nigam

Dr. Laxmi Parewa

The findings reveal that citizen perceptions of transparency are largely negative across most dimensions. The highest mean score was recorded for JNN's website providing updated and useful information (mean = 3.27), suggesting that digitally engaged citizens find the official web portal a meaningful information resource—consistent with the Rajasthan government's investments in the Jan Sookhna Portal. The availability of tender and procurement information received a mean of 3.07, indicating modest acknowledgement of progress in procurement transparency, likely driven by e-tendering mandates.

However, the perception of social audit outcomes being made public received the lowest mean (2.43), followed by advance information about policy changes (2.50) and accessibility of ward committee meeting minutes (2.63). These findings indicate that while administrative back-end information is partially accessible, the deliberative and participatory accountability mechanisms—social audits, ward minutes, and proactive policy communication—remain largely non-functional from the citizen's perspective. This asymmetry mirrors findings from Pande (2015) on selective transparency in Indian municipal governance, where financial process data is more available than outcome accountability information.

The moderate average response rate on RTI compliance (mean = 2.90) is particularly noteworthy given that secondary data shows improving RTI response rates. This apparent contradiction suggests that while formal compliance is improving, the quality, comprehensibility, and timeliness of information provided in RTI responses may still leave citizens dissatisfied—a distinction between procedural and substantive transparency emphasised by Heald (2006).

4.3 Citizens' Perception of Public Participation

Table 5 details citizen perceptions of public participation opportunities and their effectiveness within JNN's governance framework.

Transparency and Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies: A Study of Jaipur Nagar Nigam

Dr. Laxmi Parewa

Table 5: Citizens' Perception of Public Participation in JNN (n = 30) [SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, N=Neutral, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree]

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean
I have been invited to participate in ward sabhas	6.7	20.0	13.3	40.0	20.0	2.53
My suggestions are considered in local planning decisions	3.3	10.0	20.0	43.3	23.3	2.27
JNN conducts regular public hearings on development works	3.3	16.7	20.0	40.0	20.0	2.43
Online grievance portal is effective and responsive	16.7	30.0	16.7	26.7	10.0	3.17
Citizen volunteers are involved in local governance tasks	3.3	13.3	23.3	40.0	20.0	2.43
I am aware of my rights as a citizen under 74th Amendment	10.0	26.7	20.0	30.0	13.3	2.90
Ward committees function effectively with citizen input	3.3	13.3	16.7	43.3	23.3	2.30
NGOs/RWAs facilitate meaningful participation in JNN affairs	6.7	20.0	23.3	36.7	13.3	2.70

Citizens registered their lowest mean scores for the perception that their suggestions genuinely influence local planning decisions (mean = 2.27) and the functional effectiveness of ward committees with citizen input (mean = 2.30). This near-universal scepticism about the substantive influence of citizen input on decision-making closely mirrors Datta's (2015) findings on Rajasthan ward committees and Sivaramakrishnan's (2011) broader argument about the disconnect between formal participation and substantive influence in Indian ULBs.

The effectiveness and responsiveness of the online grievance portal received the highest mean score among participation indicators (3.17), confirming that digital grievance mechanisms have succeeded better in creating two-way interfaces than have in-person deliberative mechanisms such as ward sabhas (mean = 2.53) or public hearings (mean = 2.43). This finding is consistent with the India Urban Observatory reports, which document higher citizen engagement with digital service interfaces compared to traditional participatory platforms.

Awareness of citizen rights under the 74th Amendment received a mean of 2.90, indicating moderate but incomplete constitutional literacy. The relatively higher score for awareness compared to participation outcomes suggests a pattern where citizens may know of their formal rights but find few meaningful channels through which to exercise them—a phenomenon aligned with Arnstein's (1969) characterisation of tokenistic participation, where the appearance of engagement is maintained without genuine power sharing.

Transparency and Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies: A Study of Jaipur Nagar Nigam

Dr. Laxmi Parewa

4.4 Administrative Officials' Perception of Transparency

Table 6 presents administrative officials' self-assessed ratings of JNN's transparency across eight dimensions.

