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REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-57042

Title: Assessing Citizen Perceptions on Gram Panchayat Governance: A Distributional Analysis from West Bengal,

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Recommendation:

Accept after minor revision

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality		✓,		
Techn. Quality		✓,		
Clarity	✓,			
Significance	✓,			

Reviewer Name: Dr Abdul Haseeb Mir

Detailed Reviewer's Report

The article titled "Assessing Citizen Perceptions on Gram Panchayat Governance: A Distributional Analysis from West Bengal" provides a rigorous and methodologically innovative evaluation of local self-governance in rural India. By moving beyond aggregate satisfaction scores to a distribution-sensitive analytical framework, the author uncovers the granular realities of how Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) function on the ground. This research is highly significant for political scientists, development practitioners, and policymakers, as it exposes the persistent gap between the democratic ideal of "power to the people" and the practical challenges of elite capture and partisan influence.

The manuscript's primary strength lies in its methodological critique of traditional governance assessments. The author correctly identifies that "mean-based" satisfaction scores often mask extreme dissatisfaction or significant variations in citizen experiences. By utilizing a five-point Likert scale to analyze ten key governance indicators—including accountability, transparency, and responsiveness—the paper provides a much more nuanced "distributional" profile of local governance. This approach effectively demonstrates that while some citizens may benefit from PRIs, a substantial portion of the rural population feels excluded from the decision-making process.

The empirical findings regarding "Fund Utilization" and "Responsiveness" are particularly revealing. The study documents substantial citizen dissatisfaction in these critical areas, suggesting that the decentralization of funds has not necessarily led to the decentralization of benefits. The author's analysis

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of "perceived political bias and favoritism" is a courageous and vital contribution, highlighting how partisan interests can subvert the intended inclusiveness of the Gram Panchayat. By documenting the prevalence of "elite capture," the manuscript provides a powerful empirical basis for the argument that institutional structures alone are insufficient to guarantee social justice without robust mechanisms for accountability.

Furthermore, the discussion on "Timeliness of Service Delivery" identifies a significant operational bottleneck. The finding that citizens often face delays in accessing basic services underscores the bureaucratic hurdles that persist even at the local level. The author successfully links these micro-level frustrations to the broader theoretical debates on "Decentralization and Development," referencing foundational works by Sen (1999) and Bardhan (2002). This synthesis of primary survey data with high-level political economy theory ensures that the paper is both empirically grounded and theoretically significant.

To further elevate the manuscript for publication in a high-impact political science or development studies journal, a few minor revisions are recommended. First, the author could strengthen the "Analysis" by exploring "Social Stratification" within the data. Specifically, analyzing whether perceptions of governance vary significantly across different caste, gender, or income groups would provide a more intersectional understanding of who is most affected by partisan bias. Second, the "Policy Recommendations" section could be more specific regarding "Digital Interventions." Exploring how e-governance tools (like those mentioned in 2024 and 2025 literature) could mitigate political favoritism and improve transparency would add a modern, solution-oriented dimension to the paper.

From a structural perspective, the article is logically organized and maintains a high professional standard. The bibliography is comprehensive and current, featuring essential works on comparative federalism and decentralization, which ensures the study is well-anchored in the global literature. However, the author should ensure that the formatting of the survey data tables is optimized for readability, perhaps including a "Net Satisfaction Index" to complement the distributional analysis. A final proofread to ensure the transition between the "Distributional Findings" and the "Conclusion on Elite Capture" is seamless will enhance the narrative impact of the work.

In summary, this article represents a vital and methodologically sound contribution to the study of local governance in India. It successfully exposes the complexities of the Gram Panchayat system, offering a

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clear-eyed assessment of its successes and failures. By identifying political bias and fund mismanagement as key obstacles to effective decentralization, the author provides a compelling roadmap for institutional reform. With the addition of more granular social data and a focus on digital accountability, this paper will be an outstanding resource for researchers and practitioners dedicated to the empowerment of rural communities.

Recommendation: Recommend for publication with minor revision.