Table 6: Administrative Officials' Perception of Transparency in JNN (n = 20) [SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, N=Neutral, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree]

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean
JNN proactively discloses financial information	10.0	30.0	25.0	30.0	5.0	3.10
File management & noting processes are transparent internally	20.0	35.0	20.0	20.0	5.0	3.45
Citizens are kept informed about project status	5.0	25.0	30.0	30.0	10.0	2.85
e-Governance initiatives have improved transparency	30.0	40.0	15.0	10.0	5.0	3.80
RTI has positively changed internal accountability norms	25.0	35.0	20.0	15.0	5.0	3.60
Political interference reduces transparency in administration	15.0	35.0	20.0	25.0	5.0	3.30
Audit objections are communicated and resolved efficiently	10.0	20.0	30.0	30.0	10.0	2.90
Digitisation of records has reduced corruption in the department	20.0	35.0	25.0	15.0	5.0	3.50

A consistent finding across Table 6 is that administrative officials rated institutional transparency significantly more favourably than citizens did on comparable items, confirming a systematic perception gap between the two stakeholder groups. The highest official mean scores were recorded for e-governance improving transparency (3.80) and RTI positively changing internal accountability norms (3.60)—both reflective of genuine institutional progress acknowledged by insiders. Digitisation of records reducing corruption received a mean of 3.50, consistent with documented improvements in property tax collection and building plan approvals through digital platforms at JNN.

However, officials conceded that political interference reduces transparency in administration (mean = 3.30), an admission of systemic constraint that cuts across hierarchical levels and confirms a finding consistently emerging from the Indian municipal governance literature (Mathur, 2009). The efficiency of audit objection resolution received one of the lower official means (2.90), suggesting that internal financial accountability mechanisms are not functioning as effectively as digital service delivery improvements. Communication of project status to citizens received a mean of 2.85 from officials—virtually identical to citizens' assessment of the same dimension—indicating rare convergence in perceptions of a shared communication gap.

Transparency and Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies: A Study of Jaipur Nagar Nigam

Dr. Laxmi Parewa

4.5 Administrative Officials' Perception of Public Participation

Table 7 captures administrative officials' assessment of the quality and effectiveness of public participation mechanisms within JNN.

Table 7: Administrative Officials' Perception of Public Participation Mechanisms (n = 20)
[SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, N=Neutral, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree]

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean
We regularly organise ward-level public consultations	5.0	20.0	30.0	35.0	10.0	2.75
Citizen feedback genuinely shapes our planning decisions	10.0	15.0	25.0	35.0	15.0	2.70
Online feedback mechanisms are actively used by JNN	25.0	40.0	20.0	10.0	5.0	3.70
Staff are trained in participatory governance methods	5.0	10.0	25.0	40.0	20.0	2.40
Ward committees are empowered with adequate resources	5.0	15.0	20.0	40.0	20.0	2.45
Grievances from marginalised communities receive priority	10.0	20.0	25.0	30.0	15.0	2.80
Public participation outcomes influence budget allocation	5.0	15.0	30.0	35.0	15.0	2.60
NGO partnership enhances quality of public engagement	15.0	35.0	25.0	20.0	5.0	3.35

Officials' perceptions of participatory governance reveal an important internal differentiation: digital-channel engagement mechanisms are rated as more functional (online feedback: mean = 3.70; NGO partnership: 3.35) than in-person deliberative mechanisms (ward committee empowerment: 2.45; staff training in participatory methods: 2.40). The low mean score for staff capacity in participatory governance (2.40) is a critical finding, as it indicates an acknowledged skills deficit that likely limits the quality of citizen-official interaction in formal participatory settings irrespective of structural provisions.

The admission that citizen feedback does not genuinely shape planning decisions (mean = 2.70) from officials themselves—despite the mandatory consultation provisions in municipal planning guidelines—confirms the structural disconnect between participatory form and substantive influence documented in the literature. The finding that public participation outcomes do not significantly influence budget allocation (mean = 2.60) is particularly significant given that participatory budgeting has been advocated by scholars of local governance as a vehicle for both accountability and inclusion (Rao & Walton, 2004).

4.6 Secondary Data Analysis: RTI Compliance Trends

A trend analysis of RTI applications filed with JNN and the corresponding institutional response

Transparency and Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies: A Study of Jaipur Nagar Nigam

Dr. Laxmi Parewa

record, compiled from official PIO records and government transparency portal data.

The secondary data reveal a clear and positive trajectory in both RTI filing volumes and response rates; indicating growing citizen awareness and use of the RTI mechanism, which may itself be partly attributable to the Jan Soochna Portal and civil society awareness campaigns. Crucially, the timely response rate improved significantly, reflecting enhanced administrative compliance with the 30-day statutory response deadline. The declining trend in first appeals (from 312 to 198) further indicates improving satisfaction with initial RTI responses, as fewer applicants found it necessary to escalate.

However, a response rate of 87.1%—even at its peak—implies that approximately 13% of RTI applicants did not receive timely responses, representing over 350 applicants in a single year. Given that citizen perceptions of RTI responsiveness remain moderate (mean = 2.90 in Table 4), the gap between improving compliance data and persistent citizen dissatisfaction warrants further investigation into the substantive quality and utility of information provided in RTI responses, as distinct from the mere fact of a reply being furnished within the statutory timeframe.

4.7 Barriers to Transparency and Participation

Table 9 summarises the barriers to transparency and public participation as identified by citizen and official respondents, enabling a comparative analysis of the barrier landscape from both sides of the governance interface.

Table 9: Perceived Barriers to Transparency and Public Participation (N = 50)

Barrier	Citizens Endorsing (%)	Officials Endorsing (%)	Overall (%)
Lack of awareness about entitlements and rights	73.3	45.0	62.0
Complex procedures for filing complaints/applications	76.7	30.0	58.0
Language barrier – official documents not in simple Hindi	63.3	25.0	48.0
Limited access to digital platforms (internet/smartphones)	66.7	20.0	48.0
Fear of official displeasure for raising concerns	70.0	15.0	48.0
Political influence on administrative decisions	60.0	50.0	56.0
Inadequate frequency of ward sabhas and public meetings	73.3	40.0	60.0
Absence of feedback loop on citizen-raised grievances	80.0	35.0	62.0
Poor coordination among JNN departments	56.7	55.0	56.0
Insufficient digital infrastructure within JNN offices	46.7	60.0	52.0

The barrier profile reveals that the absence of feedback loops on citizen-raised grievances (80.0% of citizens, 62.0% overall) and complex procedures for applications and complaints (76.7% of citizens) constitute the most critical functional barriers to meaningful civic engagement. The high endorsement of inadequate ward sabha frequency (73.3% of citizens) and lack of rights awareness (73.3%) confirms structural and informational deficits that depress participation even among

Transparency and Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies: A Study of Jaipur Nagar Nigam

Dr. Laxmi Parewa

citizens who are in principle willing to engage.

A comparison of citizen and official perspectives reveals areas of convergence and divergence. Both groups converge on poor inter-departmental coordination (citizens: 56.7%, officials: 55.0%) and political influence on administration (citizens: 60.0%, officials: 50.0%) as significant barriers, suggesting that these are widely acknowledged institutional dysfunctions rather than partisan perceptions. In contrast, limited digital access is a more strongly endorsed barrier by citizens (66.7%) than by officials (20.0%), reflecting the digital divide that separates the connectivity experiences of government offices from those of ordinary households—a gap documented by Bhatnagar (2014) for Rajasthan's e-governance landscape.

The asymmetry in endorsement of language barriers (63.3% of citizens versus 25.0% of officials) is equally revealing: official documents, public notices, and portal interfaces in JNN continue to default to formal administrative Hindi and English formats that are inaccessible to large segments of the citizen population with primary-level education, despite constitutional and statutory provisions for accessible governance communication.

4.8 Hypothesis Testing Results

Table 10 presents the results of chi-square tests conducted to assess associations between key socio-demographic and institutional variables.

Table 10: Chi-Square Hypothesis Testing Results (N = 50)

Hypothesis	Variable 1	Variable 2	Chi-Square Value	df	p-Value	Decision
H01	Education level of citizens	Awareness of RTI provisions	14.82	3	0.002	Rejected
H02	Income level of citizens	Frequency of grievance portal use	11.47	3	0.009	Rejected
H03	Designation level of staff	Perception of political interference	9.63	2	0.008	Rejected
H04	Gender of citizens	Participation in ward sabhas	5.78	1	0.016	Rejected
H05	Experience of officials	Attitude toward e-governance adoption	8.34	2	0.015	Rejected

All five null hypotheses were rejected at the 0.05 level of significance, confirming statistically significant associations between the tested variables. The rejection of H01 (chi-square = 14.82, p = 0.002) establishes that higher educational attainment is significantly associated with greater RTI awareness among citizen respondents, consistent with Singh and Sarkar (2012). The rejection of H02

Transparency and Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies: A Study of Jaipur Nagar Nigam

Dr. Laxmi Parewa

(chi-square = 11.47, $p = 0.009$) indicates that higher-income citizens engage more frequently with the online grievance portal, underscoring the digital divide in formal participation channels.

The rejection of H03 (chi-square = 9.63, $p = 0.008$) demonstrates that senior officials perceive higher levels of political interference than junior officials—a counterintuitive but plausible finding, as senior officers are more directly exposed to political principals and bear institutional responsibility for decisions where political considerations are most salient. The rejection of H04 (chi-square = 5.78, $p = 0.016$) confirms significant gender disparities in ward sabha attendance, with male respondents reporting higher participation rates—a finding consistent with Datta (2015). Finally, the rejection of H05 (chi-square = 8.34, $p = 0.015$) establishes that more experienced officials hold significantly more positive attitudes toward e-governance adoption, perhaps because longer-serving officers have witnessed the operational improvements e-governance has yielded and hold informed views on its potential.

5. Discussion

The convergence of primary and secondary evidence in this study permits a multi-layered interpretation of the transparency and participation landscape in Jaipur Nagar Nigam. Three overarching themes merit extended discussion.

The first theme is the asymmetry between procedural and substantive governance quality. JNN demonstrates measurable progress on procedural indicators: improving RTI response rates, growing use of digital platforms, and increasing e-tendering compliance. Yet citizens' perceptions of transparency and the influenceability of their participation remain deeply sceptical. This asymmetry reflects a broader pattern in Indian public administration where compliance with formal accountability requirements does not automatically translate into the lived experience of accountable governance for citizens, particularly those with limited digital access, lower education, or belonging to socially marginalised groups.

The second theme is institutional fatigue and norm erosion in participatory mechanisms. Ward committees and ward sabhas, the constitutionally intended arenas for local democratic deliberation, receive low ratings from both citizens and officials alike. This convergent assessment from across the citizen-official divide is significant: it is not merely citizens' cynicism but officials' own acknowledgement that formal participatory structures are under-resourced, infrequently convened, and poorly connected to actual resource allocation decisions. This finding supports Arnstein's (1969) critique that participation can be reduced to ritual without genuine power sharing, and reinforces the EPG framework's (Fung & Wright, 2003) emphasis on institutional linkages between deliberation and decision-making as the critical missing element in Indian local governance.

The third theme concerns the differential experience of governance across social divides. The hypothesis testing results consistently confirm that education, income, and gender significantly

Transparency and Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies: A Study of Jaipur Nagar Nigam

Dr. Laxmi Parewa

predict both the awareness of rights and the ability to exercise them within JNN's governance framework. Women participate less in ward sabhas; lower-income citizens use digital grievance portals less; and less-educated citizens are less aware of RTI provisions. These findings confirm that the formal architecture of participatory governance, even when procedurally available, is not substantively equally accessible. Governance reform that does not account for these structural inequalities risks deepening existing civic stratification rather than ameliorating it.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Institutional and Administrative Reforms

JNN should establish a dedicated Transparency and Citizen Engagement Cell with adequate staffing, resources, and an annual public accountability charter specifying minimum standards for proactive disclosure, ward sabha frequency, and grievance response timelines. Ward committee meetings should be held monthly on a fixed schedule, with minutes published on the JNN website and physically displayed on ward notice boards within one week of each meeting. Social audit findings for all public works above a specified threshold should be compulsorily published and communicated to ward residents through Jan Soochna Portal within 60 days of audit completion.

6.2 Digital Inclusion and e-Governance Enhancement

The significant digital access gap identified in this study demands targeted digital inclusion investments. JNN should establish community digital kiosks in every ward, staffed by trained municipal volunteers, to assist citizens in filing online grievances, accessing Jan Soochna information, and submitting RTI applications. Grievance portal interfaces should be redesigned in plain-language Hindi with visual icons to serve users with limited literacy. Mobile SMS-based grievance acknowledgement and status updates should be provided as a non-digital fallback for citizens without smartphone access.

6.3 Participatory Governance Strengthening

Capacity building for ward committee members and JNN frontline staff in facilitation skills, legal awareness, and participatory planning methods should be institutionalised as a mandatory component of annual training calendars. Participatory budgeting pilots at the ward level, where citizens deliberate and prioritise at least a defined proportion of the annual ward development fund, should be introduced in selected wards as a proof-of-concept before citywide scaling. Gender-sensitive ward sabha design—including timing schedules compatible with women's domestic responsibilities, creche facilities at meeting venues, and designated speaking time for women—is essential for rectifying the gender gap in participation documented in this study.

6.4 Accountability for RTI and Grievance Redressal

Despite improving response rates, the 13% non-compliance rate in RTI responses and the persistent

Transparency and Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies: A Study of Jaipur Nagar Nigam

Dr. Laxmi Parewa

citizen dissatisfaction with information quality demand structural redress. JNN should appoint dedicated RTI help desks in each divisional office staffed by personnel trained in information management and citizen communication. The quality of RTI responses should be audited annually by an independent citizen ombudsman panel, with findings reported publicly. Punitive action against officers responsible for sustained non-compliance should be made transparent through published action-taken reports.

6.5 Legislative and Policy Recommendations

The Government of Rajasthan should consider amending the Rajasthan Municipalities Act, 2009 to mandate a minimum number of ward sabha meetings per year with quorum requirements, compulsory publication of outcomes, and a time-bound response mechanism linking sabha deliberations to ward-level budget revisions. National-level reform of the Model Municipal Law recommended by the Fifteenth Finance Commission should incorporate transparency and participation benchmarks as performance-linked grant conditionalities for ULBs, creating fiscal incentives aligned with governance quality.

7. Conclusion

This study has examined transparency and public participation in Jaipur Nagar Nigam through a rigorous mixed-methods research design that integrates primary survey evidence from 50 respondents with secondary institutional data spanning five years. The overarching finding is one of a governance system in transition: measurable improvements in e-governance functionality and RTI compliance coexist with persistent citizen scepticism about the meaningfulness of information access and the substantive influence of participation. This transition is characterised by significant inequalities—in digital access, in civic knowledge, in gender—that differentially enable and constrain citizen engagement with municipal governance.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its empirical application and contextualisation of the democratic accountability framework and Empowered Participatory Governance theory to the specific institutional milieu of a major Indian municipal corporation, generating evidence that extends and nuances these frameworks in the Global South context. The practical contribution lies in its actionable, multi-level recommendations that address administrative, digital, participatory, and legislative dimensions of the governance reform agenda.

The limitations of this study should be acknowledged. The sample size of 50, while adequate for exploratory descriptive research, limits the generalisability of findings. The purposive sampling approach, while enabling depth, introduces selection considerations. Future research should expand the sample to multiple wards across JNN's bifurcated jurisdictions, incorporate longitudinal designs to capture pre- and post-intervention changes, and employ qualitative methods such as focus group discussions and ethnographic observation to enrich the quantitative survey findings presented here.

Transparency and Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies: A Study of Jaipur Nagar Nigam

Dr. Laxmi Parewa

Comparative studies across multiple Rajasthan ULBs would provide a richer basis for state-level policy inference.

Ultimately, the realisation of the democratic promise of the 74th Constitutional Amendment—local governance as genuine self-rule for urban communities—requires not merely legislative compliance but a sustained institutional commitment to transparency and participation as lived governance values rather than procedural obligations. This study affirms that Jaipur Nagar Nigam has the institutional capacity and the reform momentum to make meaningful progress toward this vision, provided that political will is matched by administrative follow-through and supported by a civil society ecosystem that holds municipal governance accountable on behalf of all citizens.

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Transparency and Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies: A Study of Jaipur Nagar Nigam

Dr. Laxmi Parewa

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**Transparency and Public Participation in Urban Local Bodies: A Study of
Jaipur Nagar Nigam**

Dr. Laxmi Parewa